

Dream Analysis

Pia-

I was in the center of the lecture hall with my laptop open to two screens; a blank word document so that I could take notes if the professor started to actually teach instead of just phoning it in on the first day of classes and only covering the syllabus and course standards, and then the syllabus that I had downloaded a week before when I was getting ready for the first day of class. According to the syllabus I was in for an introduction to the introduction to psychology class, but I knew that I was only going to get an introduction to the psychology professor and his ability to read the syllabus that he wrote for his class.

I never was able to understand why professors would always start that first day with reading a text which everyone in the class was capable of doing on their own. We all graduated from high schools, we all knew how to read at least basic sentences; why waste everyone's time, including the professor's, with something as stupid as telling us that the tests were not going to be graded on a scale, and that there would be absolutely no extra credit given throughout the course? I guess I should have expected that from a pseudo-science like psychology.

David-

"Hello everyone, my name is professor Omel, and this is Psychology 102, Introduction to Psychology." I had just barely made it into the lecture hall, I was running a bit behind schedule, but managed to slide into a seat just as Omel was unpacking his briefcase at the front of the room. I kicked my backpack under my padded auditorium seat and got comfortable. There wasn't a chance in the world that he was going to say anything worth writing down, it was just

the first day.

Worst case scenario, he'd say something like what we'd have to read for the next class, but people were still able to add and drop the class which meant there wasn't a chance in the world that he'd do something too much or else late adders would have a fit.

The more that Omel talked, the more I started to zone off and look around the class. I knew he was the professor and that I should have been paying attention, but he was talking about the attendance policy. What is there to know about attendance? You show up to class, you don't get in trouble. I thought that it was something that everyone learned back in middle school when they tried to ditch class. With a look through the class, maybe not everyone had learned that, in fact I didn't even know if some of them knew how to ditch a class. Good ol' state ran universities, free admittance for every high school graduate, and it showed.

Britney-

10:00 is too early to wake up, especially on a Monday morning. I invented the best way to nap on a desk in tenth grade. You take your hoodie, keep your arms in the arms, but pull the shirt over you, and then use the hoodie as a pillow. You get a pillow and your arms stay warm.

Professor O was hardly into which books we were reading when I had already slipped my hoodie over my head, and was trying to figure out how to fall asleep on the tiny swivel desk that was attached to my chair, and then he walked in.

“Hey sexy.”

Pia-

How disrespectful for herself, the professor, and the university. I couldn't believe that the hussy would ever say that. Who did she think she was? Some 1920's steel worker making cat calls to the women as they walked by? I was ashamed for my sex as soon as the words came out of her mouth. If I was professor Omel, I would have asked her to leave right then. I do not care what the circumstances are, there is no reason for her to be peeing all over the place trying to mark her territory as the alpha dog.

My dad always said, the bigger the peacock the smaller the brain.

Kendel-

I could feel blood rushing to my cheeks just a bit from the attention when I tried to sneak into class late. It wasn't the first time anyone had said something like that, and honestly it was a bit nicer than hearing the traditional 'sweet cheeks' from girls; they say I have cute dimples, but with how much they stare at my butt I'm pretty sure those aren't the cheeks they're talking about.

I didn't want to hurdle over a row of people that already had sat down, and even one girl who had pulled out her laptop and was taking notes about the homework policy, so I took a seat in the aisle.

"One thing that you are going to need to start in the next week is a dream journal. We're not going to start out with Freudian theory, however when we do get there, one of the best ways to learn is through self-analysis." My brain stopped working as soon as he said 'Freudian'. I wanted to stop him and ask him what Lord of the Rings had to do with psychology, but he seemed to be on a roll and I just figured that he would tell us. He didn't. I walked out of the class

wondering what Frodo had to do with anything.

David-

The assignment was simple, every morning write down what you dreamed about. If you didn't dream, then just put that you didn't dream. It was a free A for anyone lazy enough to write down, 'didn't dream' or 'don't remember' for an entire term. Omel said he didn't give out extra credit, but if you didn't do your dream journal, you might as well be passing up on free points.

The second week of class at the very end Omel said, "Just to make sure that you're all doing the dream journal. I'm going to be collecting them on Friday. Make sure that you have them updated, and bring them in on Friday to be collected."

Pia-

He told us half a dozen times, like we were in some sort of developmentally challenged class. "Be sure to remember your dream journals. Just remember, your dream journals are going to be due on Friday. If you haven't started your dream journals, I'm going to be collecting them on Friday." I found myself regretting the decision to ever allow myself to have that low of standard as my safety school, but that's what I get when applying to nothing but Ivy League schools, and not caring about the school I automatically got accepted to just because I graduated.

Britney-

On Friday I was halfway through checking my computer to see where the best party was going to be when I heard the professor. "I'm going to be collecting those dream journals from

you now. Is there anyone that would like to share their dreams before we hand them in?”

I prayed that someone raised their hand to give me more time to write down, ‘didn’t dream’ fourteen times.

David-

The smart girl that always sat in the center of the class with her lips firmly attached to Omel’s butt raised her hand straight up like she was trying to show just how far up she could reach. Omel looked around the class trying to find someone besides her to answer. He learned his lesson when he called on her and she asked him some obscure question from the textbook that she had researched in the library the night before because “it sounded interesting.”

He passed through the class twice, with everyone but her avoiding his gaze. Defeated he gave up and pointed at her. “Yes Pia?”

“It was on Sunday when I had the dream. It was outstandingly vivid, in that all of my senses were active. It was not only a dream that involved auditory and visual hallucinations, but it also involved tactile, and olfactory senses as well. I remember noticing that it was such an odd thing for me to dream about the smell of a stable.”

“You were a jockey then?” Omel said trying to get Pia back onto telling about the dream.

“No, but don’t you think it is odd that I had such a vivid, almost living dream? Aren’t those supposed to be a rarity within the general population?” She was fishing for a compliment, she might as well have just stood up and said, ‘tell me how special I am.’ Plus, vivid dreams aren’t that rare of a thing. I didn’t check my journal, but I knew at least one of my entries were vivid.

“They are not the typical reaction, however a strong portion of dreaming is based off of our memories and imaginations. Considering that many people remember the tastes or feeling of specific things instead of just the images corresponding with them, it is not that rare of an occurrence for a dream to include more than just visual cues. For example, blind people do dream, but those that have been blind their entire lives dream in how they experience the world, and those who have lost sight throughout their life are still able to dream in a more traditional sense. Your dream reflects a great deal about how you interact with the world, so if you are able to taste or feel, that simply means that when dealing with certain things you are more connected to touch or taste.”

Pia tried to spin Omel’s answer. “So you’re saying that I experience the normal world deeper than everyone else who doesn’t dream like that?”

“No. Not at all. Is there anyone else that wants to share?” The room remained still, with no one willing to even shuffle a piece of paper in fear that they’d be asked to share their dream. “Okay, pass them to the right of each of your rows, and then once each of your rows are together, pass those forward to me. I’ll see you all tomorrow. Have a good day.”

Kendel-

“Before we start the lecture can I please see,” Omel looked down to a piece of paper that he had on his desk, “Pia, David, and Kendel, after class?”

One guy yelled out from the other side of the class? “Which David?”

“Oddly enough, there’s only one of of you in this class, so you know who you are.”

Why did he want me? And why in the world was he putting me with the know it all? I

was sure it was because I needed a tutor and he was going to make me pick one. If we were in a group I just wished that David was cooler than Pia because I couldn't handle two of them together in the same group. Then again, working with them in a group wouldn't be that bad, I'd just let Pia do all the work for an easy A.

David-

Worst case scenario something happened to my registration and I got unenrolled. Or maybe it was about that one day that I was playing a game on my laptop instead of taking notes and someone tattled on me.

Pia-

Finally.

He finally realized that I was the best student in the class and wanted to make me a TA. Or maybe there was that thing that happened in my other class. David or Kendel could have some sort of learning disability which made them not be able to take notes in class, so he was going to ask me to take notes for them.

Britney-

The bell rang so I closed my laptop and started to head out of class when I noticed the smart girl and two guys go up to the professor. I was checking my email and chatting with a few friends, so I didn't know what was going on so I grabbed my bag and lined up behind them, just in case.

If they were asking about something nerdy I could just walk away. If it was something that actually mattered like moving a test date, or not being able to do the homework, I was going to jump on the bandwagon faster than you could blink.

“I need to talk to the three of you real quick,” the professor said. “I will let it slide this week, but the university’s policy on cheating is clear, you cheat and you fail the class. If I catch you three cheating on an assignment again, I’m reporting you all to administration. On a more personal note, come on guys, it’s a dream journal. It’s free points. I’m trying to help you pass this class, don’t do something stupid like this.”

Pia-

Cheating?

Me?

“I’m sorry professor, but I don’t see how you could ever think that I was cheating. I would never think of doing something like that.”

Kendel-

Shut up. When a person in charge says that you’re in trouble you shut up and say sorry. You do not try to throw other people under the bus and save your ass. You’re in trouble. It doesn’t matter why, it doesn’t matter if they’re right or wrong, you just look sad and say that you’re sorry. Apparently they don’t teach common sense in AP Smarty Pants 500 Honors.

“It doesn’t matter who cheated off of who, I’m not here to look into the details, I’m just warning all of you. Just write down what you dreamt about, and be honest about it, and there

won't be any more problems like this."

She just couldn't let it go, and turned to me. "I can't believe that you would do something like this. Did you have fun reading about my dreams? I'm sure you loved hearing about me dreaming I'm a princess."

David, on the other side of me whispered, "I would have never guessed that one." I tried not to laugh.

"Who said we ever cheated off of you? You couldn't stand not getting an A+, so you had to copy down something one of us wrote. You have to be the best of the best, even when dreaming, so you couldn't stand to put 'didn't dream' because that would mean that you failed at something. Stop trying to throw this on us, when you're the one that did it."

Omel put up his hands to stop us. "Hey. We don't need any of that. Just don't do it again, and there's no problems."

David spoke up, "What dream got copied anyways?"

"It was something about the 1950's. My TA graded the journals and said they were sort of similar. I don't know anything else."

Britney-

The professor got done dealing with the cheaters when he turned to me, "What can I help you with?"

"Oh, nothing, I figured it out." I walked out of the lecture hall trying to decide if I actually dreamt about being in the 50's a few days ago or if it was something that I was thinking about only because he had said something about it.

Pia-

It was possibly the most inaccurate, most misogynistic, repugnant dream I had ever had. There was absolutely no way that I had ever copied that dream off of one of the boys because I was certain that I created that nightmare of a dream on my own. Everything about it was against who I was, who I wanted to become, and showed nothing more than the worst case scenario that I could ever imagine for myself.

I was a middle class stay at home mom with only a high school education and two boys. It was painful. I cooked, I cleaned, I fussed over my husband, and the entire time I was so obsessed with my looks I couldn't do as much as check the mail without first double checking my outfit, hair, and makeup in the hallway mirror. My husband even left me the entire night so that he could have drinks with his work buddies, and from what I could understand from the entire thing, he was just leaving the house because he didn't want to be around the boys.

David-

It was one of the only dreams I wrote down because it was so crazy real. The weird part about it was that it was real in the way that it was boring. Normally in dreams if you're something cool like a cop, you're going to do something crazy like get in a shootout, or have a high speed chase while shooting laser guns at the chinchillas that stole a semi full of microwaves, but I was just a cop. The most exciting thing that happened during my dream was making kids go home from making out in their cars at the 'lovers lane'.

Kendel-

I know I was at some sort of classy party, black tie, fancy drinks with no umbrellas in them, muzak playing in the background, but I had no clue if it was in the 50's or not. I even went back and read through my journal, and nothing in it was even related to the 50's. All I talked about were the people that I had drinks with, but nothing about classy drinks with friends made it stick out as the 50's. People drink so they don't have to deal with life no matter which decade you're in.

Britney-

I missed my psych class for a week or so because you can't expect me to make it to a 10:00 class on time when I don't wake up in my bedroom. There's no way that I'm going to go to class in some of the dresses that I wore the nights before.

I knew I didn't miss anything because I skimmed what we were supposed to be going over in the textbook, and it wasn't anything new. The brain has different parts of it, each part does something different. No need to go to school if I already know what they're teaching, and even if it's college and there's no dress code I don't want the pervs I sit around seeing me in that dress.

I made it back for one class and of course the professor tells us that the next week our journals are due again. Translation it was time to write 'no dream' fourteen more times.

Pia-

On Sunday night I double checked my entire journal, making sure that all of it was self

created material. I even double checked by searching them online to make sure that there was anything related anywhere else in the internet. I was well aware that internet searching your dream journal is not the most accurate way to check for plagiarization, however seeing as I knew that all of the material was original content, it was more an act of security than it was in evidence collection.

David-

The only weird part of my dreams was that I seemed to really enjoy dreaming about the 50's and then there were a few about me being a wizard, but even then I could at least pass the stack of papers in knowing that I wasn't faking them.

Kendel-

I walked into class right when the professor was getting the computer ready to project his lesson. "David, Kendel, Pia, and Britney, after class, come and see me." Having taken only a few steps into the class, I almost turned around and headed right out the door to avoid getting kicked out of college. You can't get yelled at, if you're not there to be yelled at. I could tell from his voice that we were in trouble again for cheating, and now someone new was cheating with us. I wanted to be anywhere but there. Even getting yelled at by coach for not sticking to the diet he put me on, and not being able to run the split he wanted me at for my 100 yard sprint, sounded more fun than having to deal with Omel.

Once the class was over the four of us made our way to the front of the class. I couldn't help but notice that the new girl, Britney, was a much needed improvement on the group. I'd be

willing to cheat off, on, with, from, under, over, besides, or whatever other position you could come up with, with her. “You four, follow me. We’re going to my office, we need to talk.”

“But sir, I have a class in ten. . .”

Omel cut Pia off. “I already talked with your professors, you’re with me.”

The four of us took our bags and followed Omel to his office in another building. He unlocked the door to his small office and we sat down behind his desk. “You four, if you had pulled this in any other class, would be kicked out of this school so fast that your heads would spin. If I was any other professor in this university, and if I was any other professor in this department, your parents would not be ignorant of the stupid choices that you had made, but I would personally call them and speak with them about the failures of students that they had raised that resorted to cheating on a fluff assignment.”

“But you’re not going to?” Pia asked. I wanted to reach over and strangle her. When a person is threatening you, you shut up. It doesn’t matter, you shut your mouth and you don’t say things. When coach is mad at you for being late to practice, you take the extra laps, the extra drills, and the extra yelling, and you keep your mouth shut. If you talk, if you try to explain, you’re only going to make them more upset.

Luckily professor Omel kept going without responding to Pia. “Because my specialty is subconscious research and I try to understand what the mind does when you’re sleeping and when you’re not paying attention, you four just might be able to do something other than get suspended or kicked out. I’m going to ask you a few questions as a group and if you don’t answer them honestly, you’re done here. Am I clear?”

Three of us nodded our heads while Pia said, “Yes sir, I understand and will be perfectly

honest with you.”

“David, a few nights ago you dreamt about being a court magician, could you tell me anything about the nobility that you worked for?”

“There’s not much to say, they were your typical royal family. King, queen, princess, and a prince.”

“Are you sure about that? Think carefully about the family, who was part of it.”

We all sat there in silence waiting for his response. “I guess that there wasn’t a prince? I don’t know. I remember the king, the queen, and even the princess. They all are something that I remember because it was weird to me how they acted around each other, but I can’t remember for sure if there was a prince or not.”

“That’s just fine, Pia, in your princess dream, did you have a brother?”

“Of course I didn’t have a brother. Why would I think that I had a brother.”

Omel nodded and made a quick note on a paper on his desk. “Britney, you wrote only one dream down in your journal. Do you remember when you had that dream?”

“I was tired from the party I had just got done with, I think it was sometime around 11:00.”

“In the afternoon?”

“Yeah, I had to catch a bus back to my dorm. I ate lunch after taking a shower, and then I was out.”

Omel turned towards me. “And do you remember when you had your dream that you were in an orchestra?”

I felt my face blush a bit. If there is anything I wanted to dream about, it was not about

how I was in a professional orchestra. I don't care who you are, no one can pull off any good from first saying that they're in an orchestra, or have dreams about being in an orchestra. "Yes."

"And when was that?"

"It was after I was done with my classes last week and I took a nap after having lunch, but I was only asleep for like a half hour before I had to go to the gym."

"David, you took a midday nap as well?"

"I can't remember. I could have. I usually try to study in the middle of the day, and I get sleepy when I read that much, so I could have fallen asleep. If I did fall asleep, I can't remember if I dreamt in it or not."

Britney-

He kept asking us questions about our dreams and when we had them, and to be honest I couldn't remember a single one of them.

What was I wearing?

Who was I with?

What did I eat?

What did the place look like?

I couldn't tell you the answer to those things about my most recent date, there was no way I could remember those details from when I wasn't even awake.

Prof Oreo bounced between us trying to check our dreams against each other, but I couldn't keep up with where he was going with his questions. I thought he was done when he reached into his desk and pulled out for packets of paper. "I'm going to need the four of you to

sign these papers and then come back tonight to the sleep lab. You four are quite possibly the rarest, most impossible phenomenon that I have ever heard of, if you are actually telling the truth and not lying.”

Petri opened up her big mouth, again. “Are you trying to imply that we are cohabitating each other’s subconsciousness?”

“As of right now, I don’t know what I’m saying. I just know that I’ll be seeing you tonight at the sleep lab so I can do a bit of research.”

I couldn’t help myself, “I like to sleep in lingerie, is that okay? Or will that be too much for some of your TA’s to handle?” I didn’t, I slept in a baggy pair of sweatpants, and a tank top, but it’s hard not to do something like that just to get a rise from people.

“Wear what you are comfortable in, we will be as professional as possible no matter what your preferred sleeping situation is.”

Lame, I was expecting so much more than that.

Kendel-

It could actually work out for me. I’d show up, wanting to sleep without pajamas, she’d show up in her lingerie. I could only think of how few people could say that they hooked up at a sleep lab. The only problem would be trying to figure out what to do with everyone watching.

Pia-

Professor Omel requested that we arrived for the sleep study at 9:00. As a person who falls asleep promptly every night at 9:30, I did not want to ruin my sleep schedule, so I left my

dorm at 8:00, and was in the lab at 8:15.

The room that they placed me in was reminiscent of a hospital room. The bed was uncomfortable, there were too few pillows, and even to a person, such as myself, who enjoys cleanliness and hygiene the entire thing felt too sterile and stank of bleach. Luckily, I took with me a small throw that I had knitted during the previous summer, to bring for a small sense of home. I finished one chapter in the novel I was reading, and then had lights out by my scheduled time of 9:30.

David-

Being on campus after dinner is only for midterms, and finals. Falling asleep on campus is only between classes when the night before you were up too late being a college student and doing whatever you wanted because you have no schedule. Falling asleep on campus after dinner, and planning to stay there the entire night just felt wrong.

The sleep lab was in a corner of the psychology building surrounded by offices for professors, and a few clinical offices where professors, as well as PhD students, could clock in a few hours trying to counsel and shrink students. You'd think that at a place that requires you to be smart so you can get a 'higher education' there'd be a touch less crazy than the real world. It turns out smart people are just as cracked up as everyone else.

I walked into the lab and saw a masters student who was watching TV on their computer behind the front desk. "I'm here for the lab."

Without missing a second of the crime drama he was watching he slid a clipboard towards me. "Sign in with your student ID, then go down the hallway to room number two.

Remember to stay in the room the entire night, and only leave under extenuating circumstances.

If you need anything there will be a buzzer near your bed and I'll be on call all night long.

Professor Omel will be with you in the morning. Do you have any questions? Good. Sleep well."

He slumped back into the office chair without waiting to see if I had any questions.

Kendel-

My coach was about as thrilled as I was that a shrink had made me late for practice, and that it was about getting caught cheating. Practice was horrible. With practice running over, I hardly had time to actually work on school. I was trying to get into graphic arts, but the class was kicking my butt thanks to coach and Omel thinking that I was cheating, giving almost no time to work on anything graphic, let alone anything artistic. I got done with just enough work that I could fake my way to getting a C in the class and then I left for Omel's lab. I stumbled in around 10:30, and changed into a semi-clean pair of basketball shorts that I think I wore only once before, and I didn't sweat in them so they weren't that bad; and a tee shirt from an old team that I had been on with the arms torn out.

As much as I wanted to see if Britney was waiting, I hit the bed and the bed won.

Britney-

An early night for me is 2:00 so I don't get why Mr. Smarty Pants looked like I was ruining his world, showing up at midnight. It wasn't like he was doing anything anyways, he was just watching TV. Maybe it was because I already had watched that episode, when that show was actually cool to watch and they hadn't sold out, and I told him that it was the best friend of the

victim who killed him accidentally in a backyard wrestling match and then tried to make it look like it was a suicide, that made him mad.

I offered him the rest of my beer when he told me I couldn't bring it in, but apparently some people can't drink on the job. Whatever job that is, I don't want to have it.

The three beers that I had downed before I showed up did their job, and helped me go to sleep in that jail cell of a room. Once I felt myself drifting off, I woke up at the same time, but not as me, it was the me who lived in a castle and was a servant.

Pia-

A princess

David-

A magician

Kendel-

A knight. When the dream first started I let my dream run on its own. I could see everything that I was doing, and the motions that I was going through were in my own body, but it was like someone else, that actually knew what it meant to be a knight, was in the driver's seat.

I went through my dream, letting the life of a knight pass me by, and enjoying what I could. I couldn't say if I was having the dream of my life, or a nightmare when I had to go through training. On one hand, it was beyond anything that I had ever dreamed of, being a knight in a castle with a suit of armor begging for me to put it on, with a sword and a shield right next to

it, but then there was the training. My dream body wasn't as sore as my real body, but I wanted to do anything besides more training. I had just gotten done with hours of repetition and sore muscles, there was no way that I wanted to have it for a few more hours in my dream.

Lunch came and went, but instead of more hours of fighting, jousting, and sparring, I headed into the castle. I was letting my body go through the motions when I heard shouted from behind me, "Kendel?! Kendel? Is that you?" I turned around and saw the princess and instantly bowed down my head in respect.

I found my autopilot responded with saying that Kendel wasn't my name, and it just felt weird. I was calling myself a different name. The dream me wanted to think that it was who I was, but I was me. I was still Kendel.

The princess stared at me, trying to bore through the top of my head with her eyes so that she could look at me and see if I was telling the truth even though my head was turned down.

"Are you sure? You seem to be having a hard time saying that."

I fought against what I wanted to say, and took control of my dream. "Yes, that's me. I'm Kendel."

"Great, let's go find the others." The princess turned around and headed back towards the center of the castle where she had come from. I wasn't quite sure what she was talking about, or who the others were, but I also wasn't sure in that one dream I had where I dreamt about having green goo instead of cheese in a grilled cheese sandwich but I still ate a handful of those and I ended up flying the rest of the dream, so I stepped in line with my princess and followed her through the castle.

"I've already located Britney, and she is waiting for us in my chambers. It was easy

enough to locate her, I simply asked my servants to find me a person who knew how to make me a Jaeger Bomb, and with no one knowing what a Jaeger is, or how to bomb it, I was able to find her. I'm assuming that David will be in his laboratory."

The phrase, it felt all like a dream, was in play too much with everything that was happening. The castle, and everything that was happening in it was just clear enough that it didn't seem real, and because it was a dream real life was just distant enough that I couldn't put a foot on that as reality either. I finally had to stop looking at her, because she only sort of looked like the smart girl, sort of like how you see a person on the street that you swear is your best friend from high school, but when you take a second look, you realize that they could be close relatives, but it's not quite right. "Wait, what's going on? What are we doing?"

"We're finding the last of us that are in the sleep lab right now. We're dreaming together." She said it like we were taking a bus together, like it was something that people do all the time. You just hop into each other's dreams and share them.

"We're dreaming together?"

"Quit yammering, we have to locate David." She pointed down the hall, to what I knew was a library. "Go check in there, I'll check his lab." I turned and headed towards the library, not knowing if I did it because the smart girl told me to do it, or because my princess told me.

I made it through a few rows of books, looking for a person that I had only seen in Omel's class and office, but as a dream version of him, when the princess poked her head into the room and yelled, "Found him! Follow me, we're going to my room. Hopefully Britney hasn't left. Knowing her she dreamt that she knows where the beer is and is making a subconscious beer run."

I fell in step behind the princess and was greeted by the court magician. The dream me, the knight me, felt like I had seen him a thousand times. He was always around the king, and I think that I had even been on a trip with him and the king before, but chasing after the blur in the blue dress it was the first time that I really noticed that he looked a lot like the guy from my class. I stuck out my hand, “Hi, I’m Kendel.”

“David.”

“Stop chatting you two, you gossip queens are only slowing us down.”

“That dress is slowing you down. The cobble stone floors are slowing you down.” David said, trying to keep his breath while breathing a bit heavy, “Saying hello to a person, is not slowing us down. If we were going any faster we’d be running.”

“A lady never runs,” the princess quickly responded. “We are almost there. Hold all questions for the big reveal.”

“Do you know what she’s talking about?” I whispered to David.

“Not a clue. She does realize that we’re not getting graded on this, right? That this is a dream?”

“A lady doesn’t eavesdrop, however, everything a lady does is point for scrupulous speculation and inspection.”

I turned towards David, “Help a brother out. Translation?”

“Princess thinks that because she’s a princess- which she’s not because it’s a dream!- that people are always watching her, judging her, and grading her.”

I bumped into the princess from having her stop so fast in the hallway. She opened up the door to her room and guided us in. Laying down on the bed was a servant, who unlike the

princess and the magician, looked exactly like Britney. “And there we have it, the four of us finally together. Now we may ask questions and begin our discussion.”

I wanted to say something about how she said that we may ask questions, like she had the power to say what I could and couldn't do, but the knight part of me was still there and stopped me from being rude to my queen. I started instead with, “Can someone explain to me, what the hell is going on?”

“That, I believe, is why I gathered us all together. I think we should introduce ourselves first, before we start trying to unscramble the situation that we are currently in. My name, my real name, or however you want to see it, is Pia. I graduated as valedictorian from my class with a 4.3 GPA, and am currently a freshman majored in Economics.”

“How do you even do that?” Britney asked, sitting up in Pia's bed. “Get above a 4.0? Isn't the whole thing about averages and stuff like that supposed to keep it under 4? When the highest you can get is a 4, how in the world do you average it out and get above what the top score is? That's like saying I took an average of people that are bald, and their average hair length turns out to be a foot long. You're either so smart that the scale doesn't even notice you, or the scale is so screwed up that they decided, ‘you know what, let's have this one slide, no one will notice that in PE she got a W’.” She turned to me, “That's when you get so far above an A+ or an A++ that it wraps back around and you start with Z.”

“Thanks, I would have never figured that out.” I looked back over to Pia trying to see her as something more than the princess. I knew that it was a dream, I knew that she wasn't really a princess, but part of me kept wanting to fuss on her hand and foot. The same part of me that wanted to get anywhere else in the castle other than the princess' bedroom because I knew that if

I got caught there, even if I was with other people, the king was not going to like hearing that there was a man in her room and I'd be headed straight for the dungeon. "I might as well go next. I'm Kendel. I'm a sophomore, I run the 400m for track, and I think I'm going to go into advertisement, or something."

I looked over to David to try to pass the invisible baton of introductions. Luckily he got what I was going for. "David. Freshman. Undecided major."

"I guess that leaves me!" Britney bounced a bit on the bed trying to find the best place to sit; an impressive feat when you realize that there were no springs, or much of anything that you'd consider a normal bed, in that bed. "My name is Britney, that's one t, one y, no i or e. I'm a member of Kappa Omega Kappa. I'm also a Virgo, so that pretty much tells you everything you ever need to know about how I'm going to be, because you know what we're like. I'm going to school so I can go into business. I'm thinking of opening up my own bar. I had this really cool idea one time to open up a strip club as well and call it 'The Pole' and have it be a classy place. You know the type, the ones that serve surf and turf, or sushi. But then I found out how expensive liquor licenses can be. Can I just tell you that I can see why our economy is going downhill, with them making people pay for things like that. I don't get it."

I felt a brain cell commit suicide listening to Britney. "That's great to know everyone's name, but that still doesn't tell me why we're here. This is my dream, I fell asleep, and as far as I know, you three shouldn't be here."

"Assuming this is even your dream," David said. "Hello? I'm a wizard. Do you know how much that says that I'm winning in this dream? What do you do in your dream world? Stand around and do nothing? I'm a wizard. Like, fireballs, summon demons sort of thing. If it's

anyone's dream, it's mine."

"Still doesn't tell us why we're here."

"It's a dream!" Britney said, flopping back into the bed. "What does it matter? Do you care this much about a dream when you're naked going to school? No! You just suck it up and be as classy as possible with no pants on and know that you're going to wake up, and it's okay because you have underwear on in real life. I don't get the problem." It was hard for me to admit to drunk logic. She had a point. It was still just a dream. It was a little weird that three people were in on it, but that didn't change that it was a dream. I'd wake up, and instead of being a knight, I'd be me.

David-

Pia got a look in her eyes that I would later learn only meant trouble for the rest of us. "I have an idea. If it is just a dream, let's see what caused this. Maybe something within this dream holds clues to what we are doing here. Britney, you could speak with the other servants and lower class citizens about this castle, there could be something that they know. Kendel, you speak with the knights. David, speak with the undead, or whatever it is that you do. I will make it a point to talk to the lords and ladies about any unusual circumstances that they have found themselves in that would be the origin of this problem."

"You realize that you're asleep, right?" Kendel said. "You're supposed to relax, and sleep when you're asleep. You know that's what normal people do when they sleep, right?"

"I am well aware of the role that sleep plays in the physical and psychological health of the body, as you would be, if you actually did any of the reading for our psychology class, but if

we are here, and there is nothing else to do, we only have one possible solution to what to do with our time.”

“Sit around? Do nothing? Get on a horse and ride it in any direction until I have saddle sores? Slay a dragon? I’ll say that again, just because you seem to forget that we’re in a dream—slay a princess eating, fire spewing, giant lizard, put it on a leash, and call him Godzilla as I take him out to the park for his morning walks. Oh, I can think of things to do in a dream other than talk to people.”

“Sir Knight, I am ashamed of you.” I held my breath and felt my entire body go as still as it could no matter how uncomfortable it was me to keep my arm in the position it was at for more than a few seconds. The princess was angry. She was the future queen, the ruler and decision maker for the kingdom. She was not just powerful, she was power. Her father was still alive, but that didn’t stop her from flexing her ruling muscles when needed. It seemed like such a weird statement before I heard the princess talk like that to Kendel, but I quickly found a deeper, truer, meaning in the phrase ‘heads are going to roll.’

I saw David glass over, coming to the realization of exactly what he had just signed himself up for. “Please forgive me. I’ll get right on that.” He did a quick turn for the door and headed out. I didn’t need a second invitation to get myself out of there and followed suit, spending the rest of my day trying to find anything in any book that I had about spirits, demons, angels, or whatever else I could find that would explain how four people would share dreams. I did have a theory about the sandman getting a bit lazy, and hitting us all with a dusting of dream powder, but I didn’t think that was exactly the scientific proof that Pia was looking for. I took a stab in the dark and assumed that she wasn’t exactly one for believing in Santa, the tooth fairy, or

something as weird as the sandman.

I didn't hear from Pia, David or Britney for the rest of the day. When I went to sleep I woke up to find myself in the sleep lab at the university. I gave myself a morning stretch, slipped on my shoes, and headed for the door.

The first jiggle of the cold handle didn't take, so I tried a few more jiggles, a push, a pull, and finally a shoulder nudge to try to open it. It was after the bass thunk of my shoulder that made it sound like I was trying to break the place down that a speaker in the ceiling clicked to life. "If you could please wait in your bed, we will be in momentarily for a quick review of your dream last night. Thank you."

I sat back on the edge of my bed and waited for the TA, or lab assistant, or whatever he was, come in with a clipboard and a few sheets worth of questions. He took the rolly stool that was in the corner, pulled a pen out of his shirt pocket and started in on the list of questions, which really helped me not feel like a lab rat.

"Did you dream last night?"

Britney-

I've had one night stands . . . no that sounds bad, scratch that idea.

I've had dates with men that happen to end at their apartment for us to spend the night together where they were warmer to me in the morning than that prick. I'm even counting the guy who kept insisting, 'no names please' and kept calling me Deborah.

"Yes."

"Who were you in the dream?"

“Me.”

“And was there anything notable about the dream?”

“No.”

“When was the dream set?”

“I didn’t check a calendar. I don’t know.”

“Was it set in a time period? Was it modern? Was it alien? Was it someplace different?”

“Yes.” If I was in a cartoon it was at this point steam would have started to pour from his ears from my answers, but he deserved it. You don’t just wake me up, act like a bastard for no other reason than you having to do your job, and expect me to fart sunshine and rainbows. Especially not at 8:00, and especially not before you let me shower, eat breakfast, and I have at least two cups of coffee.

I have a strict rule- no smiles for anything that wakes me up before the clock has at least four digits. I can be up early, but if you’re the thing that got me up early, no smiles for you. I’m pretty sure my first few teachers back in high school thought that I wanted to kill them because of this rule.

“Which of those?”

“It was in a different place.” He stared at me, wanting me to say more, and I stared back at him. No smiles.

“Tell me more about the place. How was it different?”

“It wasn’t here. That’s pretty different.”

“And what were you doing in this different place?”

“Work.”

“What type of work were you doing?”

“Manual labor. It sucked.” I did honor him with a slight pout, but made sure not to do the cute pout. Any girl can tell you there is the pout where something legitimately sucks, and then there is the pout when they’re just trying to get something for free.

“Do you remember who you were working for? Who your employer was?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

“A king.”

“What type of king was he?”

“Of a kingdom. What other types of kings are there? We weren’t in a playground.”

“Did you meet the other students that Professor Omel had come in tonight as well?”

I wanted to lie. It was a crapshoot. If I said yes, more questions. If I said no, I could get out early, but then there might be follow on a later date, more sleeping in those stupid rooms, and more dealing with little mister happy pants. I went against my better judgment. “Yes.”

“Did you do anything with them?”

“Yes.”

“What did you do with them?”

“Talked.”

“What did you talk about?”

“Stuff. You know, names, personal history, getting to know you stuff. But we didn’t do that weird one that people like to do where they say you have to say something interesting about yourself. Cut that one out because I don’t like doing that here, not a chance I’d do it in my

dream.”

“What did you do after you introduced yourself?”

“Work.”

“All of you? Together?”

“No, I just went back to work. I don’t know what they did. I just said hello to them, and then got back to dreaming.”

He flipped through three blank pages of questions that he should have asked me, but he stood up. “You’ll need to report back to Omel’s office later today after he has reviewed this information. It’ll be at that meeting that he’ll be able to tell you about your future here at the school, and if we will push for your suspension. His office hours are between one and three, I would suggest getting there earlier than later, as he likes to leave on time.”

Pia-

I gathered my things, and I knew where I should have gone. I should have gone back to my apartment to shower, change, get ready for the day, and go to my classes that I could still make it to, and then being back at Professor’s Omel’s office on the third floor. I made it to the ground floor on the elevator and could not make it out the door.

With everything that was going on, with me being called a cheater, with there being the potential for me to be removed from school, and then there was the analysis of my dream that bothered me. I read ahead in the text that was assigned for the class, and the trip down the elevator was just too much for me with the information that I had.

I was a princess. Not just any princess, I was a spoiled, pampered, sit in the top of a tower

and wait for a man to come along to save me, princess. If I hadn't done the reading I would have remained ignorant of just what this said about my subconscious, and therefore, the desires that I was unaware of. Freud postulates that dreams, and what we experience inside of them, are wish fulfillment. That would mean that I wanted to be a passive, worthless, spineless, hardly literate, debutant that has about as much self motivation and self respect as the night shift at the grocery store, or as I like to call it, the land of broken dreams. You know when you have hit rock bottom when it is two in the morning and you are organizing apples.

Then there was the setting that I was dreaming in. Freud says that everything in dreams can be important, and the setting can tell you things about your desires more than the action. Assuming that was correct, that meant that I did not want to be within the modern, intelligent, and technically advanced world, but instead desired to be in a backwards, uneducated, time period that could rightfully be referred to as the dark ages. From wanting to be part of the dark ages, that meant I wanted to rid myself from technology as well as science.

I wanted to be in a world that's great science was half truths and trickery? I wanted to be ignorant of the world around me? It was just too much for me and so I sat down on the chair that was outside the elevator on the ground floor to try to think through it.

I was working through that I was wearing a blue dress, and how that I was wearing a masculine color even though I was in such a feminine role. I had figured out that it was a symbol of how the masculine gender roles were so strong in that dream, expecting and enforcing their standards on everyone around them, that they were literally covering me in their oppression. I wasn't entirely sure what I could do with that information, but while I was trying to come to a conclusion David walked into the building.

“Hey Pia. Ready to head up and hear our fate?”

“What? It’s not one, is it?”

“No, it’s like two.”

I had lost track of time for half of my day, and the only thing that I did during that time was nothing more than sit in the foyer of a building thinking about what my dream meant.

What’s even worse, at least some of that time was spent thinking about a dress that I wore and what color it was, and that typically would be nothing like me, but I did it while willingly disregarding my personal hygiene. I stood up and pushed the button to the elevator, “Let’s go.”

We stepped into the elevator, and although it was only three floors that we needed to ascend, David insisted on trying to break the whirl of the elevator’s motor with small talk. “Do you have any plans for the weekend?”

“I plan on studying for the classes that I missed while having to deal with this unfortunate situation that we have found ourselves in. Thanks to Professor Omel, I am certain that I am at least two days behind my reading schedule that is outlined in the majority of my class syllabi.”

He paused for a beat, trying to take in what I had told him. “Well, that sounds like fun.”

“Certainly.”

David-

What a freak.

Who spends their weekends catching up on homework and reading? I could have put money on it that she wasn’t even behind reading, she just wanted to read more so she could keep being ahead of everyone else in the class that she was in.

We made it to Omel's office and Britney was already waiting for us. "Great, only one more of you to come before we can start this." Pia took one of the seats in front of Omel's desk next to Britney, leaving me to stand next to a file cabinet, and then the social awkwardness came into the room, and refused to leave.

No one wanted to talk. I didn't want to get Pia to say anything, Britney quickly pulled out her phone to check whatever it was she was reading, Pia politely crossed her legs and stared blankly at Omel, and Omel went to typing at his computer. We stayed like that, doing the awkward samba, for fifteen minutes until Kendel knocked on the door.

With the four of us all together Omel stopped working on his computer and swiveled towards us. "You four are easily the most bizarre, unique, and entirely confusing psychological anomaly that has ever been recorded." I saw a hint of a smile from Pia. Only she would be happy about being the best at being abnormal. "The fact that you four not only are all lucid dreamers, but that at the same point that your lucidity is overlapping with each other raises the potential for a lot of research that needs to be done." Omel reached into his desk and handed each of us folders, "I'm going to need you to read through those, sign where appropriate, and be back here tonight to start the research. I don't want to wait any longer than what I have to to start this."

"Can you give me a tldr of this?" Britney asked looking at the first page. "I'm not going to read all of this?"

"Tldr?"

Kendel translated, "Too long, didn't read. She's looking for a summary."

"It's simple. For the remainder of the semester, you will live in seclusion from each other, and society, in our sleep labs. Each day when you wake up we will have interviews with each of

you, and pending some more signatures there might be an EKG or MRI in each of your futures. You will be unenrolled in your current courses, with no negative marks showing on your records, and you will be reimbursed for your time with a full ride scholarship until you graduate.”

“Sleep labs? You mean the ones that we were in last night?”

“Not the exact same ones, those that were used last night have to be used for other studies, but there are others that you’ll be using.”

“And we’ll be in there for how long?”

“The contract in those papers says until the end of the term, however if the dreams stop, or if we find the reason or way that you are able to share your dreams consistently, earlier than that date, there will be no reason for us to keep you.”

“What are we allowed in the room?”

“As little as possible. We will provide your meals, but as for entertainment or leisure, we’re not going to provide you with materials unless absolutely necessary because we don’t want to add any variables to your experience than necessary. We don’t need one of you reading a murder mystery, the other a fantasy, and then a romance novel and having you dream, tainted with all three books. For the most part, you will be living in solitude with little to no interactions with anyone else.”

Spending a few months in solitary confinement in exchange for a full ride to school, not going into debt, and not having to take out student loans? I dug out a pen from my backpack and was the first one to hand the folder back to Omel. Britney was a close second, Kendel tried to act like he read at least some of the legalese in the folder, and Pia spent the next fifteen minutes going page by page reading everything that she was agreeing to. It was the only time that I had

ever seen a person ever read all of the terms and conditions on anything.

“Great, I’ll have some TA’s grab your clothes from your apartments, but now if you’ll follow me I’ll escort you to your rooms.” Omel stood up and directed us to our future rooms. The four rooms were at the end of the hallway, Pia and I took the rooms to the right, Britney and David took the rooms across the hall from ours.

The door clicked shut behind me and I was left with a hospital room. I wanted to think of the room being a hotel room, because there was one bed, a small desk/table to eat at, and a bathroom, but the harsh light and the tile floor made it feel more like a hospital than a hotel.

Kendel-

With nothing else to do I inspected the entire room. Everything seemed to be from a cheap furniture store. Nothing in there that looked like wood was actually solid wood, and then there was the painting on the wall. It was the most nondescript, abstract painting of pastel shapes and colors. The worst part about it was that it was so faded that I didn’t even recognize it on the wall next to the bathroom until my second lap around the room.

The problem that I had with the room was that there were no windows. I didn’t have a clue why it mattered if we saw anything outside, but it was a little hard to guess what time it was. No cell phone, meant no clock, and that meant that I didn’t know if twenty minutes or two hours had passed while I walked around the room seeing what I got to play with while I wasn’t dreaming.

Britney-

Fluorescent lights buzz. You don’t notice it when you’re in a room and there’s other

things going on. Even if there's another person talking, the buzzing gets covered, but when you're in a room all by yourself, the only thing you can hear is the buzz. I managed to make it maybe ten minutes before I found the light switch and turned them off.

I swatted the switch down, and all of the lights turned off except for the one in the bathroom. As far as I could tell that one was going to require me to punch through a wall to figure out how to turn that off. It didn't bother me too much, as long as there wasn't as much buzzing, so I just laid down on the bed and tried to catch up on some sleep. If there was one thing that I could do, it was sleep.

I started to dream, and just like when I was a servant in the castle I didn't think much of it. It was my life. I was still me, just living a different life in a different time. I didn't think much of it, and just let my body go on its own. It was weird, but relaxing. I didn't have to worry about what I was doing, where I was going, or who everyone's name was, I was just along for the ride. It was almost like watching a movie, but a movie about a life that I never knew I was part of.

Know how there are some times when you get to a place and you can't remember how you got there? You remember being at your house, you know you got in the car, but for the life of you, you can't remember the car ride? That was the entire dream. I knew that things were happening, I knew that I was going from place to place, but I wasn't in control of it, the dream version of me was.

The only thing I remembered from that dream was that I made poodle skirts look hot.

Pia-

The only thing I want to remember from that dream was the deep hatred I had for any

man who said ever muttered the untimely phrase, “What’s for dinner?” within seconds of coming home from a lazy day at the office. In my dream, I knew that he was my husband, and that I should love him, and care for him, and the dream made me want to whip together a casserole with a side salad and dessert for him and the boys, but I wanted to do nothing more than take off my heels, put on a pair of pants, and slap his sloth ridden body into women’s rights with the help of my trusty fourteen inch, cast iron skillet.

Authors, philosophers, and religious fanatics have been trying for centuries to be able to communicate the endless torture of the concept of Hell. It is a difficult concept, never ending pain, never ending suffering, and an eternal infinite search for refreshment that will never be provided. Without a heartbeat of hesitation, I can calmly and clearly solve thousands of years of confusion and misunderstanding on the subject of the inferno of Hell. It is a mother waking up, getting two boys ages eleven and eight ready for school while their father has already left for work. You may believe in demons like Beelzebub or Asmodeus, but I know for a fact that Satan’s helpers are named Gregory and Allan, and they are able to produce a tier of suffering that Dante himself would be awestruck by and fearful to traverse without Virgil by his side.

I knew throughout the entire nightmare that, much like the medieval dream that I only was required to force my way into the dream’s consciousness and claim control of my life to make it stop. If I wanted to leave, all I had to do was push Mrs. Perfection who was wearing a bra that had so many wires in it I could have doubled as a radio transmission tower, to the side and take control. The only problem with that, was that if I took over I would become lost in the dream. Where else would I go? I knew that I needed to find the other dreamers, but how was I supposed to find people when I was not even certain that I was in the same city as they were?

It was a nightmare, being trapped in a woman's body who did not even seem to understand that her body was her own. I was trapped in a woman who was trapped in her house, and she was happy to be oppressed. She thought that she was adding to society, that being able to sew and do dishes was some sort of benefit that all of humanity received from her. I gained respite for a quick hour once the spawns were asleep which I spent reading, but even then she squandered her life on Victorian romance novels, the literary equivalent of soap operas.

I was never happier than when I went to sleep and found myself waking up on campus in the disinfectant smelling sleep laboratory. When I started to stir, a speaker in the ceiling cracked to life. "One of us will be in there momentarily, please wait. We just need to ask you a few questions about the dream that you just had."

I sat up in bed and waited for the TA to come through my door. I wanted to forget the dream. I wanted it to be like one of those dreams that you have that seems to be super memorable, but by the time you have brushed your teeth and put on your deodorant the only thing that you can remember about it is that you had a dream. I wanted it to go away, but it staggered around in my mind, refusing to leave no matter what else I tried to focus on.

The TA that came into the room was a different one than from the previous time, this one didn't seem like his life was ending by having to talk to me. "Do you know how long you have been asleep?"

"No, I do not know how long I have been asleep. I'd assume that it was for a longer period of time, at least longer than five hours, but I am unsure."

"What did you dream about?"

David-

“I was a cop. I did cop things, and then went home. There were a few things going on at the precinct, but I can’t say that they were anything out of the normal.”

“On that note, was there anything abnormal about the dream? Weird physics? Discoloration? Incomplete ideas or images?”

“No, it was just as real as here, I just wasn’t in control.”

“Are you certain?”

“Very. No one broke out into song and dance, I didn’t fly home after a day of work, everyone was wearing normal clothes, everything fit. The only weird part about it was that it wasn’t now. It was in the 50’s or something. I remember listening to the radio, and I could tell that the music was stuff that my grandparents would listen to or something like that. It wasn’t normal at all. It was that old stuff where guys would wear suits and ties to perform on TV, and actually knew about music.”

“Could you sing any of it that you remember?”

“Not a chance. Ask one of the girls for that, my music talent starts and ends with the shower.”

“Did you meet anyone else there? Did you speak with Pia, Britney or Kendel?”

“No, I didn’t know that they were even there. Were they in the dream?”

“I can’t tell you that.”

“So they were!”

“We’re done here.” He stood up from the stool he was sitting on and headed towards the door. “Thank you for your time. Is there anything that you think you might need?”

I looked around the room again, trying to remember everything that I could about my first glance through it before I fell asleep. “Books. Or at least something to do.”

Kendel-

“Something to read? Is there anything else?”

“I’m going to go crazy in here if I can’t work out. Can you get me some free weights or a treadmill?”

Pia-

The TA was started to look a little flustered after I asked him for books and a treadmill “Is there anything else that you would like besides that?”

“I am aware that in our contracts that there is a prearranged time for food to be delivered to me for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but could we please also include some bottled water or dried fruit to snack on during the periods between those meals?”

Britney-

Something was wrong with the TA. All I asked for was some beer nuts, or something to snack on. People might call me a dumb blond, but I knew that it probably had something to do with the other guys saying something like that to him as well because beer nuts should never get that sort of reaction.

I knew that it’d probably mess up the entire experiment, but I had to do it, “Yeah, we all said we’d ask for the same thing.”

“But, you said you didn’t meet.” He said it like when you tell a kid that Santa isn’t real and he doesn’t want to believe you, but he knew that there was something there. It was almost like he was begging me to not tell him.

“Yeah, we also said we wouldn’t say anything about that either.” I paused for a second, “Ooops, I wasn’t supposed to say that.”

“Thank you.” He opened up the door a sliver, just big enough for him to slide through, and I couldn’t help but laugh at him. It was just too easy to screw with him. A bit later he came back with books, some snacks, and said that next time we dreamt that we’d get our clothes from our apartments, and depending on how fast they could find them, maybe a treadmill.

The books weren’t that fun to read. He only brought an armful, and they were all boring books. I tried to read the fifth one for an entire chapter, and instead of turning the page I was waking up in the castle.

My room was nearby Pia’s because I was her servant, so I walked into her room. “Pia! Wakey, wakey!”

“Britney, I’m still in my nightgown, a lady never . . .”

“You aren’t a princess sweetie, stop thinking that you are. No one likes a snobby brat.” That seemed to knock her back to her senses and off of her high horse. “Did the TA who dropped off books to you seem . . . weird?”

“Like he had just witnessed someone managing to break the gravity pull of a black hole?”

“I’m just going to assume that, that means he looked at you like you had twenty arms, and say yes.”

“I was quite perplexed by his actions. I wonder why he was acting in such a quizzical

manner.”

“Quizzical? Are you serious? This isn’t a test, you don’t get extra credit for using your vocab words in sentences. And really? You, miss

‘took-the-ACT-because-it-sounded-like-a-fun-weekend’ can’t think of one thing that would make him act weird?”

“The obvious conclusion would be that it would include something about us; however I just assumed that Professor Omel would have briefed his assistants with the information essential for participating in our research.” I stopped what I was doing while Pia was saying this. I hadn’t noticed it, but since I came into Pia’s room my body went into autopilot and was helping her get ready for the morning, prepping the dress that she would be wearing for the rest of the day, taking her night gown off, and starting to get her into the new dress. My mind was even already planning on how I was going to do her hair for the day. “What? What are you thinking about? Why are you just standing there?”

“Nothing, just realized that I was helping you get ready like I was still your servant. I guess I still don’t have this dream kicked like I thought I did.” I did the last tie on her dress, because I wasn’t going to leave the girl there half dressed because servant or not, you always help out another girl zip up, even if the dress doesn’t have a zipper because they haven’t been invented. “You can do your hair on your own. But back to what we were talking about, of course it was about us, there’s nothing else that it could have been. What did you tell him that you wanted for your room?”

Pia pulled her long, perfectly silky hair that I had plans to do an amazing braided net with into a sloppy bun. Her dress said princess, her hair said virgin freshman. “Books to read, and

then I realized that my cardiovascular health would seriously decline in that laboratory room so I asked him for any way that I would be able to exercise.”

“Then you asked him for munchies?”

“Healthy snack options for in between meal hunger pains, but yes.”

“I asked for the same thing, and I bet with the way that guy was acting the guys asked for the same thing.”

“Speaking of them, where are they? I would assume that after the previous time that we had this dream that they would meet us here, in my chambers. Go find them.”

“You go find them. Still not your servant, still in a dream.”

Pia realized what she had done. “I am so sorry, I apologize. I didn’t mean it like that.”

“I know, we’re all going through it. No harm, no foul.” I opened up her bedroom door that lead to the rest of the castle, “Let’s go find those boys, knowing them they’re sitting around waiting for us to come to them.”

David-

It wasn’t so much that we didn’t know where to go, it was more on the fact that we didn’t want to go. Kendel, who apparently ran a crazy early to bed early to rise type of schedule as a knight, came to my room at dawn break to wake me up. After getting ready I even told him that we should go and find the girls but he countered with, “Or you can show me what you can do with magic.”

It was an air tight argument.

At first I showed him the things that I’d do for the king. Basic illusions; making things

that weren't actually there, look and sound like they were there. The one that the king really seemed to love was when I would make a bunch of miniature knights in armor, and then have them fight on the banquet table against a fake dragon. We didn't have the table, so I used the stone floor.

After the sideshow was over Kendel reached over to my bookshelf, sat down on a wooden chair. "Now, show me what you can actually do."

"That is actually what I can do. Weren't you paying attention? That actually happened."

"That was maybe a book or two worth of tricks. If I know anything about magic,"

". . . which you don't. . ."

"You've got at least a hundred books in here. You have to know more, what else can you do?" And that lead to Kendel handing me random books from my shelves and me showing him a spell or two from each one. It was a weird experience, part of me felt like I had already knew those spells. I knew how to unlock any lock with a wave of my hand, I knew how to ignite cobwebs with a snap of my fingers, I knew how to spy on other rooms of the castle like I had a closed circuit security system, and I knew how to make Britney and Pia walk around the castle, looking for us everywhere, except for where we were. I already knew how to do those things, but at the same time I was learning them for the first time. I had no clue what I was doing, but it flowed from my hands. It was like sitting down behind the wheel of a race car for the first time, managing perfect time trial laps, and learning every lap from myself how I was able to put up those times.

It wasn't until conjuring up two, twelve inch meatball subs and making them disappear into our stomachs, that I stopped pointing the girls in the wrong direction, and let them find us.

As soon as Pia saw us, she put her hands on her hips, “Where have you two been? We’ve been searching all over the castle for you. We have squandered at least half of our day going room by room trying to find where you were.”

“Trust me” Britney said dryly, “it was thrilling. I could hardly contain myself.” Pia didn’t react to Britney’s sarcasm, I could only guess that she had become immune after the first hour of Britney’s comments following behind her.

“I don’t know what your problem was, we were here the entire time waiting for you. You did try here, didn’t you?” Kendel asked smiling at a time when he shouldn’t have.

Pia picked up on the faint glimmer of joy. “You did something. You hid from us? You ran from us? You did something to avoid us, didn’t you?”

Kendel’s smile grew a bit more, “Nothing. We sat in here, with these books. David tried to get me to read some of them, but I didn’t do anything.”

“Fine, lie to me, it plays no role now that we are finally reunited, we can finally discuss a few things that need to be addressed. First, Britney and I were realizing that something seemed wrong with the TA who worked with us in the sleep labs. We wanted to inquire what you spoke to him about.”

“She was inquiring,” Britney said from the doorway behind Pia, “I don’t care.”

We told her what we asked for and we realized that in one way or another the four of us all asked for the same things. “It’s just a coincidence,” Kendel said, “dumb luck. Maybe we all asked for it, because those rooms are prison cells and we all don’t want to go crazy.”

“There is no room for coincidences,” Pia said, “My father always told me that coincidences are an uneducated’s man explanation for scientific laws. There are no such things

as coincidences.”

“What do you think about magic?” Kendel asked looking directly at me, trying to hide his grin by looking at the ground. I knew where he was going with it, and so I had to stare at the ground and think about anything besides what Pia was going to say next.

Pia-

Magic? At a time like that, when we were experiencing the most abnormal psychological situation that in written history, and they were asking me about magic? “Magic is a lot like God; at first there are signs of miracles, but when put under the microscope is nothing but lies about the physically impossible.”

Kendel said something under his breath like, “Don’t tell that to my meatball sub,” but I didn’t understand everything that he was saying due to the fact that he started laughing, which triggered David to start laughing.

“If you two are finished, we still need to discuss what it is that is keeping us here together. I am unaware of if you have noticed this, but from what Omel has told us, as well as his actions towards us, I do not think that he has any intentions of stopping us from being here together.”

David managed to stop laughing, “For once we agree on something! Being stuck with you is a bad thing that needs to be changed.”

“Yes, and from the lines of questions that Omel has been asking us the few times that he has been aware of our situation, it seems as though he’s not interested in helping us stop it, but only wants to find out how and why.”

“So how do we stop this then? Don’t sleep?” Britney asked.

“That is a possible solution, however I think the biggest chance that we have to solving this puzzle is to work together. This leads me to ask what it is that you all do in the other dream, in hopes that we will be able to find each other there. If we’re only able to meet together in the castle, then we’re cutting our efforts short, we need to meet every time that we dream so we can continually work on solving this problem.”

“All I know is that the last dream that I had, I was a cop. I can’t remember the details. It was a bit fuzzy, sort of like the first few times that we came to this dream. It still felt like a dream, but there were parts of it that were real.”

Britney and Kendel provided no assistance in telling us who they were in the other dream. Either they were unaware of who they were, which I would not be surprised by either of them for not being self aware, or they were so used to slacking in school that even when they were dreaming they allowed other people to do their work for them. I knew that we would have to meet somewhere, and that I would rather read an instruction manual about steam engines than allow there to be any excuse to visit me at that house. “Would any of you have any difficulties if we agreed that in the other dream we would meet at the police station, or do something that would cause the police to be called?”

“What are we going to do?” Britney asked.

“Aren’t you listening?” I interrupted, trying not to pull out my hair at her inability to hold onto a single thought for longer than thirty seconds. “When we go to the other dream, do whatever you can to get to the police. From there, we find David. Whatever you do, just make it obvious that you know about either this dream or home, and then we’ll find each other.”

Britney who had not closed her mouth from when I interrupted her continued on. “Like I was saying,” she inserted a few slanderous statements with her eyes towards me, “before I was interrupted; what are we going to do once we get together? Right now we’re together. We’re sitting around planning another meeting. We’re meeting to make a meeting. If that’s all we’re going to do, I can tell you this right now that we’re going to be stuck like this for a long time.”

A broken clock and all of that, you know?

“The first step is to organize, after that we have to identify the problem, then we can work on resolving that.”

“And if there is no problem?” David asked, “Because right now I’m not seeing a problem in this dream. What are we going to solve?”

“The significant lack of alcohol. I am far too sober. If this is a dream, then I need to be dream drunk. All of the fun, and I still get to keep my liver,” Britney said.

Kendel threw an empty cup at David, “Time to make a dream come true man!”

David wrapped his hand around the cup, muttered a bit to himself, and a red fluid filled the cup. From that one cup of wine until the end of the night I had lost them to partying for no reason. I left the three of them in David’s room while I spent valuable time investigating everything that was happening in the castle. The only news besides petty squabbles between peasants was that my dad was going to be heading out to an outlying province to go hunting in a few days. Hunting being a very loose term which translates, when expanded upon, to him and a dozen of his knights, riding around in the forest looking for an animal to kill, and then finally a tracker/hunter from the province finding game, killing it, and then giving it to my dad to claim as his own.

Britney-

It is a different feeling 'going to bed' buzzed and almost tipsy, and waking up from going to bed and realizing that you are perfectly sober and it was only in a dream that you were drinking. It was like I hadn't even drank anything. It was weird, but I could get used to it.

After answering the TA's questions about the dream, I laid down on my bed and stared at the ceiling. The clinic's room was just as boring as when I went to sleep in it. Nothing to do, nothing to keep me entertained, and boring enough that the only thing I wanted to do was sleep, but I had just slept so there was no way I was going to do that again.

Against my better judgement I reached for a book that they had left on the desk and started to read.

When there is absolutely nothing else going on in your life, and you have zero options, I can honestly say that classic literature that you'd normally use for a footstep to reach the top shelf, is sort of interesting. Don't get me wrong, it was still boring, it was just more fun than doing nothing. I finally understood why those books were those people's version of a good show. When your life is so boring that your only other option is falling asleep, reading some super long story about who knows what, is actually sort of fun, but still something that makes you want to fall asleep.

Kendel-

I woke up in a much better bed than I went to sleep in. Where the one in the sleep lab was the cheapest one that a company could sell and still call it a mattress instead of a steel box, my

bed, and especially the blankets on it, were heavenly.

My dream brain kicked in and I allowed it to pilot me around the house that I was living in by myself. It seemed a bit weird for me, that I was a single guy but I had a house, but I just assumed that I was richer than most people and could afford the extra rooms instead of the typical studio apartment bachelor pad deal. As I was driven around the house, everything inside of it said that I had money. The art on the walls were vibrantly colored, and slightly abstract. The carpets were plush, and even though I was in the back seat of my body I could still feel just how much I sunk into the carpet with each step.

Going to college and living in low end housing ruins your idea of carpet. Carpet was just something under my feet that was better than having concrete. It was a bit warmer than concrete, and only a hair softer, but it hid dirt better, so it was the best option. Then there was the carpet in my house in that dream. It was liking walking on those gel shoe inserts, but everywhere in the house.

I showered, got changed, ate breakfast, and expected that I would hop in my car to do whatever work it was that I did in my dream when instead I walked into one of my rooms. In the center of the room was a half finished canvas that had a mess of abstract shapes and colors, and sitting in front of that was what I thought was my inspiration- a bowl of fruit.

I let it run.

I could have pushed my way past the auto-pilot, like I did when I was a knight, but I didn't want to. I always liked artsy things, I just never had time to do it. I was so busy with running, and either getting in shape for the season or keeping in shape after the season that I didn't have much time to do it. I tried a bit in high school to take the first year drawing class, but

the teacher always looked at me like I was a guy taking a home-ec class.

It wasn't the first time that I had ever dreamt about being an artist, but it was the first time that what I was painting didn't have boobs on it, and wasn't half bad. The best part about it was that at one point I couldn't tell if it was the dream me, or the real me that was painting. I wanted to add detail to one section, and the dream me seemed to agree, and did exactly what I was thinking. I knew I hadn't gained full control because he did it a lot better than me, but it was like for a moment, I could finally paint.

I wasn't anywhere near finished with the colored blobs and squiggles that made the bowl of fruit, when I found myself standing up to get lunch. I had lost a morning thinking about nothing more than paint on a canvas, on a canvas that I wasn't even actually painting. I wanted to go back to the room after my sandwich, but I could imagine just how big of a stink Pia would make out of it, if I didn't at least try to find someone else in the dream.

I pushed my dream out of the drivers seat and took control over what I was doing. Just to be nice, I went to my restroom to look at myself in the mirror, "I don't know if you're in there, but I'm so sorry, I really like what you're doing with that piece. I just have to go find some friends. Sorry."

I knew that I had to get to the police station, or at least a police station, if there was more than one. The problem with that, is that even in the normal world I didn't know where to find the police expect for calling them, and if I did want to go I'd just look it up in my phone. It took me far too long to realize that I could get the address from the phone book, and then it took me even longer to have to find a map, figure out where my house was, figure out where the police station was, and then write down the directions so that I wouldn't get lost.

I was so focused on making sure that I made it to the right place that I hadn't really thought up a way to find David once I got there, so I walked in the front door and yelled. It wasn't pretty but, "If someone doesn't tell me what I want to hear, I'm going to 9/11 this place up like it's 2001!" managed to work.

Murmurs and whispers quickly worked their way around the station but with a bit of patience a small speaker on the desk of the front receptionist popped to life, "It's okay Michelle, he's with me, if you could please show him to my office. Kendel, come on back, you're the last one."

The front receptionist stood up and guided me through a labyrinth of hallways and doors to David's office. She opened the door, poked her head in to say, "Here he is detective," and disappeared back around a corner to her desk. I walked in and couldn't help but smile.

David, was David. He was maybe five years older, but he was a detective in a police department of wherever we were at, so it made sense that he would be a bit older. He looked a bit different, but it was close enough to the original that you could tell who he was. Britney was the exact same. I mean, the exact same person. Nothing was different about her. Same hair, same eyes, same smile, same body, same booty. All she did was dream up a poodle skirt. Pia I couldn't look directly at without my the corners of my mouth inching up. It was impossible not to laugh. She was forty years old, wrinkly, and looked like a mom. There's no better way to put it, she might have been in a dress, but it was the 1950's version of mom jeans. Her hair, her face, her body, everything about her said that she never got outside of her house and that she'd rather be at home scrubbing the floor and mending clothes.

"Not a single word." Pia pointed a well practiced mom finger at me. It was the type that

mothers could wield across a silent room at a kid who was starting to screw around and make things happen without a whisper. “Do not even create the thought in your mind about what you want to say.”

If I was a decade younger and related to her, it could have caused me to close my mouth, but it was Pia, not my mom, not my aunt, and not my grandma, “Okay mom.” I turned towards David, who was reclining behind his desk, “Sorry I’m late, I got caught up in something this morning. I couldn’t get out until lunch.”

“It’s just fine, Britney didn’t make it in until a while ago, and Pia was arrested this morning before my shift even started.”

“We agreed before that we would do whatever it took to find each other in this dream. I am not apologetic for upholding my end of the agreement.”

“She beat her husband after throwing a boiling pot of water on him. Her son called the cops after watching her cover his dad in second and third degree burns and then breaking his leg by hitting him with the pot after spilling the water on him.”

Pia turned towards me without letting a muscle in her face to move to show any change in her emotion, “He had it coming.”

I made a very quick, and very permanent note to never, ever, not even if given a million dollars, to ever, ever, ever get on Pia’s bad side. Know-it-all Pia was like dealing with the a saint compared to the, I just woke up my husband with boiling water Pia. Dream or not, that was some twisted shit to do to someone else.

“We’re all here now, so where do we go from here?” I asked.

Britney rolled her eyes, “I told you guys that meeting to make a meeting was stupid.”

“I was under the assumption that we were going to take the exact steps that we planned on taking while in the castle,” Pia said, going back to her normal self, or at least as normal as she could ever be. “We are here at a police station, there has to be some sort of conflict that we need to resolve, let’s find a case that we need to solve.”

David leaned even further back into his chair, “I don’t think you understand just how many cases there are, or even how many cold cases there are just lying around. To magically pick one of them as the winner for us to focus on is completely random. There’s no way to know, plus, what if it’s not even the way for us to stop dreaming? What if the only way for us to go is to do that whole ‘kill yourself in the dream, wake up in reality’ idea? All we’d have to do to fix the problem is to eat a shotgun barrel.”

“Trust me. I researched dreams for our class, and traditionally dreams are an actualization of an inner conflict, something that is not resolved during our waking hours. In a traditional, single person, dream, these conflicts are experienced and resolved, if the problem is not resolved that is how people get recurring dreams or recurring nightmares. We are having combined dreams, and they seem to be recurring between this and the castle, which means that there is some conflict in our reality that is manifesting itself in our dreams. There has to be something, some conflict, some problem that we’re missing here, which keeps bringing us back to the dream.”

“What if my conflict doesn’t involve the police?” Britney asked. “I don’t know about you, but in my normal dreams, I don’t involve the cops. And if the cops are there, they are in very different uniforms, that typically disappear very quickly into the dream.”

“There’s four of us. That means that whatever is going on, whatever is keeping us here

has to be big enough for four of us. A small problem for one person can be something like not being able to go out with the person you want to be with, or being afraid of not having friends at school. That can not be enough for us. Something bigger has to be happening. Something big enough for us to break every single law of psychology and every tradition and understanding science has built around dreams is not that you think your clothes aren't in this season. To do this, to create this chaos that is forcing us together, something big has to be happening. Despite the very probable chance that the event could be legal, or at least under the radar of the local forces, I am assuming that if it is big enough to bring all four of us together, then it is big enough to be somewhere in these cases."

Britney-

It made sense if you were looking at us like your science fair project. I always just thought that I dream when I dream. They're just dreams.

Pia talked the rest of us down to agreeing with her, which meant that we had to spend the rest of the day in the police station going through every single cold case, every open case, and everything that Pia thought that we should look at. I didn't know what I was looking for, I just flipped through them reading about the murder cases and stuff for a good time because it was a whole lot better than having to read those classic books that were stuck back in that lab room.

Even after work hours were done Pia had us box everything up, and we moved into Kendel's house. It was the only one of our places that we could all be. We could have been at Pia's but after what she did to her husband, we were pretty sure that she wasn't going to be welcome back her house any time soon. It didn't matter, a house or a police office still meant that

I was going to be doing nothing while everyone else was freaking out about trying to find something that had us dreaming.

David-

I think it was because it was all sorts of illegal for me to take home those boxes of files from the precinct, but I stayed up late trying to figure out if there was anything in the boxes. I even watched Pia, who got me to go out and buy a pair of men's pants in her size so that she wouldn't have to wear the house dress that she had on, fall asleep on Kendel's couch. I read at least a hundred reports, and it made me really wonder just how crazy we were for coming up with a dream like that.

Dreaming about being a cop, not too crazy.

Dreaming about being in the 50's, still not crazy.

Dreaming with three other stranger, a bit crazy.

Being able to create boxes and boxes worth of police reports about violent crimes and unsolved cases- that was full fledged, bounce off the padded walls, talking to the voices, the government is out to get you, crazy.

People say that the easiest way to tell if you're dreaming is the small details. If you're dreaming you find a dictionary and you can't find the definition to anodyne, because it's your brain that's making it and no one knows what anodyne means. I don't know if it was just one of us that made those boxes, like if Kendel spent too much time watching cop shows on TV, but the boxes were too much. Each one was a detailed crime written by a person who I had worked with or around. I didn't want to say it to the group, but I was starting to think that maybe it wasn't a

dream.

When I finally crashed on the sleeping bag that Kendel got out for me on his floor, I woke back up in the sleep lab. The TA came in after a few minutes and did his normal song and dance and asked the exact same questions.

Yes, I dreamt.

Yes, I was with them.

Yes, it was in the 50's again.

Yes, I know it's weird that I dreamt that I was in the same dream doing the same thing, with the same people.

Yes, could I please get a pen and paper so I could write some things down?

I might not have been Pia, but I did know that reading through that many cases for 'fun' was still with me, and I could maybe throw something together because some of them seemed a little off. I don't know what it was about them, but it was something that just didn't seem right about them, and I needed a pen and paper to try to remember everything I could about them before it faded away like most dreams.

Pia-

Waking up as me was the most enjoyable thing I could imagine. Spending a night, or a dream, or however long it was, being entrapped in that prison of a world, made me enjoy the simple things, like a bra that fit.

The others hated those rooms, I found them to be the best option presented to me. I was allowed to be myself in that sleep room. Then, on top of being a woman who could do things

without having to first seek a man's approval, there were the books. They might have made fun of me for enjoying reading, and I knew that occasionally my vocabulary was well above their reading level, however having the time and the freedom to sit down with the classics and finally be able to enjoy them without fear of a book report, pop quiz, or homework being assigned was a much better reality than either of the dreams we seemed to keep visiting.

Britney-

I hadn't drunk anything for three days. I drank a bit when I was a servant, hanging out with David and Kendel, and even let my hands get a little away from me and onto Kendel, but then I woke up. I spent an entire day awake in the lab, then an entire day in the 50's, and finally a day in the lab again. It was three days, and I didn't drink anything.

Okay, that's a lie, I stole a bit from Kendel's while we were reading the reports, but it wasn't enough for what happened to me when I woke up in the castle. I woke up in my room, with Pia yelling that she needed a servant, and my head wanting anything but someone yelling at me.

I made it into Pia's chambers, "Yell at me again." I started to squeeze right above my nose, between my eyes to try to make some of the pressure go away. "See what happens. I dare you."

"What happened?" She whispered it, but it was the type of whisper that you could hear across the room in a crowded bar. Not exactly heaven on my head, but at least she was trying to be human and didn't want to get beat in the head with any heavy object I could find.

"I think I've got a hangover, but it doesn't make sense. I didn't drink."

“Yes you did.”

“I think I would know if I drank. Those rooms might be boring, and I might want to forget every second that I’m in them, but I’d remember if I managed to sneak in something to drink.”

“It does not work like that. Have you not noticed? We are living a life here. You wake up wherever you fell asleep, things are exactly where you left them, it is precisely like the real world. The previous time that we were in this dream you decided that there was a significant lack of getting drunk and then spent the rest of the dream drinking with the guys.”

“I don’t think that’s how dreams work.”

“You are correct in assuming that, normal dreams do not function with logic and cause and effect as inherent structures within them, but normal dreams also do not include sharing your dreams with three strangers.”

“Really? I’m a stranger to you? I thought we were better than that now days. Come on Pia, we’re at least acquaintances.”

“I do not care what you think we are, the fact of the matter is that you drank a lot before you went to sleep. You now have a hangover. It is simple cause and effect.”

I sat down on her bed and squinted at the floor trying to force the hangover away.

“Nothing about this is simple. I would kill for a cup of coffee right now.”

“Assuming that David is capable to create alcohol from nothing, it could lead one to assume that he could also produce caffeine on demand as well.”

I looked up at Pia and smiled at her. “And you said we weren’t friends, good call.”

David-

I was sleeping in because my entire body was throbbing. It wasn't just a hangover from the alcohol, but from the magic as well. I didn't notice it the first time as much because I was only doing small little illusions for Kendel while hiding from the girls, but I quickly learned that magic took it out of me physically. It was like I went to the gym and over did it on every machine, and then decided to get a hangover on top of that.

I heard my door open and wanted anything other than someone to talk to me. People talking to me meant that they wanted me to do something. No one ever talks to the magician for a friendly chat. Someone always wants something. Pia's whisper cut through my dark room, "David? You alive?"

I grunted at her and tried to burrow into my bed so I wouldn't have to deal with her.

"You have to have something for this. You made this, time for you to fix it."

She was right. I did have something for hangovers. Everyone has their 'magical cure' for hangovers like raw eggs, greasy breakfast, or whatever else; mine was actually magical. At that point though, there was nothing in me that wanted to do as much as a wand wave. "No."

"But David." She whined like a teenager. My name wasn't just David it turned into 'Dayyyyvud'.

"Find Kendel, he drank with us too. He'll want in. I'll try to wake up while you get him here." I was betting that Britney was Britney and had the initiative of a sloth. With her hunting down Kendel I'd have at least half a day to try to sober up a bit on my own and also figure out how to cast a spell without wanting to cry. Before I did anything that adventurous I fell back asleep letting Britney show herself out.

She did not disappoint. I'm pretty sure that Kendel wasn't running away from her or trying to do anything super secret with how hung over he was, but it still managed to take them until after lunch to both show up in my room to get sobered up. I cast the spell and could tell that I wasn't hung over, but was still sore from creating so much wine out of nothing, at least it didn't hurt to listen to people any more.

Britney instantly perked up when the spell hit her and she became her bouncy bubbly self. "Do you know how much money you could make if you could do that in reality? Just think, I could drink as much as I'd want and every morning I could get hit by that and be good for another day."

"You do know that there's a thing called alcohol poisoning," Kendel said stretching his arms above his head and shaking his legs a bit to get the blood flowing back into them, "right?"

"Yeah, but that's why we have liver transplants. Flood this one up, and then just sign me up and get me a new one. I wonder if I can get my name on the VIP list early so I won't have to wait that long for my next one."

He looked at me for support to try to explain to her how you could die from massive amounts of alcohol at once and I just shook my head, "Not worth it."

Pia-

I was certain that the others managed to squander their time worrying about trivial matters, but I was still stuck in a dream and I had all intentions of getting out of it. Their care free attitude would have been merited had we any clue why we were living in the cycle of dreaming and living, but at that point there was no evidence that we could base anything off of,

which meant that if I had to carry the research weight on my shoulders I would do it.

I managed to do more research and detective work on my own in that morning than they could have produced in weeks of being stuck in this dream cycle. I had information about all of the events that were happening within the castle, I knew that my father was going out on a hunting trip soon, and that the castle would be kingless for a while. It didn't mean that the kingdom was going to be without their leader, but it did mean that if anyone wanted to attack the castle, that period would have been ideal while he was away with some of the strongest knights like Kendel.

The more I learned about the trip, the more I was certain that something bad was going to happen while he was gone. It was the typical dream/story device. The parents leave, and the house is broken into. It was so blase that I was certain that Britney's subconscious had a direct relationship to it.

Kendel-

The three of us were walking around the castle having a relaxed day after starting out with those hangovers when we saw him. I didn't need Pia around to know that he was the villain.

Britney-

Greased back black hair (tricky to do when there's no hair products), a pointy goatee, and then there were his eyes. Dude was straight up shift. If it was a few hundred years later he'd even be driving in a windowless van with a bucket full of "candy" in the back. Even his outfit was 'evil dude'. Who else would wear that much black leather? He was either the bad guy or a

dominatrix (if guys can even be a dominatrix, or is that only a girl thing?).

The worst part was that he had a face that I recognized. I knew that I knew him, but I didn't know how. He either looked like someone that I knew, or something. I tried to think of any of the guys that I had gone out with, and none of them screamed rapist quite like he did, but douchy facial hair and hair like that could make anyone look two steps away from having to tell you that he lives in your neighborhood.

"Guys, I think I found the bad guy that Pia was telling us about." I finally looked over to David and Kendel and they weren't even trying to be sly about staring straight at him.

"You do realize that it means that she's right about it then," Kendel said.

David sighed, "She's going to rub it in, isn't she?"

"Me? No, I'd never. You guys saw him too. I wasn't the first one that saw Creeper Mc Creeperson of the Creeper clan from Creeplivania."

"Not you Britney," Kendel said turning to me, "Pia. She's right about this. There's something keeping us dreaming, and that's it. Or rather, he's it."

"Oh. Right. Yeah. She's going to like that she's right." There was only one way to make it fair "One, two, three- NOT IT!"

"Not it!"

"Not it! . . . Damn it."

Daivd-

"Pia, we think that we found the thing we need to fix in this dream."

"I do as well." I found myself clenching my jaw together, trying not to react or flinch to

what was coming my way. It wasn't that hard, I just had to let her think that she came up with the same answer that we already knew. It couldn't be our idea, somehow I had to twist her into thinking that she came up with the evil villain looking guy being the evil villain. "You see, unlike you three, I managed to do some basic research into the social and political structure that we have found ourselves in. In the upcoming week my father, the king, is planning to take a hunting trip. I am under the assumption that it is during that time period that someone will attempt to overthrow the throne."

"Do you have any leads on who it would probably be?"

"The best that I was able to get was rumors that it was going to happen, I was never able to get someone to name a name."

"We managed to do some of our research and we think we managed to find the guy."

Pia's entire disposition changed. Instead of looking down at us a twinge of hope crossed her eyes. "Really? Who?"

"Well. . . we. . . um. . . didn't get his name, but someone pointed him out to us and I've got to say the evidence is pretty damning." I crossed my fingers not wanting her to ask us about the source, or what information we managed to get about him.

"Amazing, show me."

I looked over to Kendel and Britney to try to get any help from them. We were expecting an hour lecture about how looks don't make a person a bad guy, or somehow getting caught in lying to her and getting yelled at about that, none of us were expecting Pia to automatically go with what we had planned on telling her. I had planned for everything else besides the best case scenario.

Britney saved me, if there's one thing that I could say about her, it's that she is fast on her feet when she needs it. "Follow me, I'll be able to find him again. If not I'm sure we can find someone that knows."

The entire trip around the castle I was waiting for Pia to be Pia, to call us out on the entirely non-scientific and entirely made up 'tip' but she stayed quiet. I wanted to say something to her about how she must have really wanted to stop dreaming or bring up the miracle that was her keeping her mouth closed and following Britney around the castle, but I didn't want to ruin the moment.

It took Britney a few wrong turns, and even a few questions to the other servants that were in the castle, but we managed to find out that it was "the Duke" that we were looking for, and where we could expect him. We followed their directions, tracking his steps, and finally saw him from a distance. Britney disregarded normal social standards and pointed straight at him, "There he is, that's the guy that's going to try to take the crown."

"Put your arm down," Pia snapped. She took a quick look at the duke and then turned back around towards Kendel and me, "He looks familiar, like I should know him."

"It could just be the dream talking. You're the princess, he's a duke, isn't there supposed to be some sort of family relationship in that or something? Like he's your uncle or cousin or something?" Kendel asked.

"No, I see it too," Britney said. "I thought that it was just chance, I get that feeling a lot with guys. I don't have a perfect memory of all of the guys I've gone on dates with and faces just start to blur together. I thought he was just an ex or something like that, but that never felt right."

With Britney and Pia having their backs turned to the duke I looked between them and

gave him a second glance. As evil as he looked, when I looked past the black on black outfit, and really stared at his face there was something familiar with him. It was like seeing your best friend while growing up, but after ten years of never seeing each other. Something about him seemed familiar like I should have known who he was, but his face wasn't right. I recognized him from somewhere other than the dream, I just couldn't tell where.

Kendel-

It was like looking in a mirror when I was dreaming. I knew that I was looking at me, and I looked a bit like what I expected, but at the same time a stranger was looking back at me. I knew that I was looking at the Duke and I knew that there was something there that I should have recognized, but it was a stranger that I couldn't ID.

We didn't stalk the duke for too long and headed back to Pia's room which seemed to have become our unofficial meeting spot. Nothing about meeting in the princess' bedroom seemed like a good option, but we kept going back to it and all had our favorite spots. Britney always ended up lying down on the bed, I always took to standing near the opposite wall from the bed, just in case anyone came in, David had claimed a chest full of dresses as his place, and Pia constantly walked around the room, never finding a place that she could think was comfortable enough to stop at for more than a minute.

"Now that we know what the problem is in this dream," Pia said, not waiting for us to get to our spots in her room, but starting as soon as the door was closed behind us, "What are we going to do to stop it?"

Britney-

We were in a kingdom.

We knew that the king was going to get killed or something like that.

We even had the princess who could just tell her dad, 'hey dad, something's wrong, you should watch out.'

The king could have single handedly grabbed the duke by the collar and thrown him out for even there being a rumor of treason.

The knights could have been involved and we could have had a good ol' fashion beheading, hanging, and/or quartering.

We were in a place with a government that responded to no one that could get away with doing whatever they wanted, and our solution was to not involve any of those people. Apparently because it was our dream we had to solve the problem, or at least that's what Pia argued us into the ground into believing. I don't care whose dream it was, it would have been a lot easier to just turn to the king, point out the Duke and say that he was trying to kill him, and watch the magic happen. But nope, we had to do it ourselves. Apparently our dream, our problem, meant that we had to take the hard way to solve the problem.

Kendel-

My job was one that I was going to do whether Pia told me to or not. I was going to be one of the knights that the king took with him on his hunting trip. While the others were stuck at the castle trying to stop Omel from doing anything there, it was going to be my job to make sure that nothing happened to the king while he was away.

Pia-

Any of the knights would have been able to do that job, I sent him with my dad so that I would have one less child that I would have to babysit while trying to create a solution to our dream. I was going to get us back home, and moving Kendel out in the middle of the forest so that I could do that, played little significance to me.

Assuming that the dream was created from our own intelligences, or lack thereof, I knew that the duke would have to be created from our intelligences as well. Certainly it wasn't I who took care of his outward appearances, those were probably taken from the great void that Britney refers to as a psyche and most likely the reason that he looked like a cartoon villain. If his outside was created by their lack of creativity, that meant that my mind had to create something within him, which meant that the best chance was that I had created his psyche.

I might have been the princess, but I knew that if I wanted to take over the kingdom exactly how I would have done it, which meant that I was expecting the duke to take those exact same steps, and I did not need the three stooges to mess anything up with me dealing with my mental equal. If I had the ability to send all three of them out with my father, I would have, sadly that was not an option.

I was, however, considering the option of sedating Britney so that I could leave her in her bed and get some real work done.

"If Kendel is watching over the king, what are we going to be doing here? Isn't it as long as the king's alive and good, there's a kingdom?" David asked.

"Not necessarily. If royalty does not have a kingdom to rule over, then there is no way in

which they can be leaders. It is like saying that stranded man on an island is the king over it. This might be true, but I personally do not want to see any threat come to the people that live in or around this castle.”

“Let me get this straight. So the one guy out of us that actually is suited to fight, we’re sending out to play defense on the off chance that there’s an assassination attempt, and the three of us are left here trying to stop the duke, and whatever army he might have with him, from taking control of the castle or killing everyone who tries to stop him?” David laughed at the ridiculous concept that he had presented without seeing the full scope of what laid in front of him. “You better have one crazy plan for a servant, a prince, and a magician that still doesn’t know everything he should about magic, to stop whatever the duke is planning.”

“The solution is as simplistic as anyone could create. Although the circumstances might be complicated, the best solution towards violence and illegal activity is social awareness and letting the criminals understand that what they were doing would not go unseen. The reason that criminals attempt to break the laws that govern over them is because they are under the impression that what they are doing will go unseen and unreported. Through the very simple act of making sure that we are nearby the duke the entire time my father was away. The instant he would attempt to do anything unlawful we act as the concrete version of the abstract angel on his shoulder.”

David-

I couldn’t help but laugh. It was a dream. It was even a dream that had magic in it, and her best solution was that we watch the bad guy and if he ever looked like he was going to do

something bad that we stand there and shake our head like a disappointed parent. Now, I've had some good guilt trips put in by my parents. A shake of the head while staring at your feet can do some crazy things to a person and shame works from any distance, but something told me that the guy overthrowing the throne was a bit past shame.

"Kendel, it's looking like you get to stay at the castle with the rest of us, we're going to need you here."

"We need no such thing. His job is to protect the king, he goes where the king goes." Pia said.

"You are out of your mind. This is not a Saturday morning cartoon. The duke isn't going to give up just because the people that he's trying to kill tell him that he's making bad choices, and he should look into channeling his anger into something more creative than destructive. He wants to take over, and I'm pretty sure that he knows what that's going to take, unlike you."

"What if the assassination is his attempt to take over? You want us to defend the castle then and let luck run its course? I would much rather have a weaker defense here and defend against all possible solutions, instead of only defending against one solution and having all of my effort wasted because I was not cautious enough. As for my solution of non-violence, it is a valid, tried, true method of reduction of crime."

"We're not talking about someone spray painting on a wall, we're talking about a person trying to take over an entire kingdom. What you're talking about doing works with grade school bullies and punks that get a wad of paper towels and try to clog the bathroom. He's not going to care if you put an entire group of nuns in front of him shaking their heads at him in shame. If he's looking to take over the kingdom, he's okay with a bit of death."

“If we are near him, we can rationalize with him, and even be the first responders to stop him.”

Kendel spoke up, “You’re telling me that you want to be right there when the massacre happens? That’s so brilliant I can’t believe I didn’t think of it myself. When the duke starts taking things over, let’s have the princess, the heir to the throne, be standing right next to him! You’re making it too easy for him to just reach over and kill you.”

“Kendel you play the part of the duke, I’ll be Pia.” Kendel started to stroke his invisible goatee. I walked over to him and batted my eyes a few times, “Hey Duke, what are you doing tonight?”

“Nothing much, just wanting to take over for your father.”

“Just wait, let’s talk this one out . . .”

Kendel reached over to his waist and pulled out his sword and ‘stabbed’ me, under my armpit, letting the blade slide between my body and my arm. “Nope, I’m good now.”

“See?” I said, pointing to the sword that was impaling me. “You’re saying that you want to either be the first to be stabbed, or have me or Britney be the first to get shanked.”

“But it’s a dream. If you get stabbed what’s the worst that’s going to happen? You wake up?”

Britney-

“Whoa. Just whoa.” I sat up from the bed to finally pay attention to what they were talking about. “I might be down for some crazy stuff, but I never signed up for getting stabbed. I don’t know if you know this Pia, but getting stabbed hurts.”

She rolled her eyes at me. "I am aware of the results of being stabbed." Then she went on to argue with David and Kendel about how we were going to catch the duke for the rest of the night. Each of them wanted to do something different. Pia, she was all about rationalizing with the duke. Kendel was more of just arming everyone, stabbing the duke before he stabbed us, and David wanted to use magic, lots of magic. They didn't like each others answers and after a while it was a game of paper, rock, scissors with the three of them. Pia would offer one thing, Kendel and David would start to get upset. Kendel would say the exact opposite of Pia, and David would start to side with Pia. That always led to David saying that his answer was the best and getting the other two mad at him.

I didn't get any of it.

None of us even knew what the duke was going to do. We weren't even 100% sure that he was the bad guy. And all they did was talk. They seemed to like to do that, just sit around and talk about everything for hours without actually doing anything.

I was done for when David started going through all of the spells that he could possibly use to fight against the duke, so I excused myself to use the girl's room. Or at least as much of a girl's room as you could call it. Yay for the dream not having indoor plumbing!

Once out of the most boring argument that I had ever sat through, and I once was in a bar and two guys were talking about which movie was most unlike the books they were off of, I headed towards the duke. I rearranged Hannah and Naomi, padded them up so they would say a bit more of a 'howdy' instead of a 'sup?' and did a bit of work on the bleh of a dress I was wearing and went to find my date for the night.

It doesn't matter what decade you're in; a smile, a significant amount of booze, cleavage

that a guy can bury his face in, and enough nerves to let some jerks get a bit handy, you can get into just about any circle. Even the gays love me, because let's be honest, I'm fierce and fabulous, and I let them borrow my clothes. That closet that they're all talking about being in? It's mine.

I went to bed next to the duke, and was expecting to wake up in my bed in the sleep lab, but woke up to Kendel's house instead.

Kendel-

I woke up because I heard crying. It didn't matter to me where I was, if someone was sobbing, I was going to wake up. If you have a soul, you're going to wake up to a person crying.

I knew that it was Pia that was crying, but the problem was getting to her. I wasn't all the way awake, and I knew that I should have woken up in the sleep lab, so it took me a lot longer than it should have for me to know that I was in my house, my 1950's, professional bassoon player, amateur oil painter, house.

The weirdest part about the whole thing wasn't that I was in my house, the weird part was that Pia was crying. I thought that you could murder buckets of puppies in front of her and she would only ask if it was for science.

I made it to the living room where David and Britney were already standing in the doorway staring at her while she sat on the couch and cried. I tried to push past them. "Don't do it," David said. "She only gets worse when you do something."

I joined in at them staring at Pia for a minute. "We have to do something."

"We could yell at her," Britney said, "Sort of like slapping a person in the face, but with

words?”

“We can’t yell at her,” I said, watching Pia wipe her runny nose on her sleeve. “Can we?”

Pia made a few huffles to try to get air in her and managed to put words together instead of just sobbing at us. “Go ahead and yell! It won’t do any good!”

“Shit, she heard us.” Britney ducked her head down and fell behind me, pushing David and me together and hiding from Pia.

“Yes I heard you! What did you expect? That just because I was crying that I couldn’t hear? Just how stupid are you? Are you that stupid that your body can’t do two things at once, that as soon as you start crying that your brain shuts down and you’re physically unable to hear, feel, taste, or see?”

I tried to help while Pia was able to say words instead of snot and tears flowing from her. She was not a pretty cryer. “Pia, don’t worry about Britney. Why are you so upset?”

“Why aren’t you upset!? It’s all wrong!”

David took half a step forward, “Pia, it’s not wrong. It’s a dream. We’ve been here before. This isn’t anything new.”

“I wish that stupid would physically hurt so you would stop saying things like that.” With that I realized that she wasn’t feeling that bad if she could still insult David. “Nothing about this is normal! We are supposed to be home right now. Do you not understand how impossible this is right now? We were in a dream, and now we’re inside a dream in that dream. The best part, is that our dream inside the dream isn’t even a new dream, we’re dreaming about a dream that we normally have together. And to top it all off, we’re still stuck together! Do you not see how depressing that is? That even when we’re dreaming inside of a dream, we’re still stuck

together?” While explaining things to us her sobs got slower, her voice became a bit more stable, and by the end of it all Pia was back to being herself.

I sort of got what she was talking about, but at the same time didn’t get what the problem was. Sure, we weren’t supposed to be there, it messed up the pattern of reality, dream, reality, dream, but I didn’t get the problem of it all. “It’s still a dream though, and not real. Right?”

Pia’s nerves couldn’t have been any thinner, “Of course it’s not real! It’s a dream! And it’s not even a dream, it’s a dream inside of a dream! This is so far away from reality that I am slightly shocked that none of you are flying, breathing fire, or that this room isn’t melting around us.”

“Sorry to disappoint, but we’re all still here together, and none of us have super powers” David said, “And that means that we still need to figure out what we’re doing here. Or at least that’s what you said last time we were here.”

I think it was the idea of doing research and the hopes that something even slightly scientific could solve her problem brightened up Pia a bit more. She wasn’t perfectly back to normal, but being able to head back into the records of the police department and trying to find a logical solution to the problem gave her something to grab onto. “Yes, we need to take care of the dream. Let’s get to work on that.”

David-

She skipped breakfast and went full tilt into the police records.

As crazy as she was, it was sort of nice to have Pia back to her old self.

The rest of us had breakfast, and worried about filling up our stomachs before we went

back to attacking the paperwork and trying to find the reason that we were stuck in that dream. With a full stomach we sat back down, and started to shuffle through the papers. The work turned a little mindless and we started to try to talk, either about the crazy crimes that we were reading about, or whatever we wanted. Pia was the one that actually broke into something that got all of our attention. “Was it just me, or did the duke remind you of someone that we should know?”

The rest of us stopped what we were doing and thought about it, “Sort of.”

“Yeah, but I thought he was just someone that you guys knew that I didn’t. Sort of like how that one cook looks like my roommate,” Britney said. “None of you know her, but she’s there.”

Pia asked “Do any of you know who he is? Or at least does he look like any of your friends, relatives, or slight acquaintances?” None of us answered. “But he at least looks like someone that we know from the real world, correct?”

“Yeah, but I can’t place him.” I said putting down the file that was about a person who decided to ram their car through a few mailboxes when they were drunk. “His eyes, or something about him look super familiar, but I can’t tell you who it is. But all things considering, Pia if I didn’t know that you were who you are in this dream, I’d be hard pressed to tell that you were you.”

“Please, do not remind me.”

Something clicked in Britney’s head because instead of slowly shuffling through papers, acting like she cared about what we were working on, she started to dig through the files around her. “I think I know who he is. Or at least, I think I’ve seen his mugshot in here somewhere. I

just have to find it. He looked a bit different, but it was still the same face, the same guy.”

“You were working?” I realized how it sounded once I said it, but I was a little shocked that Britney was reading any of the files she was looking at.

“I got bored, and I have a thing for bad boys sometimes. I was just looking at their pictures and seeing if there were any ones I could see myself with.” There she was. Britney wasn’t actually working, she was just trying to find a date from a pile of felons. “I think there was someone in here that looked a bit like the duke. Maybe not as creepy stalker and murder as the duke, but they could be brothers.”

The rest of us stopped looking through the files that we had in our hands and waited for Britney to find the file.

Pia-

I was entirely expecting her to not find it. Once she was able to locate the correct file, I was expecting the picture to be of a twenty something meat head that she wanted to spend some extra curricular time with, that looked nothing like the duke.

I was pleasantly surprised when she produced a photo of a man who looked similar to the duke, enough that I could agree with her argument that they were the same man.

Kendel-

“That’s the duke.”

Pia, without removing her attention from the picture that Britney was holding up said, “Thank you for your very scientific review of the picture. I look forward to your next in depth

clinical research on seeing if air is breathable. The question at hand is; how were we aware of this man before we knew he existed? We all recognized the duke as being related to this man, but none of us know this man in this dream, right?” We all shook our heads no. “Then what does he represent? What does this relationship between the dreams mean?”

I didn’t know where she was getting at, it was a little too much for me. There was only one way to stop her from diving even deeper into it, “What did he get arrested for? Whoever he is, he has a record. What’s the 1950’s version of trying to take over a kingdom?”

David grabbed the file from Britney and flipped through the papers. “He’s got a few minor things that don’t mean much, most of them are just stealing things, or trying to make a fast buck. The biggest thing that he’s ever done is stolen a car.”

“The biggest thing that he has been caught for is stealing a car,” Pia corrected, “if he is anything like the duke, there is more there than just a bit of auto theft. The important question is now if this truth will be there when we transfer back to the real dream from college. I am slightly cautious about this being the truth, still understanding that this is a dream inside of a dream. We will have to wait until we are back in the real world, and then dream about this world to make sure that our research is valid.”

“Whatever, he’s our guy.” Britney said snatching the folder back from David and trying to read through it. “He’s the problem, right? That’s why we’re all here? Just like the duke seems to be the problem, he’s our problem here. We kill him and we’re done. Right?”

Killing seemed too real, too crazy of an answer to the problem. It was just too real. I knew that they all thought that it was just a dream, but it was too real for me. It just seemed right to be there, and to kill a random stranger there was just as crazy to me as the idea of killing

anyone in real life. “What if we don’t have to kill him? We just catch him and send him to jail.”

“If he’s not in jail already. I didn’t look at his file all the way through, but with how often he’s getting arrested, he’s probably already in jail serving some time for whatever he tried to steal last,” David said.

“And if that doesn’t work,” Britney paused, and looked around the room making sure that we all hanging on to hear what she had to say next, “then we kill him!” It was hard not to laugh at her because she said it knowing just how crazy it was to say, but serious enough that she sounded happy to suggest it.

David-

The police side of my brain wanted to turn it over to the department, let the professionals take care of it, but all I could hear was Pia’s lecture about how we had to take care of the duke on our own so I decided on something a bit more hands on. “I think we should set up a sting operation. Catch him in the act of stealing something, and then once he goes for it, arrest him.”

“Or kill him!”

Britney-

I didn’t get the problem. We were going to kill the duke, so why not kill the thief? Both managed to take care of the problem, and both were in dreams. It only made sense. I never worried about what was happening in my dreams, so why would I start with this guy?

The rest of them did their thing and bored me out of my mind for the rest of the day. They knew that they wanted to catch the thief guy, but they all wanted to do it a different way. Pia

wanted to knock down his door SWAT style and arrest him for breathing. David wanted to wait for him to break the law again and then work from there. Kendel was fighting for setting up an elaborate sting operation where we would make the guy steal something and then arrest him for stealing it. I didn't think it was legal to do that, but it was a dream so I let it slide.

I didn't care what we did, just as long as we did something. I couldn't believe that a group of people could sit around in one room for that long without one of them being almost dead, or all the way dead. Then again, I felt like I was dying so that could have been the case. Luckily that night, or whatever you want to call it when the sun goes down in your dream when it's actually night time in the real world, they didn't come up with anything for us to do, so I could go out and spend it having fun. It had been far too long since I had had fun, even if it was in a dream. It wasn't exactly bar hopping, but hanging out and dancing all night to music that my grandma would say was 'groovy' or something like that, was a better night than hanging out with the three stooges of dream killing.

At the end of the night I took a cab back to Kendel's place. As much as I wanted to get rid of being stuck with them, I couldn't remember where my dream home was so I knew that I could at least stay with him for the night.

Pia was crying again when I woke up. It's sort of often that I want to slap people. It's rare that I actually follow up on the slapping. The only thing stopping me from slapping the stupid right off of her was that we were stuck in different sleep labs. At the very least I could yell. "Pia! Would you kindly do us a solid favor and shut up? Or at least scream into a pillow like a big girl!"

The sobbing whimpered down to a few sobs, "Britney?"

“No. The tooth fairy. Yes. Me.”

“You can hear me?”

I will not slap a person through a wall. I will not slap a person through a wall. I will not slap a person through a wall. I will not slap a person through a wall. I will not slap a person through a wall.

Kendel-

“Pia! Are you okay!? What’s wrong!?” Pia was freaking me out. She woke me up, screaming from her room, and then she went sort of quiet and I couldn’t hear her any more. “Pia! Talk to me Pia!”

She didn’t answer. The speaker that was set in the ceiling cracked to life, “Please do not yell to each other, it will ruin the experiment that we have been running. Please return to your beds”

Not a chance. “Pia! You better not be dying! Tell me you’re alive!” I put my ear to the door, and the most I could hear was a bit of muffled talking, but I couldn’t tell if it was Pia or not. “Britney!? David? Do either of you know if Pia’s alive?”

I heard Britney through the door, “She’s talking to me through the wall. She’s not happy”

“But she’s still alive? She was yelling like she was dying there for a second, and then I didn’t hear anything.”

“Yeah, she’s still alive. She quieted down when she realized that I was nearby.”

Again, the TA’s voice came over the speaker. “Please return to your beds.”

I hadn’t heard anything from David through all of this, and got a little worried about him.

“David? Are you close enough to hear us?”

“I’m here. I think I’m next door to you. Pia! I know it’s weird, but we’re all back here together. It’s okay!”

“I can’t do this any more!” it was the most honest I had ever heard Pia be in anything that she had said. Normally she was cold, robotic, and entirely scientific. Whatever happened when she woke up had broke all of that. “Please, let us out of here. Let ME out of here. I can’t do this.”

“Please return to your beds.”

“Pia, it’s okay, we’re all right here. Just on the other side of the walls. From the sounds of it I think I’m right across the hallway from you!” I put my hand on the door like I could somehow reach out and comfort her. “It’ll be okay. We’re almost done, right?” She didn’t answer me. “Pia, we’re almost done with these dreams, right?”

“She says yes!” Britney yelled.

“Pia, I need to hear you say it. We’re almost done with this whole thing, right? We finally know what’s going on, right?”

“Yes.”

“And what’s going to happen when we finally solve this?”

“We’ll be done.”

The volume on the speaker had been turned up a bit, the TA’s voice cut through the air, “Stop talking so that the experiment can continue. You need to return to your beds, and quit all communication with each other right now.”

“And then, we can go back to being us. We’ll have an awkward reunion in ten years at an Italian restaurant and send each other Christmas cards with pictures of our families and our ugly kids that we think are the cutest things in the world.”

"I'm never having kids!" Pia yelled, her voice coming a bit back towards the cold shell we had come to expect.

"Fine, then you can send us Christmas cards of where you vacationed that year, and laugh while Britney is eighty pounds heavier, has four kids, okay? But what is it that we have to do first?"

"We have to stop the dreams."

"And we know how to do that, right?"

"Yes."

"Stop talking to each other, you are ruining the entire experiment. Please return to your beds immediately."

Britney yelled out, "Shut up Clint! We're trying to be human here for a minute. Let us help out Pia, and then we can be quiet!"

"His name's Clint?" David asked. "I always thought his name was Ryan."

"No clue. He just seems like a Clint to me. Whatever, Pia, are you doing good?"

Pia-

"No, I'm not doing well, but I am doing better. I will survive." I was unsure if I would actually be able to achieve any sense of normality again, but I was aware that I could suffer through just a few more events, if it lead towards the finality of the entire event. As much as I did not want to calm down, I forced myself to disregard the lack of logic in waking up in that room. The only explanation that I could make of skipping the pattern was that our subconscious were so set on waking up that we did not worry about waking up from the second dream, to wake up

in the first dream, so that we could finally wake up in reality. You might be able to have a dream inside a dream, but I assumed that it was not required to wake up inside a dream to wake up from that dream. “We’ll figure it out when we see each other next. I am sorry for disturbing you all, I was just under some distress when I found myself waking up in this setting.”

“You hear that Chris? We’ll be quiet!” Britney yelled out, “But it sure wouldn’t hurt to actually talk to Omel. If you didn’t catch from the yelling, we’re starting to figure this whole thing out! And I don’t mean to brag, but it was sort of because of me that we’ve figured it out!” I would not say that it was only Britney who managed to find the solution to the problem, however much to my shock, I could say that she was at least somewhat involved in identifying the conflict.

Aware that there was something more that I needed to do with my life besides cry over how my subconscious decided to manifest itself, I submitted to move away from my door, well aware that it was most likely Britney’s subconscious or even David’s that was causing the pattern of our dreams to not follow a strict pattern.

After waiting for about the same amount of time it would take the TA to call Professor Omel, and for Omel to leave his office and make it to the sleep lab, I was greeted with a knock on my door and hear his voice, “Pia, may I come in?”

“You may.”

Dr. Omel came into the room and it was difficult for me to speak.

Britney- MAKE THESE LONGER?

He saved the best for last. I knew Omel was coming with us saying that we were knew the problem that was causing the dream. It was the entire reason that we were stuck in those labs,

so the possibility of us being able to give him the answer to the entire thing was definitely going to be bringing him in.

He came into my room, and there was one stupid obvious thing staring at me in the face when he opened the door.

Kendel-

I heard doors open and close, and knew it was my turn to talk to Omel. I was sort of looking forward to seeing him. We hadn't seen him since in his office the day that he put us in there. There was so much that I wanted to talk to him about. I wanted to know if anything that we said to the TA was actually helping him do research, what he thought the problem was, or even what happened to the TA because we hadn't gotten our post dream interviews for a few dreams.

I wanted to see him and see how the research was going, but when he walked into my room, I wanted to see anything but him.

David-

I finished up my quick little talk with Dr. Omel, and I honestly can't tell you what in the world it was about. He left my room and I counted to a hundred to make sure he was gone, then I counted to a hundred again just to make sure because I was a little excited so I didn't want to ruin it by counting too fast.

With my second count done I went to the door, "Guys, I know we just woke up, but I would like to challenge you all to get tired."

“We do have those treadmills,” Britney yelled back, “Who’s up for running a marathon?”

“I do not typically participate in extreme cardiovascular exercises, so I might become winded, but I do think that this particular moment has given me the proper motivation.”

“Already two miles ahead of all of you!” Kendel yelled out. “I started running the second I was able to. See you all in wherever we wake up!”

It wasn’t the best idea, but I knew that I had to get to sleep so that I could talk with the rest of the group in a dream. The worst part about it was that it was like the night before the first day of school back in grade school. You knew that you had to get to sleep, but you were so excited to go back and see your friends and talk to them about everything, that no matter what you tried to do you couldn’t go to sleep. If it wasn’t for that treadmill and my absolute, over the top, Pia level, passion to get to sleep, I’m pretty sure that I would have been tossing and turning for at least six more hours.

We woke up in Kendel’s house in the 1950’s. “Holy Hell,” Britney said once we all got together. It pretty much summed up what all of us were thinking.

“Did anyone else. . . ?” Kendel led off, implying what none of us wanted to actually say.

“Uh huh, yeah, I think everyone did.”

Pia was the one who was brave enough to finally break it, “So . . . the duke and the thief appear to also be our professor. Thoughts?”

“Are we sure?” I asked trying to be a little cautious about jumping into this full force, “I mean, they could be the same person, but they’re just dreams. It doesn’t mean that the duke and Omel are the same guy.”

Pia turned to Britney, “Britney, if you were dating one of these guys, let’s say the duke,

and you saw Omel at the bar hitting on another girl, what would you do?”

“I’d dump the duke in a heartbeat. They’re the same guy. The hair might be different, Omel’s is shorter, the duke’s got that goatee thing going for him, and the thief has shaggier hair, but the rest of them are exactly the same. Can we just talk about Omel’s face in the lab? I swear that he knows something. He knows that we know, or at least he’s got somethin in on this. His eyes were straight up shifty, like Duke level shifty.”

“Their eyes are all the same color, their hair is all the same color, they all have the same face structure, they all have the same skin color, and all of them, when you catch them in the right moment, look like they’re about to tie someone up to a train track and watch from a close enough distance to smell the blood as it mists through the air,” Kendel said, “They’re the same guy. Just look at us. The only one of us that looks exactly the same in every single dream is Britney, but other than that we look sort of like variations on ourselves. Omel, is Omel, is Omel in every single one.”

“If he is the bad guy in all of the dreams, where does that put us on him in college?” I asked, trying to think of any way that he could be as bad as either the duke or the thief.

“I don’t know, but there’s got to be something. He might not be trying to take over the world or whatever, but. . .”

Pia interrupted Britney, “Shut up! Just shut up! I’m thinking!” We sat around the coffee table in silence, all of us staring at Pia, waiting for her to work out whatever she was cooking up in her brain. Britney tried to get out a few extra words, but Pia just held out one finger to shush her.

“It’s been in front of us this entire time,” Pia said, sitting back into the sofa, relaxing now

that she had finally figured it out. “Nothing about what he’s been doing is supported through the scientific method, or through basic channels of command at the university. Whatever he is up to, he certainly is doing it under the radar, and I can almost guarantee you, that no one knows that we’re locked in the labs, except for Charly, and him. Whatever he is trying to accomplish, it certainly has little, if not nothing, to do with actual scientific research.”

Britney-

It seemed to be right for the time, and it worked every other time that they had brought it up, “So we kill him?”

“I would prefer to stay away from premeditated murder.”

“But what’s the big deal about it then? I get it, they look the same, and that’s uber creepy and makes me think that Omel wants to dice me up into little pieces and hide me in the walls of his office or something like that, but we signed those papers, we’re stuck there. Pia, you actually read them, we’re stuck, right?”

She put her head into her hands and played with her hair a bit. “When I read them, I thought that they were legally binding, but if Professor Omel is not pursuing the most academic of paths, that means that he’s not upholding his section of the contract, which means that ours is voided as well.”

I looked over to David and raised an eyebrow for a translation. I thought I knew what she was saying, but it was important enough that I needed a Pia to English translator. “If he’s screwing us, we have a get out of jail free card.” I was close.

“How do we leave though? Isn’t it sort of hard to just walk out of a room that’s locked

from the outside?”

“When we wake up, we’ll cause a commotion,” Kendel said. “It worked last time enough to get the TA to start yelling at us. We do more than that, and he’ll have to step in or get Omel to open up a door to talk to one of us. If one of them come in, make sure that you leave with them. But while we’re here, let’s get to work on stopping thief Omel. I take back whatever I was planning before, I just want to catch the guy now that I know he’s Omel.”

The three of them buried the hatchet, and finally started to work together on catching Omel. It was sort of nice seeing them finally work together, but also really weird because it was one of the first times that one of them wasn’t yelling at the other or the boys weren’t making fun of Pia, or anything like that. It was great that they were getting along, and great that they were doing things, but it was a whole lot less interesting for me. I kept waiting for Pia to send out one of her backhanded compliments or for David to talk about the stick that was shoved firmly up her, but I got nothing. They got about an hour into planning something when I stood up, “While you’re all holding hands and singing kumbaya, I’m going anywhere but here. Yell if you need me for anything.”

I knew that I couldn’t leave Kendel’s house because as soon as I did, knowing my luck, that’d be the moment that they’d need me, so I wandered around. It was the 50’s, I knew that TV’s were around in the 50’s, all I had to do was find Kendel’s and I’d be set.

I checked everywhere for the TV, but it wasn’t there. It wasn’t in any of the bedrooms, it wasn’t in the living room, the day room, the sunroom or any other name that you’d like to give a big room that had nothing in it but chairs and books. I finally poked my head back into the dining room where they were still planning the entire thing, “Kendel, where’s your TV?”

“TV’s back in the 50’s were bigger David, they aren’t flatscreens,” David said, “Keep looking, just look for a giant huge box with a bunch of knobs on it.”

“I know what a TV is, even old ones. I couldn’t find it.”

“Actually, I don’t think I have one.” I didn’t know how to react to that. I would have never thought of Kendel being one of those people. The type that don’t want to waste their time away in front of a TV, the type that think it’s better to sit around and do nothing like reading a book. I always made him for a two beers and the Sunday game, sort of guy. “If you want, I’ve got a pretty decent library.”

There was nothing else to do but read. Pia was right, this dream was Hell. “Do you have the books that we’re stuck with in the labs? I’m about half way through one of them, and if I’ve got nothing else better to do, I might as well finish it.”

“Yeah, I think I should have those.”

Kendel-

Pia left the room, leaving David, Pia and I around the table planning a sting operation to catch Omel, or at least the thief that looked exactly like Omel. “Off topic, but have either of you read any of those stories that we had in college?”

“Not more than a few pages.”

“I spent my time studying more contemporary pieces that use such novel concepts as brevity.”

“So, if I haven’t read them, and neither have you, what’s in my bookshelf that Pia’s going to read right now?”

“Our collective subconsciouses will be able to fill in where we have not read. The story will finish with a mix of what we have heard about the stories as well as our collective idea of what the story should act as. Just as the setting that we have found ourselves in is not reality, but rather an amalgamation of what we all assume the 1950’s should consist of, the story will do the same.”

“So it won’t be the same as the real story then? Since none of us have read it, and we’re just making it up, the stuff that we don’t know shouldn’t be 100% right, right?”

“I would assume as much. Us being able to subconsciously recreate some of the most famous books in the English language is near impossible. Some of us are pressed to pass an exam for a class that you have studied for, to assume that those same dullard minds would be able to also copy and recreate the voice and writing style of some of the most notable authors the world has ever seen, is equivalent to us being able to recreate microprocessing computers out of a pile of toothpicks and a gallon of wood glue.”

David put his hands against his head, “Wait a minute. You’re telling me that all of the details of this are just all made up. So if I go and look in the dictionary or something, it was one of us, or all of us, that spent some sort of subconscious energy to make all of those definitions?”

“Yes. Any, and all of this, had to come from one of us. It is just like a regular dream. In a regular dream you are unable to dream about something that you have never been exposed to. Deaf individuals that have been deaf since birth can’t dream about sound, you can not dream about the life of a person born and raised in South Africa, and none of us can recreate a classic story because we have never been exposed to it. Instead of getting a perfect recreation, our minds are going to fill in the gaps. We don’t know something, so one of us, or all of us, are going to use

our creativity to fill in what is missing.”

I stood up from the desk and before I could even push my chair back in, Pia asked, “Just where do you think you’re going? We need to finish these plans so we can stop Omel.”

“I’m going to take a quick five minute break. We’ve been working on this for at least enough time to get a five minute break, plus I’m going to go see if you’re right.” I headed to the library, where Britney was doing a very non-Britney thing and was sitting on a chair in the room, reading one of the books. “Hey Britney, could you skip to the end of the book and read me the last two paragraphs? Once you left, we were talking about the books and Pia doesn’t think I know the ending of that book, and I told her I did.” It was a lie, but I knew that she didn’t care about dream logic and if the books that she was reading were real or not. To be honest, I was afraid that if we told her the book she was reading wasn’t the real book, that she wouldn’t read it any more, and I wanted her to read as much as she could, even if it was from a fake book in a dream.

She put her finger in the page that she was at, and flipped to the last page of the book and read it out loud. “So? Did you win the bet?”

Pia stepped up her game and went in on the lie with me, “Could you read it one more time? It sounds similar to what he said, but I am not convinced.” Britney reread the final two paragraphs one more time, allowing David, Pia and I to try to commit the lines to memory. “Sounds nothing like what you stated earlier. I still do not believe you.”

“What do you mean? That’s practically it! Whatever, let’s get back to the drawing board.” When we were headed out the door I threw in an extra, “You know I’m right, you just don’t want to admit it,” for good measure.

Britney-

For being so smart, they got stupid every now and again. I wasn't sure why they were talking to me about the book, or having me read it to them, but I knew the way they were acting that it was something else other than the book. I didn't care enough to ask them why, I just wanted to get back to my book because it was better than having to deal with them.

David-

Our plan was anything but simple, but at least I could say that it was as simple as we were going to get it with trying to capture a person that we had never met before and had no way of confirming if we were justified in capturing him in a trap meant for a thief, and possibly a mad scientist in a different reality. I wish I could say that more of it came from the police side of my brain, or even the knight that was inside of me kicking around, but it turns out that Pia, when motivated, has a keen sense on how to set up sting operations.

The trickiest part about it was that we had to involve Britney, none of us liked the idea, but she had proven us wrong before, so we went for it. I lost the game of paper, rock, scissors to the constant paper thrower, Pia. Seriously, who does nothing but pick paper? It's not even cool like a pair of scissors or a rock, it's just paper.

I worked my way through Kendel's place to where Britney was flipped upside down in a chair, her legs going over the back rest, her back on the seat, and her head on the ground, reading. "Britney?"

She didn't even look up, or down, whatever, at me. "One sec. Shit just got real."

“We sort of need you. We need your help with catching Omel.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. It’s a dream, hold your horses.” She flipped through a few pages, leaving her thumb where she was reading and found where the chapter ended. “I’ve got five pages. Give me five pages, and I’ll be there.”

I headed back to Pia and Kendel, “She says she wants to finish the chapter.”

“She does know how long those are, right?” Pia asked. She flipped her hair to one side of her head and slumped down onto the table. “Wake me up in a few hours, or whenever Britney finishes, whichever happens first. I need to get some actual sleep.” She said it, and I realized that I hadn’t slept a solid night’s sleep for what seemed like a few weeks. Every night we had to move and keep going. We’d get tired, just to wake up and keep going. It was like those nights where you feel like you only got a few minutes of sleep, but you know that you actually slept for the entire night, over and over again.

“Come on, she’s not that stupid,” Kendel said.

“You’re right,” Pia said sitting back up to look at Kendel, “Compared to you, she’s not that stupid.”

“Let’s just go over the plan one more time so that we’re for sure what we’re going to do. Britney will be in here when she gets here.”

“So very deep of you. But fine, we can go over our plan of attack against Omel within this dream one more time. If there was anything that my father taught me it was that practice and repetition are precursors to success.”

We started through our plan. Kendel, being the artistic rich snob that he was, in that dream at least, knew of a few social events that he could get us on the list for. We’d get to the

party, galla, ball, or whatever he found for us, and we'd split up. I wasn't a fan of splitting up considering nothing good ever happens when the team splits up in any story, but I went with. We'd work the party, and one of two things would happen. If Omel, or his dream version of him, made it to the party for whatever reason, we'd go straight to him, and start talking up an 'investment' that was going to be flown in. Preferably someone with half a brain would be talking it up around him, but if Britney did it I wasn't too afraid. She had a thing with guys. It was like some sort of crazy super power, she could flirt her way through anything. If Omel wasn't there, we'd still talk up the shipment, all of us, to everyone. We'd make it so known that there was a shipment coming in that we might as well have just put it on the news.

"But what if he doesn't want to steal it, or someone else steals it first?" Britney snapped us out of our conversation. I was impressed that she had finished the chapter that fast. "I mean, if you're running around yapping to everyone, why isn't someone else going to steal it?"

"That's actually where you come in," Kendel said, "We're going to need you to flirt. . ."

"Seriously? You get me in here just to tell me that I have to flirt?"

"With Omel."

Britney's face went from laughing about the idea of having to flirt because Pia didn't have the body, or the right set of brains to do it, to being utterly serious. "Oh."

Kendel kept going, trying to explain to Britney what it was that we needed her to do. "If Omel is at the party, you have to strap yourself to his arm, and never ever leave his side."

"And if he's not?"

"Then it's your job while we're doing everything else, to find him, and get attached. Fake a flat tire, accidentally spill water all over a white shirt, do whatever it is that you do to make it

so you're part of his life."

"But isn't he going to notice? I mean, he's dreaming with us, right? I mean, he knows what I look like, he even knows from the first few times we dreamed and those interviews who I am in here, he'll know that something is up. I can bash my eyelashes as much as I want, and hike up the twins until they're touching my chin, but Omel is going to know that I'm me, and that we want him out."

Pia-

As often as she did break through her expectations, there were moments in which Britney provided precisely what one would expect out of her. "If he was dreaming with us, that would be an issue, however the facts show that there he is not in here with us. Although it could be true that he could be lying to us, I think that the biggest determining factor is our slightly bizarre sleep schedule that we are running now in not just college, but in the other dreams as well. He has no way of planning with us when we're going to randomly wake up, yell at each other, and then decide to run a few miles so that we can take a quick nap, or any of our other slightly abnormal decisions when it comes to our sleep habits. Then there is the factor of him talking to us. We recently all spoke with him directly in our lab rooms. Although I might not be as adept as you at determining what people's emotions are, especially towards me, he is either a perfect actor, or he truly is unaware of what we are planning on doing. If you are truly unsure, the next time that we see the professor in either this dream or the other, feel free to reference something that happened within popular culture and see what his reaction is. From my deductions, I can almost guarantee you that he will not react, because he is not dreaming with us."

“Almost guarantee? Even for you, that sounds like a cop out.”

“If anything within this experience that we have shared has been shown to us, it is to never deal in absolutes. A while ago, I would have told you it was impossible to hold a coherent conversation in a realistic dream, let alone having that realistic dream be shared with strangers, yet here we sit. I can not promise you something that I can not control, therefore I can not promise you that Omel is not with us, just like I can not promise you that Kendel is a post-op transexual.”

David leaned over to Kendel, “You’re not a chick, are you?”

Kendel smacked the back of David’s head, “No you idiot.”

“I’m not judging. It’s just she said it, and you know, you do have some signs now that I think of it that raise some eyebrows, like that jawline of yours. . .”

“You are going to shut up right now.” Kendel returned his attention back to Britney. “We need you to get in with Omel. Be his friend, be his girlfriend, be his mistress, do whatever you want so that he trusts you, and that he’ll talk to you. If, and I sort of agree with Pia on this one that it’s a big ‘if’, Omel is the real Omel, we still need to catch him so we can fix this dream. Right now he’s our best guess as to why we’re doing this, so we’re going to try to stop him.”

I was watching Britney, and she stopped to think. It didn’t happen that often so I basked in the presence of her brain actually spending some energy to think before she did something stupid. “I’m in.”

“We’re going to need you to. . .”

“Yeah, talk him up, make sure he does whatever it is that you want him to do. Wrap him around my fingers, and then don’t let go until I get what I want out of him. I got it.” She nodded

her head one time, "I'm in."

"Okay then. Britney's going to make sure that Britney, you'll be wherever Omel thinks that you should be so that he can steal it. If that's with him, that's just fine, we'll make sure that nothing bad happens to you. If it's away from him waiting at home or whatever else he has in mind, then you've got to wait there. Kendel and Pia are going to be in the neighborhood, but we don't want to spook him too much, so they're going to keep their distance unless something happens and we need their help, which I don't see happening."

"Then you arrest him, we stop dreaming, and we all live happily ever after?"

"We incarcerate the thief, and then hopefully if our assumptions were right, we will stop dreaming in this dream. However, there is always the chance that we might not have solved the problem by focusing on this one person. It could be a coincidence so we all must be aware of the very real possibility that if this fails, we will need to readdress our hypothesis and come up with a new solution to our problem." I said this more for myself than for them. I don't know what it was that caused me to break so much when the pattern of our dreams was interrupted and the system that I had built became unstable, but I was certain that I was not going to allow that to happen again. I did not want to be seen as the crying type of girl ever again.

Britney looked right at me, and I could see that she was trying to come up with something to say, but all of her good thoughts already happened so she just sat there staring, trying to think of something witty to say, but it was anything but quick.

Britney-

I wasn't trying to say something smart, I was trying to watch her break. I knew that it was

just a dream, and that we had no clue what was going on. The chances of us guessing what would stop the dreams the first time was about as likely as me getting up for an 8:00 class, I was just watching Pia because she was like one of those idiots standing in line for a haunted house telling everyone how much she wasn't going to scream, and then once she gets into it, is the one screaming the most. She could say whatever she wanted, I just wanted front row tickets.

Kendel-

The rest of the day we went through my calendar to figure out which event I'd be dragging us all to, and then Pia left to try to find Omel and make him, 'shit face drunk' her words, not mine. Apparently the secret to instant seduction is booze, lots and lots of booze.

By the time I was back in bed, it was the first time in a long while that I felt like we had finally taken a step forward and were doing something. Up to that point we just kept bouncing around getting a piece here, or a chunk there, it wasn't until that day that I felt like we finally had an idea of what we were going to be doing and what came next. Then I woke up in the college test lab and realized that everything that we had planned and the sense of control that I was feeling before I went to sleep only covered a third of my life. We knew exactly what we were going to be doing in the 50's and how we were going to catch the thief, but with being locked in that room, it hit me that we had no clue what we were going to do to stop Professor Omel in real life.

I started my day, or at least I thought it was day, like any other one. It wasn't much of a routine, and I skipped it way too often, but at least it was there when I needed it. When I got out of the shower, I heard David yelling through the walls. "60 bottles of beer on the wall! 60 bottles

of BEEEEEEEEER!”

I don’t know why, but I dried off and got dressed before I stood by my door and yelled back. I didn’t want to talk to the group only wearing a towel, that’d just be weird. He had sung his way down to 56 bottles. “David! What are you doing?”

“Annoying us!” Britney yelled out. “He thinks that if we’re annoying enough they’ll let us out. I call it the four year old approach! ”

“You take one down, you pass it around. . .”

“His theory has yet to provide any viable results!”

“David, please stop!”

“55 bottles of beer on the wall! 55 bottles of beer! You take them all down, hand them to Britney, 0 bottles of beer on the wall!”

“Thank you!”

The four of us went silent, happy to not have to deal with David singing when Pia broke the silence, “Carl! Hey, Carl, you there?”

“I told you, his name is Chance. Isn’t it Clark?”

I stood there, propped up against the door waiting for the speaker above my head to pop to life like it had any other time we were out of line, like yelling at each other through the walls, or the TA had anything to say. “Hey! Man? You there?”

Nothing.

David-

We had all snapped in different ways at different times, except for Kendel. He had

managed to keep it together pretty good throughout the entire thing, and then the TA didn't respond. He didn't come in like he normally did to interview us and he didn't yell at us for talking. I just thought that he was out taking a smoke break, or a pee break, or whatever else. I could hardly imagine just how boring it would be to be stuck outside. At least with us being stuck on the inside of the labs, we had something to do once we fell asleep, he was just stuck there, doing nothing, watching us sleep. He totally deserved a bit of time away from his desk.

I didn't think of it being any big deal that he was gone, but Kendel's voice changed just a bit, he was stressed out. "Hey! Buddy! You've got to say something! Are you there? I'm sorry that they were joking about your name, they just never caught it."

Britney-

I had seen Kendel do it to Pia, so I tried to distract him to slow him down. "Kendel! Which book was it that you guys had me read to you? I was looking for it, and I don't know if I have it in my stack here." I lied. I totally saw it, it was on the top. It took like a hundred pages to get interesting, but finally it was getting interesting and stuff was happening and I was trying to finish it when I had the time. Kendel went silent, I assumed that he was just catching his breath. "What was that? Didn't hear you!"

Pia-

After some confusion on behalf of Britney losing her book, she found it. I wasn't too worried about Kendel, I was interested in the results of our small experiment with the book. If I was correct the real story, the one that was in Britney's hands, and in each of our rooms, was

going to be entirely different than the one in our dreams. The crafted reality of the dreams, although partially made by me, was not perfect, and not nearly as detailed as reality, and we were about to see that in effect.

“Would you kindly read us the final two paragraphs again?” I asked, “We never settled the dispute that we started in the dream and it will allow us to finally resolve this conflict.” Britney started to read the final paragraphs and the text was exactly the same. I could have been wrong, seeing as I do not have absolute recall of all of my memories, however the story, the quotes, the slightly awkward analogy, they were all the same. I didn’t like it, “One more time please Britney.” She started over again, and with it being the fourth time in less than what seemed to be a day, the similarities were apparent.

I was at a loss to what it meant.

There was the obvious theory that the similarities could be that one of us unknowingly looked at the end of the book without knowing it, or had heard about the ending from someone in any conversation that we had overheard, and that faint glimmer of reality manifested itself within the dream. There was also the possibility of maybe, just maybe, Britney had read the story before in a class and hadn’t realized that she was reading the same story that she had already read during this reading of it. That would explain why she was willing to read it, because she already knew what was going to happen and it was the literary version of watching your favorite sitcom on reruns.

David was the only one of us that was brave enough to voice his thoughts, “I think I know what that means, but I don’t know if what I think it means is right, because I’ve been wrong before. So, Pia, what does that mean?”

“What does what mean?” Britney yelled.

“The last paragraphs, we had you read them in the dream because none of us have ever read that book before. We wanted to know what would be in the book that we knew nothing about compared to reality.”

“And they’re the same, right? I mean, they sound the same. I wasn’t really paying that much attention the first time, but I knew something was up when you asked me to read it, so I sort of remember what it was about. That was almost the same thing, right?”

“Almost word for word,” Kendel yelled from his door. “I don’t remember much, but I made sure I memorized at least some of it, and it’s the same.”

Britney paused to let it soak in, “So what does that mean?”

“I am unsure of what that means. It could mean anything. We’re dealing with the subconscious mind, and not just one, four subconscious minds, working together, to create the worlds that we go into. I’m honestly shocked that they’re as traditional as they are and we are not faced with a world of creative physics, or any other drastic change.”

Kendel-

The way I saw it, there were only two options. The first was crazy and involved none of it being. College wasn’t real, dreams weren’t real, nothing was real, and there was all something more that was where we were really at. That’s the only way that the story could be the same, was if there was something, like a computer or something like that, making our world and our dreams.

The better option, which was slightly less weird, and the one that I thought was the real

answer, was that it wasn't four minds that made up the dreams, but five. Omel was in both of the dreams with us. He gave us those books, and chances are he had read them, so his mind would be able to fill in the blanks when we were in the dream about what was in the book. The only bad part about this was that if Omel was in the dreams with us, was that there was something really messed up with him. We all fought against our dream selves. I could have been a knight, or an artist, but I fought against it every time I woke up in those dreams, and made my dream me, be me. From what I could see of him, Omel hadn't changed one bit. He didn't stop himself from being the throne overthrowing duke, and he didn't stop himself from being the thief.

I didn't say anything to the rest of the group, it made it easier to take care of Omel in the dreams if we thought that he wasn't in there with us, and that he had no problem doing what he did in the dreams.

"Clyde! Hey! Clyde! We need to talk!"

"I don't think he's coming Britney," David said, "Give it up, we're stuck in here until he comes back."

"Weird question for you guys," Britney started out.

"Nothing is weird for us, go for it," I yelled at my door.

"But what do you think our roommates are thinking with us just disappearing like we did? I know I had at least a few dates set up that I've missed."

David yelled, "When we get done with this, we should become roommates. There's not a chance that anyone is going to understand us once we get out of here."

"You are unable to find an apartment nice enough, with low enough rent, or enough furnishings in it, or even enough money to deposit into my bank account to spend any more time

with the three of you than needed after this.”

“Come on Pia, you know you like us.” Britney yelled a bit muffled, I think she turned away from the door or was trying to yell towards Britney’s direction.

“It is true, that you are the closest thing I’ve had to friends in a while, but there is not a chance that I want to live with any of you, or see you in any other way besides walking down a random hallway to or from a class and we accidentally bump into each other. It has been interesting, but I can not imagine being roommates.”

I let my mind run away a bit. “I can. Britney would have a room of her own, that way she wouldn’t bug anyone when she got home late, or happened to bring someone home. Her room would be an absolute mess, and the entire thing would smell like strawberry body spray and spilled alcohol.”

“If that’s my room, then you and David would have to be roommates, and Pia’s room would be a lab. She’d bring home ‘boyfriends’ but only refer to them as ‘specimens’ and her exes wouldn’t have any names, they’d just be ‘test subject 4-Q’.”

“I would pay to see that sitcom,” David said, “But if we’re doing single rooms, why can’t I get a single room? Why do I have to be stuck with Kendel?”

“Because we are going to live in a three bedroom apartment” Pia said, letting her guard down and playing our game of house. It wasn’t her style, but it was the best that we had at the time, “Wasn’t that clear? Three bedrooms, I get one, Britney gets another, the boys have to stay together. It is either that, or you may sleep in the front room on the couch, but considering that I would stray far away from that with what Pia most likely has done on it when we were not paying attention. I’d much rather burn that couch than sleep on it.”

David-

Even though Pia said it would never happen, we spent a lot of time talking about what would happen in that apartment. The couch the no one but Pia would sit on, the rice cooker that always seemed to have half a thing of rice in it that you were always okay with eating a bowl of rice from, but you never actually made the rice, Britney trying to take Pia out clubbing with her, Pia trying to take Britney out studying at the library with her, the fights over what we would watch, Kendel and I having having entirely different sleep schedules with him waking up early and me staying up late, and even the cleaning chart that Pia made so we could rotate chores, but most of the time ended up just being Pia doing all of the cleaning were things we talked about.

With how weird the dreams were, and how little I wanted to deal with them, or those sleep labs, I would have much rather woken up in that made up apartment than anything that we were dealing with. Britney and Pia putting a shopping list on the fridge for the apartment and having tampons on the list for me to buy at the store was more appealing than trying to think about why Dr. Omel had locked us away, and what we were going to do to try to stop him.

Putting together that dream sitcom or what could maybe be reality if we ever managed to get out of that room went on for the rest of the day. There were times that I thought that we had finally hit critical mass and there was nothing more we could do, but then someone would start of with a ‘what if. . .’ and we’d have to work it out in the apartment.

What if we all stayed for Thanksgiving with each other?

What if we got a pet goldfish?

What if we got a pet dog?

What if Britney got a pet human?

What if one of us got arrested?

What if Pia slept in for a final?

The stories kept going, and finally after what I could only guess was a whole day of sharing stories and coming up with something that we could laugh about, we went to sleep.

Britney-

When I woke up, I was a bit hung over, but I knew the routine. It might have been a few centuries before it became the official walk of shame, but when you wake up in a bed that's not your own with a naked guy next to you and your clothes on the floor, you know what you have to do. I did my best to be as quiet as possible, which is really easy when there's no springs in your bed and the floor isn't hardwood so it doesn't squeak, to get out of there. I rushed through the castle and made it into my room next to Pia's just in time for her to start shouting at me.

"Britney! I am ready for my morning meal!"

"Get it yourself!" I yelled back without moving. I stared at the ceiling while hoping that no one had heard me yell that at the princess. Telling the king's daughter to shove it isn't really the best decision.

I tried to remember what we were doing in that dream. We had done the other one so much and planned everything for it, that I had forgot where exactly we had left off with it. I remember we found the duke, and that he was super creepy, and that he was trying to take over the kingdom, and that he looked like Omel, or at least Omel looked like him. It was the chicken and the egg, one of them looked like the other, I didn't really know which way it worked. Either

way I woke up next to him.

I was happy that I wasn't in too big of a rush to make it over to Pia, because It took me a second to realize where I was, and get my bearings around me. Seriously, I opened up a storage closet before I opened up the right door to get into her room. "Morning princess." I meant it to be a joke, making fun of how she acted like she was a princess, but calling someone princess when they are actually the princess doesn't really work the way that you want it to.

"Good morning to you too." Pia stretched in her bed, letting the comforters and sheets move all around her. "It has been a while since we have been here, has it not? How about we start with getting me ready for the morning, and then. . ."

I cut her off. I don't know what it was about her being a princess, but she seemed to slip out of control of it. I get it, I wouldn't mind being a princess either, but I always thought that Pia, the person in charge of everything, would ever let herself be a princess. "I'll go find the boys, you wait here and get ready."

Pia-

I watched as Britney left my room, and I had to shake the feeling of sending her to the dungeon. She left me. She left her princess in her room, unready for the day, and with no breakfast. She abandoned me, it was practically treason.

My first instinct was to yell at her to come back, and to force her into getting me ready for the day, making sure that I looked exactly as was expected of me. I managed to at least sit up on the edge of my bed, ready to walk to the door and yell down the hallway at her, but as I did it, my senses started to gather around me.

I am not a princess.

I am not a monarch in training.

And even if I was a monarch in training, I would act at a much higher level than one who has to degrade herself by yelling commands at the people that serve her. Even if I was dreaming that I was a princess, there was no way that I was forced into being that type of spoiled princess that everyone looked forward to the day that she ‘accidentally’ got slipped some undercooked chicken or a cart just happened to slip from a horse and run her over.

It took some work to get ready, mainly because bodices are not meant to be put on by one person, and with the complete lack of elastic hair ties I was not given the option of throwing my hair up into a ponytail. I rummaged through my vanity for something that was reminiscent of anything that I knew how to use to put my hair up and managed to locate an ivory comb, with only three teeth on it. I grabbed my hair, twisted it in my hands, created a sloppy bun, and shoved the comb in. I was more accustomed to a pen or a pencil to keep my hair up like that, but after a few tries I managed to get the comb to stick and to keep most of my hair up off of my neck and out of my face.

David-

Pia was a hot mess. Know how when you let a kid dress themselves for the first time? That’s how she looked. Her hair was sloppy, her dress was half put on, the shoes she were wearing were something that I thought should have gone to a ball or something twenty times more formal than hanging out with the group of us, and then she had a super ornate comb sticking out of her nest of hair that I expected to be in a museum, not on top of her head.

Britney pushed Kendel and I aside and headed towards Pia, “Do I have to do everything for you?” She grabbed Pia by her hips and spun her around, grabbing two laces that were traveling up her shirt, “Hold on to something.” Pia had barely held onto a nearby dresser when Britney gave her a medieval tummy tuck by yanking on the strings as hard as possible and making the shirt shrink by two sizes. The process knocked the air out of Pia, leaving her gasping for air.

Britney grabbed Pia’s hips again and sat her down in a nearby chair. “Seriously, how did you ever make it through high school?” She yanked out the comb in Pia’s hair and grabbed a brush. Pia’s hair was shown no mercy as Britney tried to undo the knots and snarls that she had managed to put in on her own. “Did you just constantly wear a hat? I mean, I’ve seen drag queens that have better fashion sense than you. Straight men have better fashion sense than you. There are dogs that only know how to lick their balls that keep better care of themselves than you.” In a quick move of a well practiced hand Britney took Pia’s hair and wrapped it into a bun with a different, matching, wooden comb holding it together. “It’s not good, but at least you can go out in public now.” Britney’s version of ‘not good’ was somewhere in the ballpark of Pia’s ‘going out and looking fancy.’

“So, we are trying to catch the duke, correct?”

Britney took her spot on Pia’s unmade bed, “You meant to say, ‘thanks for making me not look like I can’t tie my own shoes and ride the special bus.’ Then ask that, right?”

Pia paused trying to understand what Britney had just told her. I could tell that it was hard for her to get it, that we were in this whole thing together and we were trying to help each other out.

Kendel-

I don't know what it was, but she was stuck. Pia froze there. I don't know what was going on with her, but I tried to help out. "Of course that's what she meant. She just didn't know how to say it. As for the duke, I think that he'll be a lot easier to catch than the thief. We don't need a sting operation, we just need to wait. I'll go with the king on his hunting trip that he has planned, to make sure nothing bad happens there. You guys stay here and wait. If the duke attacks, you fight back. David has magic, Britney has her connections with the servants that she can try to use, and Pia is the princess. You might not be knights, but you've got something.

"What if he doesn't attack?" David asked.

"He will," Britney said. My eye traveled a bit from where Britney was sprawled out on Pia's bed and caught a glimpse of Pia straightening out her dress and making sure she had correct posture. I wasn't sure what was making her be so proper; the dream or reality.

"And you are sure of this? Just how did you ascertain that knowledge? If I am not mistaken last time that we were in this dream, our only assumption that the duke was evil, and that he had ulterior motives. We had rumors and hearsay, neither of which are exactly detailed plans of taking over a kingdom. And, if my memory serves me right, we never came to that agreement. I still am under the impression that as a duke, he is an educated man. As an educated man he is not going to be ignorant of logic and reason. We do not need to kill him, we need to speak with him and try to come to a sensible solution to our dilemma."

"I remember now!" David said, "You were so stuck up that you thought that I couldn't use magic to blow the duke to pieces if he ever did anything stupid while Kendel was away."

“I know what the duke is planning because unlike you idiots I did some research last night. . . or the last night that we were here . . . or whatever. This body, what it did in this dream in this dream’s last night, let me know what he’s planning on doing . . . sort of. . . I think.”

I didn’t quite get what Britney was talking about. I thought that she was saying something about the duke, but I don’t think that she knew what she was trying to say so it made no sense to me.

Pia looked over to David, “Translation?”

“She slept with him and got him to talk.”

“What? Is this true?”

I nodded a bit finally understanding Britney. It made a bit more sense why she was so willing to throw herself at Omel in the 50’s. She had already done it once with decent results. Why not do it again?

“Well, it’s been a while since we were here, like a week or something in other time,” I liked that term, ‘other time’. Time was so screwy for us, it was hard to measure any of it. “And so I can’t remember everything, but I’m like 99% sure that he wants to kill someone.”

I tried to jog Britney’s memory. “Did you catch anything else? A name? A plan? Anything? Did you get anything else from him?”

“Most likely gonorrhea or some other VD.” She laughed at her own joke while the rest of us rolled our eyes. “Nah, I could go ask him again if you want me to.”

David-

“He’ll be suspicious. You grabbed your clothes and ran this morning, right? You show

back up and start asking questions, he'll know something is up. It doesn't matter which year you're in, a girl jumps back like that after a clean break and you're dealing with a crazy." It wasn't exactly first hand knowledge, but there was this one girl I dated that did something like that. I thought it was done and over with, and after I thought I broke up with her the next day she was talking about our kids and asking me what we should name our first.

"It'll be okay, I'll just tell him the truth I had to leave because the princess wouldn't be able to dress herself if I wasn't there to help." Britney sat up from her bed and reached down into her dress to adjust each of her breasts so that they were sitting a bit more out there. I tried not to stare. "Plus, if he doesn't buy it, I have other ways."

Britney-

I didn't even think about it that way when I adjusted myself. Kendel and David were like brothers to me. Me wanting to do anything with either of them was about as weird as it could be. Plus, it was a full length dress that covered me up way too much; watching me squish my boobs together was about as pornographic as showing them my knee.

Pia-

"I am uncomfortable with you prostituting yourself out like this. I understand that it is not a permanent arrangement, however I do not condone the use of your body like this just to gain information."

"Relax P. I'm not going to go that far. I was just saying that I've got my looks to go off of if he doesn't like what I'm saying. Don't worry your nappy princess head. Worst case Kendel

gets to be my pimp and give the duke some attention with his fists for abusing the merchandise.”

Kendel let out a small laugh, “Great, not only am I a knight, but I’m a pimp now.”

“Hey, blame Pia, she’s the one that said I was a prostitute. Now you get to be a pimp in shining armor.”

David laughed a bit from the concept presented by Pia, “I will smak-eth a woman of ill reputation with an open handed back handed swat who doth not bring-eth me my money, and I shall ordain-eth this as the origination of the pimp-eth slap-eth.”

“That is certainly enough. Britney, hurry and leave us, the longer you stay here the more surreptitious your actions will seem to the duke.” She raised an eyebrow at me and turned towards Kendel for assistance. I did not wait for her to insult me for using proper English, “Leave, or else he will start catching on that you’re gone.”

“Ah, gotcha.” Britney left the room.

Kendel did not allow the door to close behind her before he was in the door frame. “I’m sorry, but it is my job to protect the king. Dream or not, I’m going to go be this knight, and I have to get ready for the hunting trip. Sorry Pia, but talking isn’t going to work for this one, we need some metal between the king and the duke, just to make sure.”

“Just be constantly aware that there is a fleshy center to that metal that you wear. It is not just metal you are putting between you and him, but yourself as well. Be careful.”

Kendel left the room, and just as he was closing the door behind him poked his head through the sliver of an opening, “I knew you always liked us. That’s two for two now Pia. Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone that you really do have a heart.” I felt my face scowl down at him, but the door was shut before I was unable to retort to anything he said.

David and I spent a minute, or two in silence, not knowing where to go from there. We never had the best repartee in the group.

David-

It was Hell.

Britney left to flirt, which is practically her hobby no matter where we are or what dream we're in, and Kendel went to go play dress up and babysit a king. They went off to live their dreams, while in a dream, and I was stuck with her. I couldn't even come up with an idea to get out of there. I wanted to do anything but stand there and talk with her, but I knew that whatever I'd come up with I'd just be stuck doing whatever plans she had for me because I couldn't point her towards Britney or Kendel.

She tried a few times to go and talk to the Duke to try to use logic on him, and then it came my job to keep her away from him so that Britney could flirt her way through, but that left us either in her room, or in my study, doing nothing.

Now, people may talk about being bored, but being in a castle with no electricity, with no place to go, and being stuck with someone like Pia was boring. Like, after lunch, I went to my study to do anything besides having to spend time with Pia and she followed because she wanted something to do and didn't want to be by herself. I got to my room, I was surrounded by books that told me how to use magic, and I was bored. I had nothing to do. I ended up cleaning and organizing my room because that was the best I could do.

That's the type of day that I had with Pia. It was the type of day where organizing bookshelves by subject matter was the most exciting thing that I did. It's cool and all when

you're done that you can look at the room and being able to see exactly what you did and that you're finished with it, and a weird part of me was really excited about being able to find the books I needed easier; but the thought that you could have an entire day to yourself to do whatever you wanted and the most creative thing that you could come up with was making sure books were in the right place is just lame. The thing that made it go from lame to being a chore was Pia.

She does not know how to small talk.

I'm talking about basic social interaction stuff, like being able to talk to a group of kids on the playground when you were in grade school and starting a game of tag, level of basic; and she didn't have it. I tried talking to make her think about anything other than the fact that we were dreaming and she wasn't having it. I tried getting her to help with moving some books, and instead of saying something about the titles (I purposefully handed her some crazy books like one that was all about poisons and curses) she talked about the sting operation that we were working on in the other dream.

I pointed out a series of books that was nothing more than a group of atlases and travel journals from people that had traveled, a perfect conversation starter about going other places, or seeing if the dream castle was actually located anywhere on the normal world. She brought up Professor Omel and how we could get out of our rooms if he had locked us in.

I had her organizing three dozen books on herbs and roots by author and instead of saying something about one that was all about roots from other dimensions, Pia decided that her time was better spent thinking about the best way to go about catching the Duke if Britney failed to flirt her way in.

I was finishing up a second row on the fourth bookshelf of the day when she went too far, “Once this is all over, I wonder if the university will allow us to go back to our classes, or if there is any other way that we will be able to make up this semester that we are essentially dreaming away.”

I couldn’t handle her anymore. “Seriously?”

“What?”

“We’re chest deep in whatever this is, and you’re sitting there thinking about if you’ll be able to make up your credits for your biology class. What is wrong with you?”

“It’s just an English class, I can just search online and read the summaries. I don’t get the big deal.”

“Just stop. Please.”

She stopped for a second to try to understand what had just happened and why I wanted her to stop. “But what about when we’re finished with this? We need to know what our options are for our education so that we can still finish our degrees, right?”

“Yes Pia, right. But, right now I don’t see that happening. We’re stuck in here. We think that if we get rid of a person who reminds us of our professor that we might be able to get rid of this whole thing. We don’t know a single thing, and we just came up with a guess of how to take care of it. With all of that in hand, you want me to start thinking about what will happen when we’re finished? We don’t even know if we’ve even started, how are you going to start talking about when we’re finished and back to normal?”

“My father always said that it is more important to be prepared than anything else.”

“Which dad? Which dad are you talking about Pia? Because right now you’ve got a

handful of dads.”

“It was the only individual that would ever earn the title of dad from me. I don’t know why you’re even asking.”

“I’m bored and I’ve got reasons.” I didn’t, I just didn’t like hearing her spout of princess things so I gave it one more shot. “When did he typically say things like that? All of this advice from your dad?”

“Around dinner, it was the only time that we would see each other.”

“And what would you have for dinner?”

Pia started to explain the meal, and it sounded a whole lot more like she was eating a banquet meal in a castle than she was eating a stove top dinner from a single dad, or at least I don’t know any single dad that would ever know how to do something like cook a roasted turkey for a normal meal.

“Pia, I want you to think really hard, can you remember anything else about those dinners? What you were wearing? How the room looked when he would say those things? Why he would say those things?”

Pia started to think, it was the same face that she made when we were in the police office, and then my house, trying to dig through all of the police files. She was in her own land at that point, her eyes were open, but there wasn’t a chance that anything was getting in to her. She turned around towards my door and left my room without saying another word.

I think I broke her.

Britney-

I spent most of my day with Omel, or the duke, or whoever he was, trying to get closer and closer to him. The worst part about him was that he didn't lie. He didn't even try to hide what he was planning on doing to the king. He knew 100% that I worked for the princess, that I slept, or at least should sleep, in the room next to her and help her with everything that she does, and he didn't even try to act like he was afraid. It was a good thing because I didn't have to sleep with him again, but a really scary thing because the only people that are that confident in doing anything are either those that know nothing can stop them, or are crazy enough to think that nothing can stop them. Either way, those are the type of guys that are no good to be around. You want to be with a guy that has something to lose, that way he'll keep you around because he knows that he could lose you too.

Without having to 'whore myself out', as Pia put it, I headed back to her room to make sure she got to sleep alright. I knew that she was a big girl, but I didn't trust her getting out of her dress on her own.

I knocked once on her door and opened it up, I knew that rules were rules and I should have waited for her to say something, but she was Pia, she didn't get things like that from me. Plus, what could she possibly be doing that she'd need to try to hide from me in the thirty seconds it takes to say, 'come in'?

I went into the room, and it was the most depressing thing I had ever seen. I'm talking little baby turtle not being able to make it from his nest and getting eaten up by a seagull, level of sad. She was just sitting on her bed, shoulders slightly slouched, staring at her hands, and there was one single candle that lit the entire thing. She didn't even look up when I came into the room.

Whatever had happened to her, I knew that she needed to get to sleep, and to stop worrying about whatever was on her mind so I helped her get changed, made sure she was lying down, and had her eyes closed, and then went straight to David's room. His door didn't even get a courtesy knock. There was a possibility that he could actually have to cover up knowing David, but he deserved it with whatever made Pia act that way.

"What did you do?"

"Hi to you too."

"I left you with Pia, and now she's . . ." I didn't know what word could fit her. There was a lot of words that she wasn't, like awake, or alive, but I didn't know what she was. "She's weird now. What did you do?"

"Nothing, it was a boring day. I finally got bored enough to drag her in here, and she helped me organize my bookshelves. That's all we did."

"No magic?"

"No magic."

"What did you do then to make her like that? Organizing books should be like going out on a date or something. I'm pretty sure she's had dreams about the dewey decimal system. Books shouldn't have made her like the way she is."

"I don't know."

He knew. I could see it. He totally knew what he did.

"What were you talking about before she left?"

"She was talking about those stupid quotes from her dad, and so I asked her which dad."

I didn't like where this was going, "She said the back home dad."

He was still not telling me everything. He would get taken for everything he brought to a table if he ever went gambling. No wonder he never had a girlfriend, he couldn't lie about pants not making her look fat if he tried. "And then what? What did you say after that?"

He stared at his feet, trying to make it so that I couldn't see his face this time, so I wouldn't call him out on lying to me again. "I asked her for more details. The more she thought, the more the quotes came from the castle, not her dad back home."

"And then what?"

"She didn't say anything, and she just left. I thought that she was going to sleep or something. It was no big deal."

I slapped him. Normally I would have waited or yelled, or tried to do anything but slap him, but sometimes stupid can only be cured with a slap on the face. "Are you stupid?" I might have slapped him a second time as well. "Pia? Not talking? If she breaths air in, chances are that it's coming out as words. She never shuts up. Never! Do you know when she doesn't talk? Do you?"

I lobbed him an easy question, but I wasn't trying to teach, I was trying to yell. I wanted him to answer it. "When she's thinking?"

"Exactly! If she's not making noise, she's thinking. If you can keep her making noise, she's not thinking. Do you know what you made her do? You made her think. What's even worse, you made her think about this messed up paradox that we are stuck in. Know how with you and me, we start thinking about the heavy stuff with all of this, what's real and not, and all that other crap, and our heads start to hurt, so we stop? Her head doesn't hurt. She doesn't have that sensor in her head. She doesn't know when she should stop thinking, because her head never

hurts when an idea gets too much. It's like you took a person who enjoys running, and showed them the starting line of a marathon, and then you just walked away once you saw her running."

"I just thought that . . ."

"What? What was the Einstein level thinking that was going through that brain shield of yours that made this gem worth it?"

"I didn't think that . . ."

"That's the one! You didn't think at all! Of course you didn't, all of the brain power in the room was sucked into her brain and left you having to limp along on the only two brain cells that you have, which had to take a break from their normal job, south of the belt doubling as your balls."

"It'll be okay, don't worry, we'll wake up tomorrow somewhere else, and she'll be just fine. We wake up to chase the thief, she'll have that to think about. If we wake up back in college, then she can start thinking about how to get out, or at least get in touch with Charles."

"Right now, she's broken." I pointed my finger straight at him, in the middle of his eyebrows, with all two microscopic brain cells floating somewhere behind them, "If she stays broken, that's on you."

David-

It was the best night's sleep I had gotten since the start of that semester. Know how you have those nights when you get so deep and so amazing sleep when you wake up, it feels like it should be noon? Or those naps that you take where you fall asleep just before the sun goes down and when you wake up it feels like you woke up at midnight even though it's only like an hour

later? That was that night.

I had almost forgotten of just how good a good night's sleep could actually feel with constantly being in dreams, and then that night happened. It was almost such a good night that it didn't hurt as bad that I broke Pia the day before. I sat in my bed for a minute, and knew that if I stayed any longer, I was guaranteed a knock on my door from Pia or Kendel telling me that we needed to meet up in Pia's room.

I got ready and headed out to Pia's room. We had done it enough times that it had almost become habit to me. You wake up, you get ready, and then you make it to Pia's room to talk about whatever happened that we needed to chat about. I walked into Pia's room expecting to see exactly what I had seen every time that I had walked into that room, Pia standing at attention trying to look as regal as possible with Britney flopped out on her bed, and Kendel leaning up against a dresser or wardrobe or sitting on the cedar chest that was at the foot of Pia's bed. I walked in, and nothing was right. Pia was still in bed, Britney was sitting by the foot of her bed, and Kendel was no where to be seen.

Britney stood up once I closed the door behind me, and slapped me. "You broke her."

"Hello to you too."

"She hasn't said a word to me since this morning. She hasn't even moved." She pointed to the bed, "You know the rules, you break it, you fix it. I'm going to go do anything but be in here, she's your problem now."

Pia-

Everything was wrong.

Everything.

I could have cared less about what David was saying to me, nothing he could have said was going to help me solve the situation that I had found ourselves in. He was too ignorant to recognize the problem, and if I had explained it to him he would have been too naive about the entire situation to even recognize the ramifications of what we were dealing with.

The worlds were supposed to be separate, at the very least the most bleeding of concepts or theories was supposed to be our subconscious minds from reality dragging in parts of reality to our dream worlds. The medieval dream was a figment of our joint imagination. With or without Professor Omel as part of that joint imagination it played no role, however the fact of that dream being a creation of joint minds was supposed to be clear. The routing of information only worked one way, reality fed into that dream, the dream did not feed into reality. The fact that I confused a king lecturing his daughter at the dinner table about proper procedure for being royalty for my real father was wrong. It was not supposed to happen that way, one of those men raised me, the other man was only a construct of my imagination, and I was too dim to be able to differentiate between the two.

I had to make sure that I was able to understand the mistake that I had made, and then, even more importantly, make sure that I hadn't made that same mistake in earlier situations without realizing it, and finally, figure out a way in which I would never make that mistake ever again.

The difficult part about my plan was that I was unable to make it past the first step, which was supposed to be the easiest one to process. I should have been able to identify my misconception and mistake with little to no difficulty. I had confused a dream for reality, it was

not supposed to be a complex problem to realize that there was a separation between the two, and the moment, or moments, in which that separation became nonexistent and I allowed a dream to blend in with reality. There had to be a moment, or at least a series of moments in which the boundary in my mind between dream and reality was weakened, and I needed to find that point. If I was unable to identify that moment, that piece of time where I allowed myself to be enfeebled, then I would not be able to provide a solution. In a very apt analogy, if I was unable to find the leak in the dam there was no chance of me being able to patch it, and out of all of the people that were able enough to potentially try to assist me in location the problem, David was not one of them.

I was unable to see the purpose of getting out of my bed when faced with this problem, so I stayed. Until I had come to a conclusion to what was happening there was no reason for me to become even more confused and put myself at risk of making another mental mistake in understanding the world around me. David tried all day to get me to talk to him, to get out of bed, or to respond to him, but I took the same approach that I take with children, if I ignore them long enough sooner or later they would go spend their time bothering someone else.

I couldn't wait for him to leave because if he left, then I would finally have the opportunity to think and possibly find a solution to my problem, instead of being constantly interrupted and bugged by him trying to tell me that I had to respond or that I had to get up. I was in a dream, I did not have to do a single thing.

Kendel-

It didn't feel right the first night sleeping and waking up in the same place.

Like, have you ever fallen asleep for a nap while the sun is still up, and then you wake up from your nap and the sun is down and you can't figure out exactly what time it is? Your body wants it to be like midnight, but it's actually like 8:00. Take that, and mix in a solid dose of when you sleep on a friend's couch or even in a hotel room and you wake up and realize that you're not where you thought you were going to be waking up, and that's what it was like to wake up in the exact same sleeping bag, if you could call it that, that I started out with.

I knew that was how sleeping normally worked, you go to sleep in one place and then you wake up in close to that same place unless you decide to go sleep walking, or if your girlfriend decides to sprawl out all over the bed and kick you off while hogging all of the pillows and blankets. Either way, in the normal world, waking up at the same place you went to sleep at is normal, for me - it made me worry.

I was on top of my game the entire day.

Normally when we protected the king, we weren't exactly the strictest on all of the rules and expectations because he's a grown man who knows how to protect himself. Sure, we were his knights and we would protect him with our lives, but the man knew how to watch out for himself, but that day things were different. With waking up in the exact same place I fell asleep I knew that there had to be something that was keeping us there, or something big that was going to happen, which mean that the king was at risk. Everything that day went by the book because I couldn't push the feeling away that something was wrong.

That night I was spent from trying to make sure that there wasn't even a possibility for the king to stub his toe. I went to sleep wanting to catch up with the rest of the group in either college or in the 50's but instead of waking up around my friends, I was forced to wake up in my

tent for another day of watching after the king.

I didn't know how much I had gotten used to being around the other guys until I was stuck out in that forest without them.

Pia

Everything was wrong.

Everything.

I still could not isolate the problem.

David

I woke up to Britney yelling into my bedroom, "You break it, you buy it! She's yours today!" and then having her slam the door on me. I tried to fall back to sleep, knowing that if Britney was yelling that at me, that meant that I would spend the rest of the day with Pia, by myself.

I wanted to go back to that dreamless sleep that I had just had, and I really wanted to catch just an hour or two more so that I could be extra rested to deal with Pia being the way that she was, but my body wouldn't let me. It betrayed me, wanting me to worry about Pia instead of trying to get sleep.

When I made it to Pia's room it was just about how I left her. She was still lying on her bed, but her outfit had changed and it looked like she was in a different position than what I had left her in, I guessed that I had Britney to thank for those changes.

"Hey Pia, how are you today?"

She continued to stare at the wall.

“Pia? Are you even alive?”

The only response that I got was a blinking of her eyes. I wasn't quite sure if it was on purpose and was her saying that she was listening to me, or if it was just an automatic response for her, but I took it as the first one because I wanted to think that at least some of what I was saying was getting through to her.

“Pia, we need to talk. I know things have been hard, but you can't be like this. We're in here together, so we need to go through this together. You can't do this one all on your own. You need to tell me what's going on and how I can help.”

She continued to stare at a spot in the wall. If she was missing skin, and was wearing torn up clothes, I would have thought that she was a zombie the way that she stared. Her eyes were lifeless, the lights were on, but no one was in the neighborhood, let alone actually home.

I broke her, and I was supposed to fix her, but doing seemed about as easy as putting a home back together from the splinters and sections that were left behind after a hurricane hits it.

Britney-

I knew I should have stayed and try to help David fix Pia, but I didn't want to. I sort of wanted to have a better excuse than that, but I just didn't want to, so I spent the day with the duke, trying to make him my best friend. I'd much rather spend a day with a person that I could talk to, even if he was trying to take over the kingdom, than try to snap Pia out of whatever rut she had gotten herself into. I knew it wasn't David's fault that she was acting weird, it was just the best way to make it so that I didn't have to worry about it.

Kendel-

I was on duty following around the king through the forest on his 'hunt' when it finally hit me. The reason that we didn't wake up was because not all of us went to sleep that night. Britney, or maybe even Pia (definitely not David he liked sleep too much) pulled an all nighter and from that we didn't have everyone asleep so we didn't transfer dreams. It was the only reason that made sense. Since we had to travel together, or do whatever it is that we did, together, then if we weren't all there and all asleep for at least a bit, then we wouldn't be able to move onto a different dream. Either someone pulled an all nighter, or it was just bad luck where one person stayed up late, and when they went to sleep someone else woke up for a midnight snack or something like that.

Either way, no matter the order of how it was caused, the only thing I knew was that, that night when I went into my tent and tried to go to sleep, that I was going to sleep, and that everyone in the castle that was miles away would do the same, and we'd wake up in anyplace other than the beds that we fell asleep in.

David-

It was a small victory, but I at least got enough of Pia back to me, to get her to eat some food. It wasn't like she was downing steak and potatoes, but it was more than nothing so at the very least I knew that she wasn't going to die from starvation. The only thing i had to worry about was if she needed to use the restroom. I didn't know exactly what was going to happen, but all I knew is that I really, really, wanted to make sure that somehow she knew how to control her

bowels so that I wouldn't have to clean up that mess. I could say that Pia was one of my better friends, but I'm sorry, friends don't clean friend's butts after they poop their pants. I don't care how old you are, friends don't do that. "I don't know how you do it, but if you have to poop, that's on you."

Pia-

If I had to poop? He saw me eat and the thing that he thought about was me defecating? I tried to remain stone faced, but it turned into one of those times where the more you think about not laughing and trying to control it, the funnier it gets. It was like I was being back in middle school and someone in the class whispered me a stupid joke and normally it would have been lame and I wouldn't have even laughed, but just because it was the middle of third period and I knew I had to be quiet, it only became that much more complicated to remain silent.

I let out a slight chuckle. Compared to my self prescribed vow of silence that I had been sticking to, it was a flood of noise from me.

"Wait! You're not broken!" David yelled. He ran up next to my bed and grabbed my arm, "I didn't break you!" His smile was contagious, I had to reciprocate. "And you smile?"

"Do not tell anyone."

"They wouldn't believe me if I did! But you're not broken!" He paused, and realized what he had done. "Mental crisis about reality breaks you . . . a poop joke fixes you?"

"I was never broken, stop saying that. I was merely lost in thought."

"If that was you lost in thought, you must have been walking around in some super maze. You know that if you just keep your right hand on the wall when doing that, you'll always find

the exit, right? I learned that from that maze screensaver.”

I started to feel a hint of regret for breaking my vow of silence, it was considerably more peaceful having him think that I wouldn't talk back to him, that way I did not have to interact with his special way of thinking. “It does not work like that, I was simply trying to understand the situation that we have been trapped in, and our interpretations of the dreams that surround us. I am still unsure to be able to prove anything to an exact reality, but then we revert to Platonic thought of forms and the interpretation of the world around us, and we start to argue if anything is real at all. Instead of becoming extremely existential and arguing about reality, I have decided that a slightly more realistic approach is necessary. We started in reality. This dream never existed in our childhood. Therefore I am under the belief that what comes first must spawn the subsequent dreams and the subconscious worlds that they exist in. My mind may be confused with the thin barrier that has been breaking down between my conscious and subconscious, however that confusion should not be considered reality, because the facts point us in only one direction and that is the our lives as college students are our lives and that anything else is inconsequential subconscious flickers against the wall of the cave.”

I was greeted with a blank stare. I could have easily had given that monologue to a brick wall and it would have understood more of what I was saying.

“You're back! I didn't break you!”

Britney -

David ran into the hall where I was sitting, chatting with the duke, or Omel, or whoever he was and pointed at me. He didn't stop for me to get up, he pointed and yelled, “I fixed her

with a poop joke! She's not broken!" and then ran out of the room.

I didn't want to think about what everyone else in the room thought of the court magician, but I was happy that he managed to fix Pia.

Kendel-

Nothing happened.

The entire day was a bore. The king tried to hunt as well as anyone can hunt with a group of knights watching you, complete with the two scouts that were always at least fifteen minutes ahead of the king to make sure there were no traps or other hunters that were trying to hunt something a bit more valuable than a buck.

I was really starting to miss my friends.

I went to sleep hoping that whatever was wrong and keeping us stuck there, they had fixed, but I woke up exactly where I was and a good trip away from having any idea of what was going on back in the castle.

David-

I fixed Pia, but we still woke up in the castle, I didn't know what to do by that point, so I got bored and started to hunt through magic books. I had so many of them, and I was supposed to be the court magician so I decided to get reading. Worst case, Pia would come in and yell at me for not getting ready to catch the duke before he tried to go on a killing rampage or whatever it was that he was planning on, and I could get her to move on by telling her that I was doing research.

If there was one thing that I knew Pia would allow me to do no matter what was going on around us was research. I don't think it would be physically possible for her to try to stop someone from reading an educational book.

Britney-

I didn't want to admit it to Pia because she'd start thinking that I could understand what in the world she was talking about when she went on her rants, but I knew that I had to be with Omel or the duke, or whoever he was, so that we could figure out what was going on. I knew that it was risky. Every time that he started talking about taking the crown, it wasn't a pretty picture that he was painting and by being right there next to him, it was like being in the splash zone next to a whale tank, you know that you are in the direct path of what's coming, but you can't help but sort of be excited for it.

I know, he was planning on killing people and changing the law of the land and doing all sorts of mean and evil things, but sometimes the thought of someone getting stabbed straight through and then dropping down to the ground just seems interesting. I get it, murder is bad, but it was a dream, I could enjoy a little senseless violence. It didn't even seem real; it was like someone talking about a game that they were playing and all of the things they were going to do in the game. That was actually part of it that made it so fake to me, if he had be secretive about it, if he had tried to make it sound like he didn't want people to know what he was trying to do, I would have believed him. With the duke being so stupid and so out there about his plans bout who he was going to kill and how he was going to take over the kingdom I didn't believe it. You don't just walk into a castle, sit in the seats surrounded by the king's guards, and announce to

them that you're going to take over, and even tell them how you're going to do it. Even I knew that it was a stupid idea to do that.

Pia-

With the reconnaissance that Britney was doing, the protective services that Kendel was providing to the king, and the research that David was attempting to do in order to protect ourselves with whatever he was doing and calling magic, I was left with little to do in thwarting the attack from the duke.

I offered my assistance to David in his research because the thought of going through books and other forms of text did sound appealing, and I did have some real world experience in diving into the deep bookshelves of the library on campus, unlike most of the group that thought that a well written research paper only required searching the topic online. I offered my assistance as a research assistant to David, but he tried to explain to me that a princess, like myself, who had no experience in magic would not be able to understand the writing that was in the books. I asked if it was in a different language, seeing as I took two semesters of Latin back in high school, so I had rudimentary understanding of any Latin based languages and while at college I had started to take a German class so that I could also have a grasp on Germanic languages. With him citing the language to be a mix of draconic, the native language of dragons, and solarian, the native language of celestial beings like angels, I was left with trying to find the best way to help thwart the attack from the duke with my title of princess.

Princesses are useless.

I went to the knights that still remained at the castle and told them about the duke, and to

them I was the spoiled king's daughter that knew as much about the attack on the kingdom as I did about a hard day's work.

I went to the other lesser nobles that were hanging around the castle, and I was just the daughter of the person they did politics with and didn't hold any value myself.

I tried to talk to the working class, my servants, and they simply asked what I wanted them to do, and how they could serve me, they were of little actual help in preparing for the attack.

I even tried talking to the bishops and clerics who legally were the force behind the crown, because it was supposed to be God who picked the king and gave him power, so without their backing the duke wouldn't be able to over throw anything, but they started going off about nonviolence and a life of contemplation and for a few minutes I think they were expecting me to join a covenant and become a nun.

If princess me was a bad idea, nun me would have only been one step worse.

For how often in stories of the time period there are, and how often knights were saving princesses, I really didn't understand why in the world anyone would even steal a princess. Stealing a princess doesn't stop laws from being made, it does not give you any credible political power, and the only thing that it really gets you are people trying to impress the king on your doorstep ready to kill you just for an 'at-a-boy' from the king. Apparently the only thing that I was good for was being a pretty face so that the arranged marriage with another kingdom would go smoothly.

David –

On a scale of one to girly scream I was a solid doing the ultimate white boy dance in my sheets when I woke back up in the sleep labs. “Guys?”

I heard Kendel yell back, “David! You’re not dead! What happened?”

Britney-

David didn’t answer.

Pansy.

He didn’t want to admit that he broke Pia. I stood up with my comforter wrapped around me so that I wouldn’t get cold when I sat down next to the door for the long conversation that I knew was about to happen. “He broke Pia!”

“I did not. I just asked her some questions.”

“Yeah, and then she broke. You caused Pia to break.”

Kendel-

Pia is one of those people that you never want to have ‘break’. She was so tightly strung that the idea of her breaking was like watching a fat dude’s speedo break while walking down the beach. Everything was there for a reason, and it wasn’t great before, but it would be a whole lot worse once it breaks.

“You broke her?! David, how could you do that? I can’t believe you guys, I leave you for a few days to be on your own and keep an eye on the duke, and you go and do something like this? How am I going to explain this to the king? I’m sorry sir, but your daughter while you’ve been away has decided to go off the mental deep end, and I can’t explain to you how or why?

Come on, we're supposed to be making these things stop, not making them take over our lives and make us break. That'd explain why we were stuck in there for a week, because you broke Pia and made it so we couldn't wake up."

Pia-

It was pleasant knowing that at least Kendel cared.

"Actually, that assumption is invalid because I was not broken, as Britney would like you to believe, I was just lost in thought. Also, David was able to assist me in focusing my attention back on suitable subjects a day earlier, if we can use any understanding of time in this context, than when we started to cycle through dreams again."

"You're not broken! I swear David, if you had actually broken her I would have figured out a way to get over to your room right now and I would break you."

"There is no reason for violence," I said trying to break them apart, "With that extended period of time apart from each other, and not having too much communication with you Kendel, do you have anything of importance to note?"

"No, not really, we're still just out in the forest, do we know when the duke is going to try to attack, or how he's going to do it?"

"I'm not sure on how," Britney said, "he's been a little vague on exactly where he's getting the strength to do it, or how he's going to take the crown, all I know is that it's going to be in the next few dreams that he's going to do it. According to him everything is starting to set up, and he just has to wait for the perfect time. I'd think that's going to be in a few days, but coming from a guy like him, I could be totally wrong and it could be in a few ears and he's just

going to be sitting around talking about what he's going to do forever and take the crown by killing everyone with boring fake stories."

"Although that is a possibility, I am under the assumption that the attack is likely to be soon as well."

Britney-

Pia thought that she knew anything about the attack? It was funny to even think it. The duke didn't talk to her, no one that was near him seemed to care much for her at all, and the idea of anyone knowing and then willingly telling Princess cold shoulder about it because of their deep friendship wasn't going to happen either.

"Oh really? How'd you know that?"

"My sources informed me that the pending attack would occur in under forty eight hours as well."

I couldn't help but think about me just telling her that I thought it was going to happen in the next day or two. "You do realize that you can't count me as one of your contacts, right? You can't use me against me."

"I was unaware that you and I were ever against each other. I was referring to the other sources that I have acquired in the castle that are also able to gain information in fields that I am not accustomed to working in."

"And you did this with your charming personality?"

"No, with my father's treasury. It might be a different financial system, and it might even be inside of a dream world, however the fact that I am to portray a spoiled princess does not

change the fact of how spoiled daughters are spoiled, and that is by getting whatever they want when they want it, and that costs money. I, myself, am not prone to fits of wanting ownership of inconsequential items, however, I am aware of the ability of a spoiled daughter to spend money that is not her own.”

David-

I was trying hard not to laugh. I couldn't get enough of it. Pia, who seemed to be daddy's little girl, was trying to tell us that she had never used dad's money to pay for anything, and what was only better was that she was telling it to Britney, like it was new information that women used men for money, and that'd be anything but news to Britney seeing that she'd get a man to pay for everything possible.

“We know when the attack is going to be then, but there's one problem with that time table, I'm more than a day away,” Kendel said, trying to get us back onto topic. “If I leave the king behind and head off to the castle as soon as we wake up, I won't be back in time to try to stop the duke from attacking.”

I had been reading through shelves worth of tomes and books to avoid having to spend any time with Pia so something came to mind, “I'm not sure that it would work, but how do you feel about magic? I think I could get you to us when we need you to be there.”

“Are you serious?” Kendel asked, “You can do that?”

“Really, you're talking about a dream that I was able to create meatball subs and I'm a court magician, I'm pretty sure that I could drag you from being right next to the king to us when we need you.”

“Pretty sure?” Britney asked, “I don’t like the sound of that. We were pretty sure that there was nothing creepy or weird with Omel, but we’re sort of stuck behind these doors now and have no clue on how to get out. What do you mean pretty sure? Side note real quick: we are also trying to get out of here, right?”

“It’s one of those spells that if it goes right things work out just how you wanted, but if I’m off or do something wrong, or misjudge where you actually are, there are some. . . um. . . side effects.”

That caught Kendel’s attention, “Side effects? What are we talking about? Headaches? Dizziness?” I shook my head no even though Kendel couldn’t see me through the door. I don’t know why I did, I think it was just because I was so used to talking to him through the door that I sort of forgot that he couldn’t actually see me. Kendel kicked into the good side effects that you hear after some commercials for new medications, “Increased blood pressure? Thoughts of suicide? An erection that lasts for longer than three hours?” I shook my head no again and Kendel amped up the side effects again, “Heart attack? Stroke? Seizure? Hair loss?” The reality of the spell and just what I was trying to do to him, ripping him from over a hundred miles away and praying that he showed up in one piece meant that there was chance of dismemberment, beheading, inside-outist (that’s when your insides end up on your outsides), and possible death. He realized from my silence what he was agreeing to, “Oh, it’s one of *those* side effects.”

Kendel-

“Who cares what it does to me? If you need me there, get me there. It’s just a dream, right?”

I said the words and I wasn't quite sure if I actually believed them myself. That life seemed a whole lot more real than being stuck behind doors, not seeing anyone for weeks, or months, or however long it was that we had been stuck in the sleep labs. Just the idea of it made me mad that I couldn't get out and see my friends so I tried jiggling the handle on my door, just to see if it was one of those times that you could get out of a locked cell just by testing the door.

It wasn't.

"You have something that can teleport me from miles away, but do you have anything that can get us out of these rooms?"

Britney -

Please say no, please say no, please say no. I hadn't shaved my legs since we had gotten in there and my hair. . . I won't even talk about how my hair looked.

David –

"I don't have anything that would actually work. I know a spell that unlocks doors, but I don't think it would work here. You know the whole lack of magic, and no dragons, or princesses stuck in towers."

"If I may, we're in the psychology building, it's sort of a tower, we're just not in the top floor, and by all accounts I'm a princess," Pia said. It almost sounded like she was supporting the idea by trying to give us a loose interpretation of princess stuck in a tower, but then she took a breath and kept going. "Even with that in mind, it still won't work. As far as science tells us, nothing like being able to do legitimate magic which alters and bends the fundamental rules of

physics is impossible. You are able to do quick illusions and slights of hand, but unlocking my door from inside your locked room is not going to be happening today.”

“Give it a shot, what’s the worst that’ll happen?” Kendel yelled from his door. “Any weird side effects on this one?”

“Not that I remember. Worst thing that I can think of is that the lock might melt, but I’ve never actually seen that one happen before in the dream.”

“That sounds reassuring,” Pia said, “getting tips about life from a dream. Next are we going to start flipping over cards and telling the future from them?” I knew by then how to tune her out so she wouldn’t get into my head. I could stand a lot of things being stuck in my head, even pop songs that were overplayed on the radio, but Pia was one of those things that I never wanted in there.

The spell was simple enough, in fact it was one of the easier ones to learn when you were training as a wizard and it was one of the first ones that I had learned. I didn’t need any special herbs, oils, minerals, or random objects to use as a catalyst or focus. (Side tangent, I know, but there were some seriously messed up, completely unrelated items associated with some spells. Like, did you know that to make someone temporarily grow stronger, like only for an hour or two, not even that long, you needed a used baby blanket? It makes no sense, but that’s what the spell requires. It was spells like that, that I had to stop and think about the poor magician that first figured out the spell. You know what this strength spell needs? More blankets!)

“Stand back! You know. . . just in case.”

Britney –

There are basic rules that I live by, even in the dreams I lived by them, and one of them was that I would never, ever, ever go out to where people could see me looking unkept. Even around my family I'd at least try to keep things sort of together, and I never really had 'lounge around the house' types of clothes. If you have an image worth having, you better use it for all it's worth no matter where you go, am I right? Otherwise, you're just one of those fake people that change all the time. That meant that just in case David actually knew what in the world he was doing, which he probably didn't, I needed to make sure that Kendel could be my knight in shining armor and save me from the building, because we all knew that he wasn't going to be getting anything from Pia.

It wasn't the best that I had ever looked, but for being a damsel in distress that needed to be rescued, I was okay with the one time opportunity of pulling my hair back into a ponytail. It isn't really the hottest thing that I could have done, but it was a lot better to have it pulled back and out of my face than be hanging around my face not curled or straightened.

Pia -

I had to grab a pillow off of my bed I was laughing so hard. I was laughing hard enough that for a moment within my fits of muffled jubilee I came to the physical understanding of rolling on the floor laughing out loud. I had always considered it a gross hyperbole that no one would physically achieve, however the thought of David casting a magic spell on Kendel's door to unlock it finally made me reach that point.

I was enjoying the endorphins of pure unadulterated laughter when I heard David yell from his room.

And then I heard the lock on a door echo in the hallway with a click.

Kendel -

I have seen some cool shit in my days.

I have even been in that unfortunate position of being so excited that I've screamed like a school girl.

I've never, ever, been stunned so much by one thing that my body couldn't move.

It's a weird feeling. You want to move, you want to say something, you want to yell, you want to scream, you want to bust your vocal chords, you want to punch a wall, but your body is almost in a trance, and the craziest part for me was that it was doing that over a simple clicking noise. I had heard locks unlock dozens of times. It's one of those noises that you don't even pay attention to most of the time. Your car locks, your apartment door locks, some doors at school click lock when you open them from the outside, and that sound means nothing. It's just the noise of some gears moving a bolt, nothing that fancy, but in that moment, in that room, standing back a few yards from my door in case it exploded, that noise managed to freeze my body in place from shock.

People talk about fight or flight reactions to things. I found out that day, that if something crazy enough happens you can't fight or flight and you come up with a third option - freeze.

The weird part about being frozen there was that I could hear everything else. It was like because my body was so stunned by hearing the lock move that everything else had shut down in my body just so my hearing could have the full attention of my brain. The reason that was so weird was because it was quiet.

David had just used magic that he had learned from a dream, we had all heard it, or at least I would guess that we had all heard it because it was so quiet, and our normal back and forth wasn't there. I was expecting Pia to yell out something about how it couldn't have happened, or that it was just Carl unlocking the door at the exact same time David had cast the spell, or even Britney screaming would have been nice to hear, but while all of my senses were dulled away just to sharpen my hearing, they were all quiet.

David -

I had heard it, but I didn't believe it.

I waited for what seemed like a year to yell out to Kendel to see if he was alive, because I really wasn't sure what to expect after making magic happen, "Kendel?"

He didn't say anything back.

I was sure that I had killed him. I tried to use magic in real life, and instead of unlocking his door I managed to blow it off its hinges or something and he was dead. The sound I heard was when the door unlocked itself, just before it blew backwards against him smushing him against the far wall making him a Kendel sandwich.

I had started to work on his eulogy in my head, even though I wasn't his best friend in the word, the dreaming had made me really start to believe that I knew him a lot better than anyone that he had grown up with, so I was the only one that could give him a proper eulogy, when I heard a door open.

It was almost like Pia had managed to take up residence in my mind and she didn't even have to say anything, I could just think what she was going to say and save her the time of her

actually saying anything. ‘That is merely Professor Omel coming in to the research laboratory after you managed to murder Kendel. You know that magic is impossible.’

When Kendel opened the door to my room, it wasn’t right. Like, I knew that it was him, but I was so used to the dream versions of him, that seeing him as a college student seemed like it was the one that was wrong. I was just so used to the idea of Kendel being either a knight or the millionaire that he almost didn’t look familiar when he opened up my door.

It felt more and more like a dream as we split up. I opened up Pia’s door, she opened up Britney’s. When Pia saw me open up her door something happened because she crumpled down and passed out. Kendel and I managed to lift her body out of the sleep labs and into the main building hallways and as soon as people saw us trying to carry her around the cops were called and all four of us were transferred over to the local hospital.

It was one big blur.

We got transferred from our sterile rooms to just new sterile rooms, but at least in the new ones we had things like windows, and visitors. I know that the cops tried to get a statement from me about Omel and what had happened, but I was so out of it from doing magic in real life that all I wanted to do was sleep.

Britney -

I didn’t ask questions, I was just happy that I wasn’t in the room any more. Sure, it sucked that we were still dreaming together, and that we were back in the 50’s, but it was sort of nice being there. We hadn’t been there for a while.

I couldn’t really remember actually what it was that we were even doing in that dream, so

I headed out of the room that I was asleep in, and tried to find the rest of the group.

It took me a bit, I blamed it on being groggy from sleeping for so long, but I finally found the kitchen where Pia, who I had entirely forgotten was a stay at home mom, was doing what she did best and making us some breakfast.

“Morning.”

“Shut up.”

David, who was sitting at the table reading a newspaper, looked up from what he was doing, “Don’t mind her, she’s just upset about the dream. She’s stressed, and instead of studying her body wants her to do motherly things to calm down, so we’re getting breakfast.”

“You should have seen her when she started the eggs. They were supposed to be fried. . . but then she started to scramble them, and then kept scrambling them, and then scrambled some more.”

Pia snapped her arm towards the table and pointed the spatula in her hand straight at Kendel, “You say one more word and I’m dumping all of this into the trash. We aren’t talking about anything that happened, or what is going to happen, until there is food in our stomachs, we’re awake as we can be, and then, and only then, will we talk about it. Clear?”

“Yes ma’m.”

Maybe it was just because I had been in the castle for the last week, or what seemed like a week, but that breakfast that she put together was amazing. I’m no stranger when it comes to coffee, I mean, it’s the only way that if I have to get up before ten that I’m able to get up before ten, but Pia’s was strong, and it tasted good. Everything about the meal was the same way. Waffles, amazing; bacon, heavenly; hash browns, crunchy and perfect; and then there were the

excessively scrambled eggs.

After a third helping of bacon disappearing into Kendel's mouth Pia sat back in her chair. I hadn't noticed it before, but that entire meal she was on the edge of her seat sitting perfectly upright, "Okay, now we can talk about it."

"Magic!" David shouted. "It worked!" It was weird, even for me, to think that magic was working in reality. I didn't know what to say about any of it, I knew that the three of them would come up with some sort of answer and just tell me what they had decided on.

"I was considering the possibilities," Pia said, "and I think I have come up with a solution. It is slightly illogical, but I have to tip my hat to Sherlock Holmes on this one and say it seems to be the only option remaining."

David-

My stomach was full, and Pia was going to try to explain why magic had worked, things couldn't have been any better.

Kendel

"You see, we have been misinterpreting what we are experiencing. We are not dreaming, but we are in fact, traveling through time, or at least remembering previous lives or something along those lines. There is the theory of genetic DNA, that our actual DNA is able to carry with it memories. What we are experiencing are some of those memories when we go to sleep. The world that we are from is where we are from, and then this, as well as living in the castle, are simply projections of those memories. In the most outlandish options we are actually traveling

through time between the different ‘dreams’, even though they’re not dreams. The entire point that I’m trying to make is that the medieval world is historically the same world that we are from, the only difference between the two is that somewhere in the centuries that are separating the two, the true, mystical form of magic has become forgotten. Through our time travel, or genetic memories that we are living, David was able to re-learn those lost forms, and implement them in the modern world. Magic did not suddenly start working when he opened those doors, it was always there, humanity had simply progressed beyond magic and it had become lost in the history of the world. Consider it like this room. We can be in here all morning, and the lights will be on, but as soon as we leave for the day, we will turn off the lights because no one will be here. During the afternoon, while we’re all gone doing whatever it is that we’re doing, this room has the potential for being lit and using electricity, but since no one is in it that knows how to flip a switch, the lights will stay off. As soon as one of us come back for dinner tonight, that changes, and the light gets flipped back on.”

Coach Sprott’s lecture about stretching ran through my mind hearing Pia say all of that. She always warned us when we stretched, to not stretch too hard, and not to push yourself to stretch to a certain point because if your body isn’t ready for it, and you’re not that flexible, you’ll only end up pulling muscles and hurting yourself more than stretching yourself out. Pia was really trying to make that stretch work, but she was a few minutes away from pulling some serious muscles with trying to do it.

“It’s a possibility,” I said, trying to figure out a way to get her off of thinking about how we managed to get out of the locked sleep labs. “But instead of talking about that life, we need to figure out what we’re going to do here. I think we sort of have medieval times figured out, if

anything bad happens, if the duke does anything weird, David casts a spell, gets me there in a heartbeat, and we start kicking some serious Duke tail all over the castle. We have that for there, but what about this dream, or place, or whatever you want to call it? We need to come up with a way to catch Omel here so we can get done with this.”

I don’t know if it worked, but it at least grabbed David’s mind. “We were chasing after him last time, right? Or at least setting up some sort of sting operation if I remember right. Britney? You were supposed to be getting him to something, or trying to convince him of something. . . right?”

Britney looked about as lost as I felt. I could hardly remember the last time that we were in that dream, let alone what it was that we were actually doing in that dream. It was sort of nice feeling that lost, for that moment it was like the dream was an actual dream and we couldn’t remember it because we had been doing something else.

Britney-

There wasn’t a chance in Hell that I was going to remember any of it.

I didn’t even know the clothes that I had worn to bed to get to the 50’s the night before, there wasn’t a chance that I was going to be able to remember all the way back then. The only thing I could remember was Pia telling me not to be a whore, but I can’t remember if that was this plan, or the other plan that I was trying to flirt my way to Omel.

David -

No one answered me, but there was no way that I was going to start all over again in that

dream. I wasn't about to let us waste another week, or month, or however long it had been to get us there, to get us back to the same spot.

"Okay, if no one can remember what it is that we're doing here, can we just assume that this isn't real? It's a dream, so let's use some Saturday morning cartoon logic, and just get this done with. I'm a cop, Kendel, you're super rich. Let's get Omel to try to steal something of yours, and once he's dealt with, we'll be done with," I turned over to Pia who even though just came out with the theory that our DNA was somehow making us live the past lives of our ancestors, was still the best brain in the group, "Right? That should work, right?"

Pia -

The entire thing was illogical to start off with, there was not a single recorded case of anyone ever sharing a dream with another person, let alone a group like us doing it, which meant that any chance to legitimately and confidently say yes to his question was nonexistent, but I had come to the terms that he was not asking for concrete responses, but rather biased opinions on the subject to allow him some self gratification in coming up with an absurd plan for an absurd situation. "I do not see why it would not work, given our current setting." I almost managed to allow the conversation to move on, but I couldn't let my opinion be misunderstood by them, especially if they were relying on me for my attention to detail and knowledge. "However, it is important to note that because we are dealing with such unique circumstances, that there isn't really any set patterns to base any of our assumptions off of. It would be much like if you let a child loose in a laboratory. There's the possibility that they could create exactly what they want, however there's a much stronger chance that they mess the entire place up, don't create anything

of value, and it only causes them hours of clean up after they are ‘done’ because of how much damage they did to the lab in trying to solve the problem they are working on.”

“That’s good enough for me!” David said. “There’s just one problem.”

Only one? I counted about forty two things that presented as problems in the short time that I was thinking about what he was trying to suggest.

Britney-

One problem?

One problem. . . .

He just stood there, letting his thought hang around without ever telling us what the one thing was. He acted like it was the most obvious thing in the world, but I didn’t see it.

“No matter how good Kendel is at being rich, how are we getting Omel to know about it?”

That was the problem? Really? That was an easy question, we just put out posters, or even something in the paper talking about something he had just bought, it was super simple. How do you think art thieves know about what art to steal? They just look for galleries that are opening, and steal the stuff in those, or really old stuff that’s been around. If it’s new, and a gallery is opening for it, or if it’s part of a traveling exhibition, then it has to be worth money, it’s that easy. Or at least I thought it was that easy, because none of them answered David’s problem.

If there is one thing that I had come to understand it was the simple fact that if everyone else in the group was quiet after a question, that most likely meant that my answer to the same question was wrong. If they couldn’t come up with it, there wasn’t much of a chance that I was

going to pull it out.”

I knew that my answer was really wrong, when I was able to shorten it down in my head. How do we get Omel to us? We lie.

Kendel -

“I’ll take care of it,” Britney said, “just tell me where we’re trying to catch him, and what is possibly going to be there, I’ll do the rest.”

I was a bit stunned because I wanted to do two very separate things at the same time. Part of me didn’t want to believe her. Britney promising anything wasn’t a good idea. The only thing that she could maybe promise was that she was going to be alive, but past that, her word didn’t mean much, but at the same time I had been around her enough, I knew that when she sounded like that, that she would do what she had put her mind to. She was the stupid blond Britney that couldn’t wake up in the morning without hitting the snooze button fifteen times, but at the same time she was the Britney who was the only one of us that looked exactly the same in whatever dream we were in because apparently her dream version of herself, is just more of herself.

“We need him to show up, and try to steal something.”

“How do we know that he’s a thief again?” Pia asked. “We are continually assuming that we will be able to catch him stealing, but yet for the life of me I can’t remember why we assume that he is a thief.”

“We dug through all of those police records,” David said, “Remember? One of you, found a picture of him on one of his files, and it turns out he has a record for stealing.”

“That means that we have no actual proof that he is still stealing?” Pia asked. I had a hard

time trying to not roll my eyes.

Britney cut in and saved me from the headache of trying to explain to Pia why we were willing to work off of assumptions. “I can do that. Where do you want him to be, and when do you want him to be there?”

I looked over to David, “How soon do you think we can have things set up by? Or at least, how soon do you think you can get cops there?”

“I don’t know. I’m sort of in charge, I mean I’ve got my own office, so I’m thinking that I could get them there in a day, I don’t know.”

I let out a small laugh. It was funny to me that when we first started it took work for us to forget about who we were in the dream, that it took everything we had in us to even get a moment of our real selves to surface through the dream, but then we were so used to it being a dream that it was hard for us to remember a single bit about our dream lives. “Sounds good, let’s do tomorrow night then. Britney are you sure that you can find him and get him there in time?”

She smiled like you never want a girl to ever smile. She had something sinister planned, and she was going to do something to wreck the universe to force him to being there, and she was going to do it so smoothly that he was going to think that it was all his idea. “Never met him, only know sort of where he calls home, but from a year ago, and I’ve got to get him to a specific spot by evening tomorrow? I think I can handle that.”

David -

I shuddered.

I’m going to be honest, I knew almost nothing about Britney, but one thing that I did

know about her, was that she got whatever she wanted. I always thought that it was just because she was good looking that she got stuff, it doesn't take too many brain cells working together to flash your cleavage and get free drinks, but when she said that it made me realize that she knew how to get what she wanted, and a good looking face was just the spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down. She was going to find a stranger in a huge city, befriend him enough for her to convince him to do something illegal for her, and she was going to do it in under two days, and to top it all off, she acted like it was about as difficult as picking up a drunk frat boy at the bar.

She was either completely over her head and had no clue what she was signing up for, or she knew exactly what she was doing and saw it as a cakewalk. My vote was on the later.

Kendel stood up from the breakfast table, "I'll start in on trying to find a place to set this up in then, and filling it full of things that he'd like to steal. David, you go to your office and talk to the other cops about tomorrow and see if they'd be willing to help, I'll call you as soon as I know where it'll be at. Britney, give me a call by lunch on a pay phone, or something, I don't know. Seriously, how did people live without cell phones? Anyway, just give me a call so I'm not afraid of you dying on me, and then also so I can tell you where you need to get him to." He wrote his phone number down on a piece of paper and handed it to her on his way out.

Britney stood up when she got the home phone number, and followed Kendel out the front door. I finished up the rest of my orange juice and headed off to my office to start filling out all of the paperwork and pulling all of the favors I could to get everyone I needed to get there. It took me thinking about it the entire drive back to the police station trying to figure out just who in that dream I'd be able to get to help me.

Pia -

Britney had her job to get Omel to the sting.

David had his job of getting the cops to the sting.

Kendel had his job of getting the location ready to be stung.

I was stuck at Kendel's home with a sink full of dirty dishes.

And I enjoyed cleaning them.

Britney -

It really isn't that hard to find a guy, especially if that guy is a jerk. I went to a gas station near where he lived, and asked for him. It doesn't really matter if you're back in time in a dream, gas station workers are pretty much what you'd expect no matter when or where you are.

The guy behind the "No, I don't know him."

If you're stupid, this is where you stop. Dude behind the counter says he doesn't know Omel, then obviously he must not know. Wrong. I put my hand on my stomach and frowned just a little bit, "Are you sure? I just don't our kid to not know their dad."

"Excuse me?"

Right there, I knew I had it, I just had to make sure I didn't oversell it. That's the tricky part, not going too far too fast. "Well, you see, I met him a few weeks ago, and so I just wanted to get him the good news."

"Are you sure?"

The trick when people start second guessing what you're telling them, especially

something like having a kid, is to get angry, and when in doubt no one likes talking about periods. “Yeah, I’m pretty sure considering I’m not bleeding right now. Not to mention the tests I had to take. Do you want me to pee on a stick for you too just to prove how pregnant I am? Or do you just want me to wait eight more months and pop it out on your floor for you?”

He pointed out the window to an apartment complex “I’m sorry, I think he lives over there. I don’t know which one. Sorry..”

“Thank you, it’s nice to know that I won’t be raising him all on my own.”

I walked over to the apartments and with a few knocks on doors and a few more sad faces while holding my stomach I found Omel’s apartment. Finding him wasn’t the hard part, the hard part was trying to get him to show up to get arrested.

I knew that I had to call up Kendel about what in the world I was going to lie about and where we needed to be. I patted down any pockets that I had, and came to the sad realization that I had to find a land line.

Kendel -

Finding an art gallery that will host a police sting is a lot harder than you think it would be. Apparently the guys in charge don’t like it when you tell them that you want to put priceless treasures on display in their gallery, just so that someone will show up to steal them and hopefully you’ll be able to catch them in the act and get those priceless things back to who they belong to.

At my third gallery, I decided to give David a call, hopefully he was getting more luck on his end. “Hey Kendel, where is this going to be at? I’ve got everything done, just need to tell

people where they're going to be working."

"About that." I paused trying to figure out the best way to tell him that I had no idea where I could possibly have it set up. "You see, there's a small snag that I've been running into. . ."

"Don't you have some fancy art stuff or something like that in your house? You're supposed to be the rich guy in this dream, right?"

I knew that I was rich, but I couldn't remember for one second if anything I owned was worth stealing. I tried to remember as much as I could about the dream, but not much was coming back to me. "I think so. I know that I have paintings that I did myself, but I wouldn't call them masterpieces by any stretch of the imagination."

"Great, we'll do it at your place then."

"Wait! What? My home? I don't want this at my home! I don't need to have thieves thinking they can just walk in and steal things." I was about to go into a rant about my home and how that I had to sleep there, and then the switch clicked in my head, "Sorry, never mind. Forgot for a moment there that this isn't real. I'm sure I can throw something together, did you get in touch with Britney yet, do you know if she's got in touch with Omel?"

"She's hanging out with his next door neighbor right now. Apparently he wasn't home and is running errands or something like that."

"And she got his next door neighbors to just let her in to sit down and hang out until he shows back up?"

"Yeah, she said it was better for the child that way. Your guess is as good as mine on whatever that means. I'm going to give her a call back, do you have any idea about what you'll

have up and will be easy to steal?”

Britney -

I saw Omel come home and it took me a second to get past the weirdness of it all. It was just weird to see him in the dream. I waited for him to get into his apartment and counted to sixty to give him enough time to get into his home without acting too much like the stalker who was watching the window for him right next door.

I went over to his door, knocked, and waited. Waiting for people to show up is always the weirdest, most nerve shaking part of anything. I can tell lies about being pregnant all day, to just about everyone without feeling any nerves, but it's when I see a person walking towards me and I know that I'm going to try to string them along that I get nervous. Right there, standing in front of that door, having rung the doorbell and waiting for Omel to open it up was as nervous as I got.

The door opened and I noticed that Omel looked younger in this dream than in college and the shirt he had on was a little tight, and I'm not afraid to admit that he was a little hot. The way he was standing, and with how far he opened the door allowed me to go balls to the wall crazy so I stepped into his apartment, stepped a bit to the side, grabbed the door from him and closed it behind me.

“Who are you? What are you doing?”

Time to activate psych ward level of crazy. I put my index finger over his lips, “Shhh. I'm going to say this quick, so pay attention.” I kept my finger on his lips and stared straight into his eyes, “2548 Mt. Hood Drive, I have a buyer who wants the recently acquired Hawkins original.”

“The what? Who?”

I pressed my finger a bit harder into his mouth, “Steven Hawkins, he’s an up and coming artist from New York. The man who lives there commissioned an original from Hawkins, and I have a buyer who is willing to pay you quite a bit if you happen to free the painting from it’s prison. You get it to me by the weekend and I’ll give you 95% of what he’s paying me since you’re taking the risks.”

He managed to muffle around my finger, “How much?”

“Six digits.” I pressed my finger tip into his nose and lifted the rest of my finger so I was pointing at him. “I’ll be back on Saturday morning for it.”

“You have the wrong person, I don’t do that.”

I let out a small laugh, “Yes you do, and you will.” I pushed his nose, sending his head snapping back just a bit, and opened the door with my other hand, “See you on Saturday.”

Pia -

“You told him that Stephen Hawkings is an artist?” I could not believe it. Everyone came home from setting up the sting, and they were trying to fill me in on everything that I had missed while I was stuck in Kendel’s apartment dusting.

“No, I said Steven Hawkins, you know, that dude in the wheelchair? He’s not famous yet for doing his science thing yet, right?”

“The man’s name is Stephen Hawkins, and why in the world would you make him be the name that you picked? Couldn’t you make up a name? In all of your lying that you’ve done, are you incapable of putting together a first and last name of a person together? And then, where

in the world are we going to find a painting that was done by him? As far as I know before his muscles started to atrophy he never showed any interest in drawing.”

“Don’t worry about that,” Kendel said, “No one knows about Hawkings, and no one recognizes the name, so we can put whatever we want up on the wall and Omel will think it’s what he needs to steal. I’ll just put up something that I’ve done. It’s art, splatter some paint on a canvas, smear it around and make some weird shapes with it, and bam, you’ve got art. Plus I think I’ve got a few originals that my dream self made before I took over that are actually sort of good, so we’ve got options.”

First Hawkings was becoming an artist, and then Kendel thought that he could just do whatever he wanted on a canvas and a thief wouldn’t be able to tell if it was good or bad art. “I’m going to have to see what we’re putting up. There is no chance that we are going to use something that looks like a kindergarten student did it during arts and crafts time. Not all art is created equally, and despite what your Jurassic era brain might believe, even someone who resorts to crime is able to tell the difference between something done by a nit wit and a master.”

David -

Kendel took us all to his studio. He was only going to take Pia to find the best painting, but Britney and I wanted to see what in the world he was creating. Art is supposed to mean stuff and whatever, so I wanted to see what was bouncing around in the head of Kendel. . . or the head within the head of Kendel. The subconscious’ subconscious?

The studio was sort of cool looking. I was expecting paint splattered all over the place, half done art on different canvases, and then something weird, like a rotting bowl of fruit, sitting

in the middle of the room. instead of all of that mess, the room was really clean. He had polished hardwood floors that were stained pretty dark and then one canvas in the middle of the room up on an easel. The painting on the easel wasn't half bad, especially considering that he didn't have a picture or something to go off of. It was a painting of the forest from inside the forest with the sun shining through the trees. It wasn't finished, but it was a whole lot better than the stick figures I would have put up.

He took us to a corner of the studio where there was a stack of canvases in the corner. It was a big row of them, one after another, some larger than others, but as he flipped through them all meticulously painted with pretty decent style. He pulled one out that looked like a bridge, but if you were looking at it without your glasses on. Everything on it was a little fuzzy and out of focus. "Start here, and anything after it I think could be good enough to fake as something serious. Before that and we're flirting with the line between artist and I took a few classes at the rec center."

Britney hummed and hawed at a few as she flipped the canvases one past the next. Considering that I was expecting canvases filled with ink blots, or large shapes, or whatever else they say 'interpretive' art is, everything that I saw was all pretty good stuff because it actually looked like what it was supposed to be about. The first time through every time she found one that she liked she slid it out a few extra inches so that she could go back to it. Once she got done with the entire row laying on the ground she headed back to the ones that she had pulled out and went through them again, giving each one a longer stare.

After one more stare, she finally pulled out one that was of a woman on a black background wearing a necklace and earrings, the only thing about it was that the jewelry was

what the painting seemed to be about. It wasn't so much a painting of a woman wearing jewelry, more than a painting of jewelry that happened to be on a woman. Even from across the room where I couldn't see the painting that well, my eyes instantly went to the gems and jewels that seemed to be real gems that played with the light of the room, instead of just being a painting. "This one, this is the one that he'll want to steal. You won't even have to put it in a crazy obvious place, he'll see this one and know to take it."

"Are you sure?" Kendel said walking towards the row of canvases. "There's other ones in here that I think are better."

Pia pointed the painting towards Britney, "How much do these gems cost if they looked exactly like this in real life?"

Britney didn't even pause to do the math, "It depends on the store and producer. Low end, I'd say that the necklace would run something like 15k it looks like it's at least a three carat diamond, and decent quality, and then those earrings would be something like . . . wow, those are nice . . . 2k for the pair, easy. If they're good quality stones, custom settings, and at least some sort of a good name behind them like Peter Storm, damn that necklace is nice, on the high end I can't even guess." She took a few steps closer to the painting to try to see it a bit better, "Ummm. . . I'd say at least 100k, if not more, just look at the setting on that necklace, you don't see it at first, but that thing is platinum and intricate."

Pia turned back to Kendel, "See? It's good enough that Britney wants to get her jewelry magnifying glass and diamond tester out of storage. It's good."

Britney -

I woke up in the hospital room and it took me a second to get used to where I was. They were so much like those stupid labs, beds that were uncomfortable, sheets that itched just a bit, and way too much florescent lighting, that part of me was thinking that I had dreamt about David unlocking my door and letting me out, but the window that had sunlight coming through it was the simple reminder that we had gotten out, and it wasn't normal how we did it.

I replayed the moment again in my mind, just to never forget a single section of it. Hearing the door unlock, seeing Kendel standing there in my door, and then Pia being on the floor.

I ripped the covers of the bed off of my legs and headed straight to the door, "Pia?"

I heard Kendel's muffled voice from down the hall, "She's down here! The doors are unlocked."

I turned the door handle and walked out into the hallway. It seemed really weird being able to walk out of the room. I knew I shouldn't see it as something crazy, but being able to open up that door and walk down a hallway when I wanted to without anyone stopping me was a weird feeling.

I headed down the hallway, past the nurses station, looking into every open door I could see and I finally walked by a room where Kendel was standing at the foot of the bed. I walked into the room and Pia was lying on the bed and David was sitting in the chair to the side. "Are you okay Pia?"

"Yes, the doctors said that I must have locked my legs or have been shocked to the extent that I blacked out. No concussion, no broken bones, so I am feeling as healthy as one can who has been living in sleep laboratories for however long we were in there."

“Did anyone check to see how long we had been in there?” I asked. I looked around the room for a calendar, a phone, or anything that could tell me what day it was. While I was hunting around the room for a newspaper or something a knock came from the frame of the door.

Pia yelled out, “Come in!”

David -

I’m glad that I was sitting down already.

Kendel -

Just when you thought you had seen it all something like that sneaks up on your and slaps you in your face. I managed to squish the dream in my head down enough to say what I knew was the right thing to say to the guy who came into the room. “How can we help you officer?”

Pia -

I have been sick because of food poisoning, bacteria, and even viruses. In all of those cases, your stomach is in knots long before you have any inclination that you might actually need to move your life to being knelt down next to a toilet. When I saw him walk into the room my heart started doing cardio gymnastics dropping down to my diaphragm while cranking up to 190 bpm. My stomach was just as confused and tried to jump into my throat while also joining my heart at my feet and got so churned up that I had to be sick. Good news about hospitals is they get really cautious when you knock your head on the ground and give you a plastic spittoon for you to use, just in case.

I grabbed for the pan and let my guts rip through me closing my eyes tight, hoping that I was simply delusional. I knew that he couldn't be standing there. I kept my eyes closed as the last drops of spit came from my lips. "Sorry officer, I'm still recovering from the fall I took. How may we be of any assistance to you?"

"Well. . ." His voice from that one word was recognizable enough to me that even shutting my eyes wasn't going to make it so he didn't want me to puke. ". . . you see, I have no clue where to even start with you guys. I tried to put together the statements that you made yesterday, but they weren't coherent so I wanted to see if today you could possibly help me understand what has happened to you."

Britney -

"Okay, maybe it's just me, but sorry officer, we need a group moment." I couldn't just let it slide someone had to say something. I turned away from the officer to the other guys, "Hello? Can we just say this now?"

"No, don't say it," David said. "It's weird, but don't say it."

"He's right, don't say it."

"You see it though, right?"

"Sort of impossible to miss," Britney said, "I mean, come on."

"Don't say it," Kendel reminded.

"I am not going to say it, it's just uncanny."

"That is the perfect word for it," David said, "uncanny."

I couldn't keep up with the innuendos that they were trying to go for, "What if we just

talk around it? We can't keep this up forever."

"You're right." Kendel turned towards the officer, "Sorry for that, you just look like a very familiar friend of ours that we haven't seen in a little while."

"Really?" the officer pulled out a folder and started flipping through all of the pages inside of it, "Because I thought you didn't even know each other a few weeks ago, let alone having a friend together, or at least that's what all of my research has shown."

"It's college," David said, "You know how it is. People get together and break up faster than you can imagine. You just look like someone we all knew."

"Knew? Past tense? Is he dead? Do I remind you of a dead guy?"

Pia, the way only Pia can, took control of the room, "Are you here to ask us about who you look like, or do you have something better to asking us as our taxes are paying you to stand around here doing nothing?"

Pia's trick worked and he dove back into his papers, "You see, we're having a bit of trouble between your stories, so I just want to make sure that all four of you can agree on a single topic as to why you were locked in those rooms."

It was easy, we were stuck in there because Omel is a twisted bastard who wanted to torture us.

David -

The less we told the cop the better. I didn't care who he looked like, he was still a cop, and the cops were never the answer. What were they going to do? head back to their office and write a report about it? If we were trying to get justice for being stuck in those rooms for that

long, there wasn't a way that the court system was going to do anything about it. The easiest way to get people out of our hair about the entire thing was to just play dumb.

Kendel -

We had to tell him the truth, we just had to. Not only because who he looked like, but because he was a cop. He was trying to help us. We were the victims of the entire thing, we just had to tell the truth, all of it, and he'd help us out.

Pia -

Nope, there wasn't a chance in the world that I was telling him a single thing. If there was one thing all of the experiences with the dreams had taught me, doppelgangers were never a good thing, and having them was never good.

Britney -

I don't know what the group would do without me. They'd most likely do something stupid like saying too little, or too much and getting us sent to jail, or the looney bin. Sometimes working with them made it feel like they had never talked to another person before. Seriously, who cared if he looked like the king from the other dream? It was just a coincidence. I never bought that whole 'dreams mean something' crap either, so why would I worry about what in the world a cop looked like.

Plus, even if he was looking weird, he was a cop trying to help us in reality, and in the dream he was the king and we were trying to help him, who cares what meanings you want to

put on stuff, if there are actual meanings to dreams, that's got to mean something right? The whole, if you let him help you, you'll be able to help him junk you see from your grandma whenever she emails you.

"Here's the deal. We're dreaming together, our professor locked us in sleep labs, and by the way, the rest of these idiots are standing around looking at you like you have four heads, because just by chance you look a lot like a dude in another dream that we've been having that just happens to be a king." I paused and looked over the group, "Oh, I almost forgot, that one over there," I pointed to Pia, "Is really looking like her head is going to explode, because she's the princess, your daughter, in the dream. You're not her real dad are you? Because if you are, I've got some serious questions to ask you because you popped out one bran flake of a human so either you've got to be, like, the most exciting person in the world and she's rebelling against you being super dull and brainy, or you're just like her. Either way, you've got some 'splainin' to do."

Pia -

I had never wanted to poison her with arsenic more than right then.

David -

The officer looked at the rest of us with a look I recognized. It was the look that said you didn't want to believe what had just come out of her mouth so you looked to the nearest sane person to double check it had actually just happened. "Yes, she's telling the truth."

"And you're telepathic as well?"

“No,” Britney said, “. . . or at least I don’t think he is. You never know, you know?”

“She just tends to say things sometimes that need”

I couldn’t find the correct word to explain the crazy that spouted out of Britney some days. Pia backed me up, “That need a reliable, credible source to back up the utter nonsense that sometimes spouts from her mouth hole.”

“Let me get this straight then. You are not friends? Just classmates?”

“Weren’t friends when this started,” Kendel tried to explain, “classmates only in the psych class, but no others, grew up no where close to each other, but thanks to everything - friends now.”

“Not to mention that temporal mumbo jumbo where sometimes dreams that last only like a few hours because we’re napping, actually cover like a week of dream time so we’ve actually been friends for way longer than we’ve actually been together.” I was proud of Britney, she used temporal in a sentence right. Sounded like total, push your shopping cart full of trash bags while wearing a hat made of melted plastic cups, level of crazy, but at least she used it right.

“You’ve been dreaming together? That’s the story that you want to stick with?”

Kendel looked right at me and shook his head, I knew it sounded crazy at just that level, I really didn’t want him asking more questions because it only got weirder the further you got in. “Yes officer, that is the story that we’re sticking with. We’ve been dreaming as a group in two separate, unique dreams, and have been locked in the sleep labs by our professor because of that for however long it has been.”

“You don’t know how long it’s been?”

“Have you seen the labs sir? No windows, no clocks, and no cell phones allowed. When

we woke up from sleeping we had no clue if we had napped or been asleep for twelve hours. Being awake was just as a long shot.”

“How long do you think it’s been?”

I sat there in his office, staring at the rest of the group, trying to guess how long it had been, or even what the others were thinking. I don’t know about the rest of the group, but I was sure that at least a month had passed.

Britney -

I don’t know, like a week, maybe?

Pia -

Assuming that our sleep time averaged to be roughly six hours, with short naps ranging from thirty minutes to longer slumbers, and also taking in account for staying awake for at least half of the tie while we were in the sleeping labs, and of course, not counting for any time that passed while in either of the dreams, we were only in the sleep labs for twenty days.

Kendel -

I cheated, I knew that it was at least fall outside because the tree outside my hospital window was missing all of it’s leaves, and we went in at the start of the semester and that was in September, so it had to be at least October, “I don’t know, like a month?”

“Assuming the dates on your original statements yesterday were right,”

Pia interrupted him, “They are, officer.”

“Assuming the dates on your original statements are correct, you’ve been in that room for over a month and a half. It’s November 14th.”

Pia just wasn’t having a good day. First the detective looked like her fake dad, then she got told the date. I don’t know what was going on in her head, but apparently that date was not the date she was expecting. Her eyes went big at first, and then she tucked her chin down into her collar bone and stared at her knees. Her hair fell a bit into her eyes and she didn’t move it back and I knew that she had just shut down for the day. We have barely been awake for a half hour and she was already clocking out from logic and reasoning letting her down again.

“I’m going to go around and take your statements again, hopefully we’ll be able to piece this all together. Just to make sure, while you were in the labs, did you ever hear Dr. Omel ever say anything about an alternate location, or anything else about where he might go to if the test went under?”

I didn’t like the sound of that question, “No, have you still not found him?”

“Unfortunately, he has managed to evade our searches, for now.”

Pia didn’t look up from staring at her toes, “Include in all of your searches any information about any home burglaries, if you can, include any involving art theft, you might find him that way. Just make sure there’s no proms going on, he just might want to take the title of homecoming king off someone’s head.”

The detective raised an eyebrow at Pia. “Sorry, don’t mind her, she’s been going through a lot lately.” We could tell the truth as much as we wanted, but there was no easy way in explaining away what Pia had let out of her mouth.

For the next few hours the detective interviewed us, taking notes and asking questions

wherever needed. At first he talked to all of us in Pia's room, but then broke us apart into each of our rooms to talk to us personally. I kept expecting him to roll his eyes, to make some sort of snappy comment about what we were dreaming about, or just how ridiculous it was that we were trying to tell him, but there wasn't a single time that he seemed to not believe what we were saying. Either he was honestly okay with what we were saying, or he had a stone cold poker face that wasn't letting anything through. Either way, it was nice to see someone believe us, or at least look like they believe us.

Britney -

We woke up in Kendel's house in the 50's after getting interviewed by the detective, and started our day in the kitchen, getting fed by Pia. She could try to throw fits all day long about how she wasn't a stay at home mom type or stuff like that, but she made some killer waffles.

It wasn't until each of us had a waffle on our plate that Kendel was brave enough to try to talk about what happened, "Pia, how are you doing with yesterday?"

"I am fine. Thank you."

"Really? After seeing the king as a real person? I don't know about you but my brain went on shut down for like a minute before I was able to even think of him like a normal person," I said, cutting up my waffle into all of the slices first so that I wouldn't have to use my knife any more.

"To see my king, not being a king, was shocking. I can only imagine what it was like to see your father like that" Kendel said.

"You are all misunderstanding a very simple point within this. It may be a moment of

interest for you, however you have to come to the realization that the detective is nothing more than a detective, while the king is nothing more than a dream. He is a dream and nothing about him has any connection to the world that we are from. For me to worry about how the king in a dream, that I dreamt is my father, somehow looks similar to a real life detective, is about as meaningful as worrying about why in a dream I was able to fly thanks to a magical grilled cheese sandwich and then being shocked the next time I ate a grilled cheese sandwich and it didn't make me fly. If you will allow me to use a phrase, you are making mountains out of molehills."

Bull shit.

I didn't buy it. Her face, and the way that she looked when she first saw the detective come in and talk to us, there wasn't a chance that she was just taking it as things came and rolling with the punches, but I knew there was no way that after she had made such a logical statement, that I was going to make her admit to anything else, "Fine then. But if you ever run into anything, you know that you can talk to us, or at least me, right?"

"If I ever need to sit down with a tub of ice cream and talk about my boy problems, you will be the first one I come to Britney." She pointed at my plate with the half eaten waffle on it, "Now hurry up, we've got stuff to do today. We might not have caught Dr. Omel in reality yet, but we can, and should be able to fix that same dilemma in this dream as long as we do our parts correctly." Pia and David took over the rest of the afternoon, we had to get the place set up for the sting, and you'd think it'd be easy, but with Pia telling us everything had to look just right, I'm pretty sure I vacuumed the hallway and front room at least a dozen times before she was happy with what it looked like, and David wasn't much better.

I think of a sting, and you just set up a few webcams, point them towards where you

want, and bam, you've got it. It costs you like nothing to get a camera on a computer, if you were feeling really lame, just set up your phone against a bookshelf and set it to record. The only problem with that, there wasn't cell phones, no wireless internet, and certainly no computers. So instead of having to hide technology all around the place so that we could just get an image of Omel stealing the picture, David had to figure out a way to put people in the house without there looking like people were in the house.

I'd like to think that I'm pretty good at hide and go seek, or at least I was back in fifth grade, but these guys were taking it to a whole new level.

David -

The concept of the layout and how we were positioning officers was pretty simple, we just had to make sure that no matter where Omel entered from, we assumed that he would either take a very direct approach, much like his actions in the other dream, or possibly a back door approach, that the furniture and layout of the house funneled him towards the painting that Kendel had done. It was like criminology feng shui. Put a couch a certain direction and it would force him to move a specific way, move the plant from one corner to the other and he would look at a different spot in the room. Everything had to lead up to making him avoid the officers that were waiting to arrest him, and go towards the painting that we wanted him to steal.

The craziest part about it all, was that even though I was in control of my dream, that I knew that I was me, and I was doing things how I wanted to, I felt like I could tap into the police side of my dream, like I had sat in on classes talking about organizing things exactly like what we were doing. As much as I was me at that point, I was also the cop. The cop wasn't trying to

push me out and take control over the dream, and I wasn't trying to push the cop to the side and do what I wanted, for that moment in planning Omel's arrest, we were working together, and it felt right.

I hate to call it criminology feng shui, and then say that I felt a bit of serenity when I was doing it, but it was nice to just do what I wanted to do and know that nothing inside of my head was trying to fight against it, that both parts of me wanted to do exactly what I was doing.

We were having lunch in the kitchen talking about all of the plans, about which officer would be stationed at which place within the house and outside of the house, when Pia, of course, was the one asked the question that none of us seemed to be remembering, "Do you know what time he's going to be here? Is he going to be here first thing in the evening, or is he going to take his time and show up at three in the morning? I just think that it would be essential that we stay awake until this happens, I do not think that it would be a good idea, with our group history of sleep, to fall asleep anywhere close to when he actually shows up."

All of us looked up from the food that we were eating and met eyes across the table. We got what she was saying, but we just had never really thought about it. Britney was the one to go out on the limb and ask the question, "What happens when we don't fall asleep together? Does the one that's awake just get narcolepsy and drop to sleep right then? Can we not go to sleep without the rest of the group going to sleep at the same time?"

"Let's not find out," I said. "The only way that we can make sure that none of us just pass out because the other ones in the group have gone to sleep is by making sure that we're all awake tonight, and there's only one way to do that; nap time."

Kendel shook his head at me, "I used to love naps."

Pia -

We awoke in our hospital beds, and after a quick monitor of our blood pressure, body temperatures, and a double check of our personal contact information in case the detective needed to get in touch with us for any further questioning, we headed back to our separate apartments on opposite sides of campus. Kendel and Britney were close because they both lived on the west side of campus, but that wasn't saying much because they were still a few blocks away from each other and in different apartment complexes.

I am well aware that I am not a social butterfly. Making friends, and social acquaintances is typically very difficult for me, and so the whole concept of roommates is disturbingly annoying for me, but financially I allow it because I can't afford an entire place to myself without having roommates.

The biggest problem about my roommates; they already knew each other.

Kendel -

I walked into my apartment, two guys I had never seen before were watching the game on the couch. Finally Jared, the guy I was sharing a room with, came back from the kitchen, "Kendel?"

"That's me."

"I thought you were dead or something. What happened to you man? We haven't seen you around here forever? I thought that you were going to get evicted or something, but someone kept paying your rent; but seriously man, what happened to you?"

“It’s a long story, I’m just going to head back and change, I’ll be back to tell you guys about it.”

“About that . . .” Jared paused. I could tell that he wanted to sit down on the couch and watch the game, but he knew that he had to go with me to our bedroom to explain something, but he just didn’t want to. “You see, we thought you were gone, so I boxed up all of your stuff. I’ll help you tonight, but you’re going to have to unpack everything again.” He waited a bit again to see if my face was going to change, he was looking for any social cue to tell him how mad I was, but I didn’t give him a single muscle twitch to go off of. “I’ll totally help you out with it tonight.”

He didn’t.

Britney -

There’s sort of a rule when dealing with people and trying to make friends, you never walk into a group of people unless you are getting some serious flirty eyes from someone in the group, or you’re just crazy. Groups of friends are impossible to just force yourself into, you have to pick one of the group off, become friends with them, and then get introduced to the group by someone who is already in it.

You want to get in the group of guys at the bar? Talk to the one sent off to order a round for the table, get in with him, and follow him back to the table. You get him to introduce you and you’re good to go. The only problem with that idea was what I was having to deal with when I got back to my apartment.

I’m sort of used to being part of the group, having that group of people that I hang out

with, eat food with, and have a good time with. The only problem was that when I first got into my bedroom they acted like I was the outsider. They had been going out and having fun since the start of school, and I was with them the first few weeks, but then thanks to Omel, I sort of missed some of the biggest things like pledge week, midterm week, and of course, Halloween. They had their inside jokes and names they called people, and instead of being part of that group I was stuck knowing that if you wanted to ever watch Pia's head to just down right explode, you'd tell her that evolution is like global warming, made up by the media and that you shouldn't vaccinate your children either because it's bad science.

As much as I got annoyed any time that I was stuck anywhere with them, I really started to miss the rest of the group and wanted to have them with me instead of my roommates.

David -

I'm not a nerd. If you give me the choice to be at home with friends, or studying at the library, there is a very clear winner. . . unless those friends are people that I haven't talked to at all while time has gone by and wouldn't even begin to understand everything that I had just gone through. You talk to roommates about the game, about your crazy ex-girlfriend and how much she hates you, or even a class where the professor is a complete idiot and should never have been hired because they cheated their way through school and can't cut it as a professor, but you don't exactly bring it up over a bowl of ramen that you and three other strangers broke all known standards for subconscious thought, and that you learned how to use magic.

I couldn't even start to think about how Thanksgiving was going to be. There's no greeting card for 'by the way, I learned magic in my dream, want to see me make a fireball?'

Pia -

I had no social contacts, my family had only assumed that I had gotten lost in my studies again, and what studies I did have going on were all suspended by the school because I missed too many days. I tried to argue with them that I could make up that time, but apparently if you miss everything from the second week to midterms, they think that you've missed too much of that semester to make up any of your work.

I was going to go to the library to just study anything to clear my mind, I don't know what it is, but studying always helped me think about life in a better way when I was finished, but I kept going back to the thought about the officer looking like my dad, or the king, or whoever he was. I don't know what it was about the entire thing, but I couldn't stop thinking about it, and the more I thought about it, the more I couldn't remember what my actual dad looked like. It came to the point that I couldn't even remember what my own father looked like.

I could remember what he looked like, but in my mind's eye, he looked like the king. The king was my father, the detective was my father, but my biological father was. . . no one. I could not remember what my biological father, the man who raised me, looked like. I could remember teachers from second grade and what they looked like, I could remember what the weird family that raised chickens in their backyard while I grew up across the street looked like, but the man who was supposed to be living in the house with me, raising me, teaching my alphabet and helping me with my multiplications tables was either faceless, or looked exactly like the king.

The rest of the evening I spent my time on my computer finding any pictures I could of my family, me and my father together. Anything to help prove to myself that I was raised by him,

that we were together for more than just a yearly family picture around Thanksgiving time. I hunted through everything that I could find, and then I searched for the detective's picture, just so that I could prove to myself that my dad and the detective, the king, were not the same person.

The king is not my father, he is only a dream.

Britney -

There is a simple solution to anything ever being weird, one, good, solid night out.

It doesn't have to be the classiest of bars, in fact sometimes the seedy ones are the ones that make the nights the best, but I had a mission, I was going to get back up on that social horse and ride it all the way through winter break. I had no school, and there was no need for me to ever wake up before noon, so I was going to use it.

I was three drinks in when I left the bar without saying goodbye to anyone.

It was fun, don't get me wrong on that, but it just didn't seem real. It felt just as much like the dream as the one I had just woken up to. Sure, it was real, but it didn't feel really real. It was like everything I touched, every sound I heard, all of the lights, were muffled just a bit, like everything was being muffled.

It wasn't one thing in particular, but things just didn't seem right. I had been bouncing around between dreams so much, and being locked up in that sleep lab for just as long, that real didn't seem real any more.

I chalked it up to just being distracted by the dreams. At that point they were the worlds that life was getting interesting in. In one, we were half a day away from catching an art thief, and the other we were a day away, give or take a bit, away from a guy trying to storm in the front

door of a castle while the king's away to overthrow the throne. Sure, college's got drama, just look at a girl funny and tell her her butt looks fat in those jeans and you'll see just how much drama you can get, but it just felt empty.

You can't really compare who's dating who and what they said to each other, to an evil duke ready to overthrow an entire kingdom. I'm sorry, you just can't even.

Kendel-

I felt myself waking up, and I instantly knew that it wasn't my dorm room. The feel was all wrong, but what it did feel like was perfect. A perfect, rock solid, cold ground, with only a blanket covering me, but perfect because I knew exactly where I was, and I knew that I'd be able to strap on some armor and have a good day.

After getting ready I headed out of my tent, greeted every single one of my knights by name, asked them about how they were doing, and made my way to the king. It was hard not to smile a bit while I did it all because it just felt so nice to be back. I knew it wasn't real, but I felt more at home among the dream than I did with my roommates.

I made it to the king, who was still getting ready for the day. For anyone else to walk into that tent while he was still looking like he did with his pants not done his shirt half buttoned and everything a general mess, it would have been a miracle if they made it anywhere but the dungeons, luckily we were 'roughing it' and he knew me. "What brings you in this early?"

"I got news from the castle, sire."

"News? Really? How? We're a week's trip away."

Okay, so maybe it wasn't the castle directly. It was the castle via a bit of the 1950's via

the real world. “It was the court magician. He told me in a dream last night,” not all false, “that the duke was looking to attack the castle today or tomorrow, and that we must be extra cautious out here in the wilderness in case he also plans to eliminate you from the picture.” David didn’t tell me all of that, I don’t even think he remembered the exact date that Omel was planning on attacking the castle, but it wasn’t like the king was going to fact check me against the mystical wizard sending messages through dreams.

When I told the king, there was something that I had realized we had done wrong in all of the time that we had spent in the castle, chasing everything around, we had never talked to the person who was actually in charge of everything. We could have just walked up to the king on the first day when we found out that the duke was planning on being sketchy and gotten the response that I got that morning, a week away from the castle.

The king smiled at me, walked towards me and grabbed me by his bear claw of a hand on my shoulder, and smiled, “I know.”

Know how when you watch those preachers on TV on those weird channels that always seem to be super pixelated and grainy, how they help people ‘feel the spirit’? They just wave their hand in front of people that are standing, and the people just fall over and the guys in the suits behind them have to catch them to make sure that the dude that got hadoukened with the spirit doesn’t also get a concussion from ramming their head against the concrete floor. Right then, I could have used those bouncer body guards behind me to catch me as my knees wanted to buckle from under me. I dropped all sense of me being a knight and him being the king, “Excuse me?”

“I am the king. You expect me to not know where my allies and enemies are at all times?

I do not idly sit on my throne.” He said it again, stressing each word to make sure that I never forgot or doubted, “I. Am. The. King.”

“But we are out here. We should be at the castle, defending your throne, defending the country, defending those that are still there in the castle.”

“At best, the duke will manage to man a force of a few dozen men. If his attempts actually work, he might get some of the servants, and other workers throughout the castle to join with him as well, but they are untrained in any amount of fighting and almost count as no one, no matter how many you try to put together. Under my directions, how many knights did you leave behind at the castle?”

“Two dozen.”

“And they are hand picked from you, well trained, and know that castle like the back of their hand, with an armory at their fingertips including the best armor and weapons in the entire kingdom. Are you seriously concerned that your knights might be overwhelmed by a few cooks with pans? Has your training been that poor that a pitchfork held by a farmer that wouldn’t know a pommel from a hilt is threatening enough to take their life? I was under the assumption that the swords that you, and all knights, carry with you at all times at your hip, are more than for show. Or am I paying the blacksmith to only polish, but not sharpen, your blades?” His eyes drilled straight into me as he said it. I had laughed with the king, eaten meals with him, and even on the trip out hunting gotten to know more human sides to him, but with the gaze that he gave me that morning half dressed and bare foot it was just as powerful as had he been in full robes with the crown on his head sitting on his throne. He was the king.”

“You are correct sir.” Time to bail on the conversation! “I was simply telling you

because,” back peddle you fool! “when the attack happens I have given the command to the court magician to summon me to assist those knights that have remained, in the defense of your throne.” Keep on going! You’re not out of this tongue lashing yet, “I did not want you to be concerned when I go missing.”

“Thank you for the warning. Is there any other concerns you have for me, or may I continue to prepare for the day ahead of us?”

Mission successful - shoved foot so far into my mouth that if I wiggled my toes it’d look like a weird alien was trying to jump out of my stomach.

Britney -

We were a day out from the attack on the castle, but just to make sure I spent the whole day actually doing my job and serving people. Say what you will about being a ninja and sneaking around trying to listening to conversations from behind blinds and closed doors, or even from the inside of dressers, but there’s something to say about being a servant. You walk right up to a person, hand hem exactly what they want, and they, because it’s ‘classy’ don’t act like you’re there, don’t talk to you, and keep talking about whatever in the world they were talking about before you showed up, no matter how crazy or inappropriate it was.

Who cared about the servant girl, she wasn’t going to do anything, except maybe get all of the details on exact raid times and plans of attacks directly from Omel as he sat down for Breakfast and talked to the guy right next to him about everything.

Pia -

While Britney was out doing her claimed ‘job’, which was not her official job, she was my handmaiden, she was supposed to be working with me, not waiting tables. I was stuck with my mantra from the night before; the king is not my father, he is only a dream. It was only a dream that I had found myself in for yet another night, and I had a duty that I had to do, and that was to prepare the castle as well as I could for whatever the duke had planned, and the only way I was going to do that was by getting out of my bedroom, and talking to people.

The one aspect of the entire attack that I was unclear on was just how transparent he had been about the attack. Typically it is a rumor or a slight whisper of there being an uprising, to walk into the walls of a castle and put a date and time on what you are hoping to do, and openly admit to spitting in the face of the government just seemed a bit stupid. I tried to give him some sort of hope, and tried to come up with some sort of tactical advantage that he was aiming for, some sort of sneaky thing that he hadn’t announced to everyone around him, but nothing was coming to my mind. The only hope that I had for him was that tomorrow, or rather, whenever we wound up in the castle again, would just be a big hoax and instead of walking in with a bunch of people swinging swords, he’ll just go into the main hall, point at everyone and just go, ‘got ya!’ but I wasn’t really holding my breath because I was pretty sure he was just stupid.

David -

Prepping magic spells, and knowing that they were going to work when the attacks were fun and the nerves were starting to kick in, but it was nothing like waking up from a nap and knowing that you only had a few more hours before you were going to do the biggest sting of your life, because you’ve never done one before, it can still be the biggest if there’s only one, and

were going to arrest a seriously hardened criminal.

When I woke back up from our nap visiting the castle for a day, I was happy that we did. Between getting wired from the dream, and then waking up from a good nap knowing that I was about to live the childhood dream and get to play real life cops and robbers, I was on cloud nine. From the moment we woke up until about ten I was on my game. I made sure everyone was exactly where they needed to be. Pia and Britney I kept up in a bedroom on the second floor so that I wouldn't have to worry about them getting in the way and somehow ruining it all, and Kendel I made sure was stationed across the street watching everything from a distance. I told them all that they had their own roles to play, but let's be honest, I set up the entire thing, the police were all being controlled by me, and I was the one that was going to jump out and make sure that I got my handcuffs around the wrists of the idiot that had shoved me into the testing labs. Sure, they had important jobs, making sure that nothing went wrong and being extra set of eyes, but I was going to be the one that put the cuffs on his hands.

Kendel -

I didn't like being the person outside the house when things were going on, but I knew that David wanted to feel like he was doing something towards fixing things, so I let him have his moment. Worst case scenario he would be a little bit slow and the girls would take care of it for him. He told them to wait up in a bedroom with the door closed and the lights off, but it was Britney and Pia, the chances of them doing that were about as high as Christian, or Charles, or whatever the TA's name was, showing up as the president of the USA, helicoptering in with secret service, and pardoning Omel right as we arrest him.

I wanted to be on the inside just to see everything happen, but I knew that they'd do it right, and that I needed to be outside, just incase. Just in case Omel tried to do something stupid, I didn't want him to have any outs, so I'd stay there just to make sure.

David -

The sun set, dinner time came and went, small kid's bedtimes passed, and all of us were in our positions, waiting. I felt like it was almost like I was playing an ultimate game of hide and go seek. There wasn't much proof, besides Britney saying that he was going to be here, but I just knew, in my gut, that he was going to show so we had to stay perfectly quiet and not move a muscle.

Pia -

While waiting for the arrival of Omel, Britney and myself were banished to the upstairs bedroom told to be the typical quiet, inactive women that the 1950's expected out of us. Apparently it was not our role to be involved in such a manly adventure, and just the thought that the action was going to happen without me was not acceptable.

I tried to convince Britney with my best feminist rhetoric filled speech, "We have to be down there. It is not our role in life, or in society, to sit passively by as the men decide to make changes in our lives." She didn't move from her spot on the bed with her head hanging off the edge looking at me upside down. "Ours is not a position of passivity, but one of action and one of decision."

"You like pop quizzes right Pia?"

It was quite the non-sequitur to what I was talking about, but I went with it, “Assessment is always essential in all aspects of life, if that assessment is planned or if you have warnings about that plays little importance.”

“I’m going to take that as a yes. It’s only one question. I’m all for equality and whatever, but do you have any police experience?”

“I am the mother of children, that is enough police experience to cover years in the field.”

Britney pointed an upside down finger at me, “Stop it. Really Pia? You want to say that you’re a mother? Is that the best argument that you can go to? Go back to the question and answer it to me, don’t spin it, just give me an answer; do you have any experience being a cop?”

It was a slap in the face that Britney was the one that called me out on my logic and making sure that I was staying in the facts, rather than in the dreams, but even without her slap back to reality, I did have experience, “Well you see . . .”

She didn’t let me finish, “It’s a yes or no question Pia, are you a cop? Do you know what cops do? We’re not up here because we’re being oppressed, we’re up here because you’re not a cop.”

Britney -

Omel seemed to know that I was stuck up in that room with her, and wanted me to suffer. If I was up there alone, there wouldn’t be a problem in the world. David could call the shots and catch Omel and there’d be no problem, but Pia just couldn’t sit still.

The longer we stayed in there, the more antsy and irritated she got. I felt like I was stuck in a room with a bomb and there was nothing I could do to make the timer go any slower on it,

she was going to blow, the only thing I could hope for was that by the time she wrestled me to the ground and opened up the door to go back out into the house, that Omel had already snuck in and been caught and she wouldn't ruin anything. But until that point I was the only thing that was stopping her from running out of the room, and I was ready to wrestle her to the ground.

Pia went back to talking about how much women needed to play a role as equal individuals to men in society, and I let her go on about it looking around the room trying to figure out the best way for me to fight her down without making too much noise. I was really trying to figure out how to smother her with a pillow, but that only works on people that are bedridden and can't fight back. You can't smother someone with a pillow if they're trying to open a door.

David -

By midnight I was a little concerned about the entire thing. Kendel was stuck outside in a car, not able to move and he was the type of person who liked to stand no matter what he was doing, so I could hardly imagine everything he was saying to the cop that was with him about how annoyed he was, and then there were the girls upstairs locked in a room so they wouldn't disturb anything, by my best estimate they could be together for about two or three hours before trying to kill each other, and they were about an hour past that murder mark so I had no clue what was going to come ripping out of there, and then there was still no sign of Omel. No suspicious cars scouting the area, no shadowy figures at any of the doors, nothing to show that there was any interest at all in Kendel's home.

I gave it an extra hour, twice, when finally there was some movement outside. The call

went out over the radio to warn everyone, and where the group of people hiding were already still, it went from playing extreme hide and go seek, to horror film status where if you move any muscle, or even blink, than the serial killer will know exactly where you are and in a few slices of a machete you're hanging from a ceiling fan by your guts.

From where I was hiding I could only see where the painting was at, so I couldn't tell which door he was trying to break into, but I heard a scratching noise that echoed through the entire house. If I hadn't known any better I would have thought it was a tree branch scraping against the roof or maybe even hitting the house with the wind, but there was no wind, and there weren't any trees nearby, which meant it was a lock pick trying to open a window or a door.

The scratching of the lock pick stopped, I heard the back door open and I held my breath. In that moment hiding was make or break. I had to do everything in my power to make sure that Omel had no reason to look in my direction, and kept his eyes on the prize. I have never broken into a persons house, but I can only imagine that in that moment where I was listening to my heart pound trying to force my heart to beat quieter in case Omel could hear it, Omel was as attentive as ever listening to every single sound for any sign of him not being alone in the house.

From the back door to the front room where the painting was in, Omel decided to take a path that put him within feet of me. At that point it was such a crazy idea of what in the world I was doing, that my mind snapped, and the best way to get me through the absolutely absurd was to think about anything other than what was standing almost an arms length away. The topic of choice to keep my mind occupied while my body stopped growing hair just in case that made a noise, ice cream.

It didn't mean anything, I was just sort of hungry and could have gone for some ice

cream, so instead of focusing on Omel and dragging out each second into minutes, and making ten minutes into years, I thought about ice cream and how awesome it is.

I was hardly down the mental frozen food row at the store, trying to remember the brand names of the ice cream that was stuck between the really good stuff that sells a little tiny cup sized tub for the same price as the super generic cheap brand gallon ice cream on the other side. I knew that it was the middle class of the ice cream, but for the life of me I couldn't remember what it was called. I was remembering ice cream flavors of that middle class ice cream when the door upstairs opened, sending a creek through the entire house, echoing around the walls and cutting through the silence.

"I do not know how you can call yourself a woman if you are unaware of the steps that individuals like Marie Curie have made. I can handle it if you don't know Franklin from Montalcini, but not being ignorant towards a great like Curie is not acceptable. I'm going to get a drink." Pia snapped on the upstairs hallway light and started her path downstairs towards the kitchen.

Omel, who was still a shadow to me, grabbed for the painting hugged it against his chest and flopped, face first, into the nearby sofa praying that whoever was walking around at two in the morning was groggy enough that they wouldn't pay any attention to the room he was in and that they would get the drink and leave.

Pia -

It was at the time of night when you are not sure to call it night or morning. Britney was being Britney, and I needed to get a drink, and so on my way down to get a cup of water I

decided to check in the front room and just see how David was doing. It was only going to take a minute or two, and compared to the hours that I was restrained into the presence of Britney who seems to only appreciate things that are printed in super high gloss and read at the sixth grade reading level on a complicated day, a quick glass of water was not going to ruin a single part of the operation.

I stepped into the entryway into the front room and waved my arm across the wall to try to find the lightswitch. “Hey guys, how are you doing? I’m going to get a drink, would anyone like anything?” My fingers ran into the switch and I pushed it up.

My eyes instantly went to what was wrong in the room to the person who was lying on the couch. I paused for a beat trying to analyze the situation that I had come into. I was not given too long to contemplate the scenario as Professor Omel was starting to sit up from his hiding spot, if you could use that term in reference to what he was doing, “You may arrest him now.”

Kendel -

Lights in the house started to turn on and that was my clue to finally get out of the car and go inside to see what had happened. When I made it to the front door Omel was being put into the back of a police cruiser and I tried to get a good look at him. The street was dark, the street lamps weren’t helping much, but Omel didn’t look like Omel. He looked similar, like maybe he was Omel’s stunt double, but it just didn’t seem like we got the right person.

But then again, I could hardly remember what the actual Professor Omel even looked like. The guy who got shoved in the car didn’t look like Omel’s stunt double to me, he looked like the duke’s stunt double.

When I got in the house the girls were sitting in the front room with Pia looking like Britney was about to murder her, and David was busy with the rest of the cops and making sure that everything was wrapped up before people went home for the night. I sat down next to Britney and put my hand on her shoulder, “We got him?”

“We got him. No thanks to Pia who almost messed it all up just because I don’t know who some old dead science lady is, but we got him.”

A pressure, that I didn’t even know that I had, came off of my chest. It was almost like when you wear tight pants all day long, near the end of the day you forget that they’re tight and that they’re uncomfortable, and you think that’s just how pants are supposed to feel, but then you take them off to put on your pajamas or whatever else, and suddenly the moment that button comes undone you realize just how uncomfortable you were wearing those pants.

“So what happens now?”

Britney and I both looked over to Pia. I realized that she wasn’t going to know the answer, but there was always that hope that somehow in the day that we had just spent in college she spent time in the library and managed to research it all up and find out exactly what we could expect.

“Now,” Pia said, “We do what we seem to do best. We calm down, get on our pajamas, and go to sleep. The only way to see if we resolved this dream is to wake up and see if we keep heading back to this dream. If we wake up and never come back, then it worked.”

“If not?” Britney asked. It was one of those questions that we had tried not to ask because we didn’t want to push it. We couldn’t ask it until we had actually tried to fix the dream.

I knew the answer, but I didn’t want to say it. If we didn’t fix it by arresting Omel, that

mean there was something else that we were dreaming about, and that meant weeks, or months, or whatever else of dreaming together until we could figure out some sort of solution. I tried my best to put a happy face on the sentence of living in living in a dream world for even longer, “If not, then we continue on and find a solution.”

David, who had been busy talking to another cop turned his head towards us, “But it’s going to work. I can feel it.”

“Now that you say it,” Britney said, “Me too.”

I’m all for gut feelings and thinking positive, but I wasn’t thinking that it was going to work, I was trying to be realistic. There was no chance that we’d get it right on the first go. I was getting ready for at least a year of laughing on the inside any time I got to see mommy Pia. Sure dreams sucked, especially having the same two dreams every single time, but there were small little things that made it worth it.

David finished his rough debriefing with the officers and joined us, sitting around on the couches. “Pia, if what you did actually gets us out of here, I just might kiss you.”

I didn’t even know what to say to that. “What happened? Why are you kissing Pia? What did she do?” David and Britney filled me in on her stunt from both of their perspectives.

“And he was just lying there on the couch?” I asked “He didn’t try to run away or anything?”

“Yeah, he held the painting to his chest and didn’t move. It wasn’t until Pia was even in the room looking at him with the lights on that he even thought about moving,” David said.

“What an idiot,” Britney said flopping back into the couch, “Let’s just hope that when we get to dealing with the duke he’s just as stupid.”

“On that topic,” Pia said, “How is it that a man with a doctorate in psychology, someone who studies human behavior and thought, so utterly clueless when it comes to basic human logic. He steals a painting, his escape route is through lying on a couch. He takes over a kingdom, he tells everyone the date and time of his attack. Even our time in the sleep labs was scarred by lack of basic scientific procedures. How is he a grown man but unable to process the most basic understanding of strategy?”

Britney raised her hand, “Oh, pick me! I know this one!” Pia gave her a slight nod, “All it takes to graduate is a passing degree. Sleep with the right people, cheat off of the right people, and study only as an info dump that you will promptly forget two minutes after you walk out of the testing center, and you pass. Do you know how many classes I have gotten A’s in that I couldn’t even tell you the title of the class, let alone anything I learned in it. I’m pretty sure that I took a history class, or maybe it was a government class, and I only took the final and didn’t do anything else and still got a C in it. You can get into grad programs with a C average, and you can get into doctoral programs too with a C average. Being a doctor isn’t about being smarter, it’s about having more money and time than other people, or at least just wanting to get in more debt.”

What she said reminded me of a joke one of my professors told a class. “What do you call a doctor that graduated at the bottom of his class?” I paused long enough for the group to think about it, “Doctor.”

David -

After a long night of an almost botched sting operation, all of the follow up paperwork

and debriefings, and then the hour long veg out session with the rest of the group, it was a little weird to wake up in my apartment with my roommates and feel well rested. I was expecting to feel tired, worn out, and even have a slight headache, but instead I was faced with trying to figure out what in the world to do while all of my roommates headed off to their classes and worried about their midterms, while I sat at home watching TV.

It's fun the first hour of finding out who the baby's daddy, and it even gets interesting when you watch a cooking show where chefs go into a grocery store and get to choose one person's shopping cart to cook a three course meal with, but it was right around lunch time that I had had enough of sitting around and doing nothing. Sure, it was nice not having to deal with the sleep labs, but at the same time, the only thing that I did in those sleep labs was sleep, and I wanted to do anything but sit around and sleep at that point.

Britney -

Stalker net, it's totally a thing.

Officially it was the online student directory, it just had a really, really weird search functions like searching by sections of housing, like if you know a person lives north of campus, you can search by their first name, that they live north of campus, and everyone that has that first name pops up, with their student ID picture.

Stalker net is what some people, typically those that are a little desperate or drunk when meeting people and remember all of their details, stalk down a person that they met the last night so they can go out together. Or you can use it to hunt down the phone numbers, emails, and street addresses for the people that you share dreams with so you have someone to hang out with that

will understand a joke about someone who only exists in a castle in your dreams.

Pia -

I wish I could say that I was shocked when Britney showed up on my doorstep and told me to put some shoes on because we had places to go, but I was sort of happy that she was there because I was starting to get extremely agitated by having nothing of any serious productive value to do with my time.

Kendel -

When Pia and Britney show up at your dorm and tell you you're going 'someplace' there's only really one place that you could be going to. I was actually hoping that we would get together, so I had a bag packed just in case we did what seemed to be our thing and slept over at one of our apartments. It wasn't like I was bringing a sleeping bag or anything, just a change of underwear, a new shirt and some deodorant. As a group we sort of have a thing for sleeping together, and I just wanted to be ready for the living after that.

David -

The knock came on my door as I was seriously thinking about trying to make a beef wellington that night for dinner with a side of mashed potatoes and roasted cauliflower with a red wine reduction sauce. You see it done enough times on cooking competitions, you start to think that even though you have almost no cooking experience that you've seen it enough that you can do it yourself. If the punk with twenty piercings and a tattoo of his favorite beer on his arm can

figure out how to do it, how hard can it be?

They came in and without much warning we took our spots in the room, just like we would in Pia's bedroom in the castle. Britney flopped down on the sofa with her feet up on it, Pia sat in her best posture on the edge of the couch by Britney's feet, Kendel stood at attention near the door, and I was forced to find any place else to sit, so I just brought in a chair from the kitchen table and sat on that.

"This sucks," Britney said starting the conversation on the right note, "Seriously, this sucks."

"I know, but at least we are not in those labs any more," Kendel said. "We're able to do whatever we want, we're free."

I laughed a bit at Kendel's understanding of freedom. "We can do whatever we want and we're still stuck here together sitting around doing nothing."

"Then let's go out to lunch," Britney said. "It is lunch time, and typically normal people do eat food during this time of the day. Let's give normal a shot."

Pia stood up from her spot on the couch, deciding for the group without even asking us that lunch was a good idea. "One rule then if we're going out - no talking about our dreams. We are attempting to be normal, and so we're going to be normal."

Britney -

We were 'normal' from standing up and leaving the apartment as soon as we ordered our burgers, and a salad for Pia, and made it to a table when the normal broke. There wasn't much we could talk about with each other besides our dreams and what was going on. It was

everything that we had been dealing with in our lives and how we knew each other. The only way that we weren't going to bring up the dreams was if we just sat around the tables and didn't talk at all, and there was no way that I was going to do that.

"Kendel, do you think that you could paint that painting in real life? You know, sort of like how David did magic?"

Kendel, who had already unwrapped his burger and was three bites in had to swallow everything in his mouth before he answered. "I don't know if it works that way. Plus, even if I did know how to paint like that, I don't know if I could do that exact same thing again. Art doesn't work like that, you don't make the same thing every single time that you sit down to paint. You can do similar things but unless you use stencils or computers or something like that, you're not going to get the exact same picture every time."

That was good enough for me, "But you're saying that you could do something like it then?"

Kendel had managed to fill his face with fries in the time that it took me to say that and I had to wait for him to swallow again. "I'd have to get all of the tools, but I could give it a shot. But, I've got to say that I have no clue what in the world I'm doing and could easily just end up with some stick figures and some very unhappy trees."

"Let's just do that then. If we don't have anything going on, and we can't really do much of anything, let's just get you painting pictures, and we can at least figure out something to do with that. It'll be better than doing whatever you want to call this, because this is just one of those things that you have nightmares about."

"Thanks for letting me know that hanging out with me is a nightmare," David said.

“It’s not like that. You know what I mean. Having lunch with you is nice, it’s just the rest of things, like how stupid it is that we don’t have anything to do. We’re out of the labs, we just can’t do anything.” I was going to keep going on about ranting about how stupid things were, how that there were no jobs because everyone else had already taken them, how that all of the good parties had their party lists already cemented for the rest of the semester, and even how lame it was that we missed the first few episodes of some series on TV so now it was almost pointless to just jump in without knowing what happened before in the season when each of our phones beeped, blooped, vibrated, and buzzed showing that we had gotten a text message.

Pia -

I picked my phone out of my purse from its spot on the side pocket that it was always in and read the text out loud, “Just wanted you to know, Omel is currently in custody. He was caught speeding in a different county, but will be transported back to us to face trial here.”

Britney looked up from her phone and looked at each one of us, waiting for us to start talking. “Fine then, I’ll say it. What in the world does that mean?”

“It means that we have even less here to do,” David said. “He got caught, he’s in jail, the system will process him through, he’ll get sent to prison, and he’ll never work at a university ever again. That’s what it means.”

“Well that is sufficiently anti-climatic,” I said. Being stuck in a bedroom while he was getting caught was annoying enough, but not even being in the same area as him, and having Omel caught by just a series of bad luck and poor driving decisions was significantly worse.

“Yeah, but it doesn’t really change anything,” Kendel said, “or at least I wasn’t planning

on chasing after him. As long as he was gone, I'm pretty sure that we were all okay with him being gone, right?"

I took a bite out from my sandwich and thought about it. I did have a part of me that wanted to find him and make him repay his debt to us for locking us away like prisoners, but at the same time, as long as I was able to go outside and live my life the way that I wanted, I wasn't really worried about actually ascertaining him and making him face justice for the actions he had taken.

David -

With Omel caught, and lunch in our stomachs we tried to figure out what to do with the rest of our day and the best thing that the four of us could come up with was heading back to one of our apartments and watching some TV. Kendel tried to suggest that we go out and play a game of frisbee or something like that, and Britney wanted to walk through the mall to see if there were any new style that she had missed out on. but the one thing that all of us could agree on was sitting down as a group, because none of us wanted to go home and be alone, and watch some TV. It was nothing but soap operas and reruns in the middle of the day, but it was nice to just veg out with the group of us and not have anything to worry about.

Pia used her mom skills from the 50's and made us a meatloaf for dinner, and by the end of the day we had worked our way through half a dozen episodes of a few sitcoms, a cartoon that Britney said that we had to watch when we tried to channel surf past it, one TV special movie with an abused wife getting out of her relationship and then running over her husband on what would have been their anniversary, and then a B sci-fi movie about going to Mars and finding a

group of vikings that had colonized it hundreds of years ago using their boat shaped space ship. It wasn't the best television that had ever been broadcasted, but it was just nice to sit around and laugh as Britney sang every single word to the kids show intro song, Britney pointed out every scientific inaccuracy in the trip to Mars, and Kendel and I were cheering for the abusive husband the entire time because the wife was a piece of work. Sure, he approached things a bit wrong, and should have never hit her, which he did only once, but she was so entitled that she had an entire monologue about how her husband was abusive because he wouldn't let her have 'proper' lighting in her house. Sorry bitch, but you don't need crystal chandeliers in every room.

Pia -

There is little to explain the adrenaline freak out that happens when you feel yourself start to fall asleep on a couch surrounded by your friends, and you feel your body relax and go to sleep, and then are woken up by one of those friends shoving you off of your bed and yelling at you. "Get up, now! They're here!"

I had little time to comprehend what Britney was yelling at me, but she was holding out her hand for me to grab, so I grabbed it and ran with her. It was a few seconds into my run that I started to realize where I was at, we were in the castle and from what I could tell we were headed off to Kendel's room. I let go of her hand and started to sprint towards his room. I was not sure who was there, or the reason that Britney had removed me from my bed so forcefully, but I knew that the hallway on the day that the duke was planning to attack, was not the place to hold that conversation.

I made it to the door first, opened it for Britney and then slammed it shut behind us.

Kendel -

When I woke up in the forest I felt like I was going to throw up. It was like someone was trying to pull me backwards, but the only thing they had a hold of was my stomach. I wanted to bend over and hug the ground until the feeling passed, but I remembered David's warnings about teleporting me from the forest back to the castle and that one side effect of the magic was possible being turned inside out.

I realized that I wasn't going to throw up, I was going to get ripped from where I was at and thrown back into the castle with David and the girls. I fought against my stomach and started to gather everything I could to help me in what was happening in the castle. My sword was the first thing I strapped on, and then I tried to get as much of my armor as I could on. I managed to get on a chainmail shirt and some gloves and then right when it felt like my eyes were going to get pulled through the back of my head I reached for my shield and the world blurred around me.

With a noise that I can best describe as the noise that a tape measure makes when it's stretched out a few yards and then you hit the button on it and it wraps back up into the tape measure I was in David's room with the girls. My head spun a bit from the trip, but after a few seconds everything went back to being normal and I could move without thinking that my legs were going to break apart.

"What did I miss?"

"The attack came when the farmers woke up this morning to do their first milking; our time, I'd say it was at five in the morning. The duke, and a few people in the castle let in the farmers and a few other peasants and they went through the castle and started waking up nobility

by stabbing them in their beds,” David said. “Britney woke up before they got to Pia, they rushed here, I magiced them up some clothes to wear instead of their pajamas, and then I pulled you here.”

“About that, just so you can tell anyone that you do that to later on, you are seriously pulling them. It’s not comfortable.”

Pia stepped towards us to make sure her presence was known, “Wow, who would have ever guessed that breaking the basic laws of physics and space time would ever be uncomfortable. Now enough chatting, what do we do now?”

“We can’t just hide in this room, there’s no way that I’m letting this Omel just walk away,” David said.

“I have a sword, but we’ve got to get ready to fight because they don’t seem to be shy about murder. The knights and the safest place in this castle is going to be the armory, there’s no chance that the guards there are doing anything but stopping anyone from getting into the armory. We get to the armory, see who is still alive and then try to clean up house. As long as even some of the knights have survived the initial sneak attack we’ll be in a good position to knock this out today. Pia, you get right behind me, the king will have my head if I let anything happen to you, Britney follow up behind her and David make sure that no one sneaks up behind us. Ready?”

David -

No. What do you mean carry up the back? He didn’t give me time to say a word and opened up the door.

“Let’s do this!”

Britney -

I’ve said it once, and I’ll say it again, Kendel could pillage my village any time he wanted. Seeing him in armor with a sword and a shield ready to kick ass and break some heads in was hot. There’s no way that you could ever figure out how to do it in the real world, but if you ever want to see just how hot a guy is, let him defend you from getting killed. I was never one for the helpless girl thing that had to be saved by the knight in shining armor, but damn, Kendel tearing down that hall was making me rethink.

Then again I was always one for a good bar fight. Having two frat boys go at it and losing a few teeth in the process was hot, so seeing a guy send blood flying everywhere with swings of his swords was the next best thing.

Pia -

We arrived at the armory and were greeted by about three quarters of the knights that had remained at the castle and were not with the king. Kendel took command after explaining to them that David had broken the laws of nature to get him there, and started to hand out orders and make sure that everyone was clear as to what the plans were.

The knights were separated into small groups of four or five and took their orders of which buildings and which floors to clear from any one who was attacking. With weapons in hand they headed out to bring peace with force. I never understood the logic behind that, to fight violence with violence. It was kin to a father beating his son for hitting someone at school. The

only real solution to violence is understanding the core issues of why that violence is being perpetuated and then trying to resolve those core concerns through discourse and diplomacy. However, for a dream I was willing to take the more direct approach and resolve contention by removing it. It's a bit medieval and arcane to approach a problem with that mindset, but when in Rome, right?

Kendel was about to leave to head us towards the throne room, where he thought Omel was, and also the safest area of the castle for me to be at, when I stopped him. "You need to give me something to fight with first. There's no way that I'm sitting back this time."

"Me too," Britney said, "give me something heavy that I can swing around. I might not be okay with stabbing people, but give me something like a frying pan and I will knock heads straight off of shoulders."

Kendel handed me a dagger, a tiny little knife that had a blade of about five or six inches. "Seriously? This is the best you've got for me? I've worked with knives bigger than this in my kitchen." I handed it back to him. "I want to hurt someone, not make them need a bandaid because they got an owie. I've seen pocket knives with deadlier blades on them than that pencil blade."

Kendel handed it back to me, "Exactly, it's a pencil blade. Small enough to cut straight through joints and ribs. You shove this into a person and drag it in any direction and it will go through whatever organs are in its ways like butter. You don't just stab in and pull out, you stab and drag. They won't bleed out, but with a liver or a kidney gushing blood into their stomach, there not going to make it that far."

It was a tiny little dagger, but Kendel made the sale, and I took it back.

David -

Kendel gave Britney a sledge hammer. He tried to tell her that it's official name was a 'mace' but it was just a sledge hammer, a stick with a heavy head on one end used to bash things. With the girls armed and ready Kendel lead us to the throne room in the same marching order that we had used before with me bringing up the rear. Unlike the first time when I didn't know what was behind us, I was totally okay with bringing up the back because I knew that the knights had already cleared out that area and that no one who wanted to kill us or take the kingdom was going to be behind us.

We made it to the closed door and Kendel stopped us, "Everyone ready?"

For once Pia did not answer a question that was said to her and she only nodded her head.

Kendel opened up the large wooden door to the throne room. I had been in there countless times. I had talked to the king in there, I had entertained crowds during feasts in there, and it was just another room in the castle that I knew, but there was a different feel to the entire room when the door swung open and it was perfectly empty except for the duke sitting on the throne.

I stayed back and started chanting under my breath. There was no chance that I was going to let him get off on a speeding ticket.

Kendel -

I tilted my head to the left and right, popping my neck, rolled my shoulders back to loosen up my arms, and readjusted my grip on my sword. There was going to be a fight, and

instead of freaking out about it, I needed to be ready to jump in and do my job.

Britney -

Just the smile that he had on his face when I saw him on the throne made me want to steal Pia's dagger and grab him by his lips and slice them off his face. It was like he thought he was in the green for everything that the forces outside were going to win their fights against the knights, and that he was as good as kinged.

I always had wanted to see what it felt like to break a person's leg in half.

Pia -

He looked over the four of us and slumped a bit in his chair, "You four? Really? I thought that I took care of you with that spell, I knew I should have never trusted a witch with six fingers."

I didn't want to hear him talk, "I expect the next words to come out of your mouth to be a surrender of the throne. If you do not give up that position of your own free will I will make sure that it is the last place you ever sit."

He stood up from the throne and put his hand on the hilt of his sword that was sheathed on his hip. "I was going to try for some banter, but I don't mind skipping straight to the killing."

You never quite realize just how far of a distance people with long legs can travel if they take full steps. It took him six steps and a swing of his arm to find myself at the wrong end of a very sharp hunk of metal.

Kendel -

I tried not to laugh as Omel took a swing at Pia. I had my suspicions that he was a horrible tactician with the whole telling everyone exactly when he was going to take over the castle, but then he attacked her first. He didn't go after the person who was actually a trained fighter and he didn't go after the wizard mumbling in the background with a look on his face like he was about to open up the gates of hell and relocate him to a warmer neighborhood, he went after the girl holding a dagger who had the physical strength of a librarian and the endurance of a fruit fly.

You could try to say that she was supposed to be an easy kill and that by killing her first it would make the odds better in his favor, although still in our favor, but I was standing not even a step away from her. It took me a bit of a step and my shield that was on my left arm to stop the overhead chop that was aimed towards Pia. I deflected the slice and made sure that I was the midpoint between Pia and the duke. I was going to say something about how he could hurt Pia over my dead body, but decided against it because we all know the evil villain answer to that, they always say something like, 'that can be arranged' or 'gladly'.

Britney -

Kendel faced off against the duke, and they looked like they were going to do that whole, fight to the death thing so I backed up, and around the two of them. First, there was no way that I was going to get hit by some cross fire, or whatever you want to call it when a person swings a sword too hard and hits someone they weren't planning on hitting. I don't care how much Kendel acted like a knight, he was still Kendel, and there was always that chance that he would do

something stupid and not look where he was swinging, and then I'd be out of the picture, missing an arm or something like that.

Then there was the whole fact that it was the duke, or Omel, or whoever he was, and I had a mace and wanted to get some bashing in. I wasn't about to go toe to toe with him like Kendel, but I was pretty sure that as long as Kendel was half as good as he thought he was that I could break at least one bone before he'd take a swing at me. The goal was just making sure that I broke the right bone so that he wouldn't hit me.

Pia -

Kendel fighting off Omel, and the two of them trading blows and blocking each other from ever actually hurting the other only a few feet in front of me was interesting, but out of the corner of my eye I saw Britney start to slide around the battlefield to get behind Omel.

I knew that I shouldn't look directly at Britney because if I did Omel would notice where I was looking and she'd be in trouble, but I had to look at her because if anything did go wrong I wanted to be able to yell at her so she could get out of the way because I knew that she wouldn't see it coming, whatever 'it' was.

The only thing that I knew was that she had to have been out of her mind. After giving me the lecture about having no background with being a cop, she was running straight into this without any intimate knowledge of medieval fighting techniques. Or at least I assumed that she was uneducated because I did not consider her to be a fan of live action role playing. When we finally got back to the real world and all of this was over with I knew that we were going to have a sit down and I was going to say something to her about it, but until that point came, I was just

fine with my spot behind Kendel with no threat of getting stabbed, poked, sliced, or hit by anything that was trying to kill me.

David -

I learned in one of my science classes back in middle school that lightning hits with enough power to power a house for an entire month, we just don't know how to keep that energy for an entire month, or to make sure that a bolt of lightning would actually hit the place that we needed it to, once a month to keep the house powered. I couldn't remember all of the numbers, Pia could have probably told me right then, but all I knew was that when I was done with what I was working up, the duke was going to join the rare club of people killed by lightning, while inside, on a sunny day.

But then I saw Britney sulk her way behind him.

When growing up my dad loved to take me hunting, and when you go hunting, you have to learn hunting safety, and most of that safety is so that you don't hurt all of the other guys running around in the forest looking to shoot something dead. You wear bright orange not just for the fashion, but so that you don't get shot. And you always try to keep your eyes out for more than just what you're trying to shoot, but to everything around what you're trying to shoot because you might miss your target, but the bullet will keep going straight and hit whatever is in the background of where you were shooting. It sounds easy to just not shoot the other guys wearing fluorescent orange, but it's really sort of scary to hear all of the stories that people have of close calls where they almost got shot, or where someone they knew almost got shot by another person.

It was going to be hard enough to bend the lightning around Kendel to make sure that he didn't get zapped to the ground, but with Britney behind the duke I also had to make sure that I hit my target in one shot or else she was most likely going to get shocked instead.

I was trying to path out the lightning that was going to rip through the room, around Kendel, through the duke and not Britney when she went for it.

Britney -

The bastard had it coming.

I pulled up the mace like a baseball bat with both of my arms holding on for that extra little punch of strength and home run derby-ed his ass. Maybe it was actually his hip, but it's so much more fun to say I hit him so hard that I heard his ass shater.

Pia -

There is a noise that I am not a fan of, and it hinders my eating with certain cousins because they seem to live off of the stuff, but eating crawfish has never appealed to me. Part of it is the unnecessary amount of work for such little meat where at points I feel as though I'm burning more calories trying to get to the food than I am ingesting, but then there is the noise I can't stand. Having to snap the exoskeleton of the crawfish and then tear the head from the body is a noise that does not illicit the imagery of a nice meal.

When Britney shattered the duke's hip the noise reminded me of having to rip a crawfish's head from its body, just louder, slightly squisher, and with the added bonus of knowing that the thing that just got hit was still alive and there was no level of medicine that

would ever be able to put his humpty dumpty hip back together again.

Kendel -

I heard the crunch of his hip shattering, and his right leg went limp and he started to teeter on his left leg, but the one thing I didn't want to happen, happened. He twisted on his one good leg as he was headed down towards the ground and was able to swing his arm towards Britney, who was on the wrong side of the fight for me to be able to be any good.

As the duke started to twist towards Britney both David and Pia yelled out, "Get down!" David's was more along the lines of a 'get down, I have a bazooka and don't want to hit you in the back of the head' sort, while Pia's was a very un-Pia sort and was along the lines of 'get down so you don't die'. Either way, both Britney and I dove towards the ground, with with Britney falling backwards to avoid the swinging sword, and me to the side feeling the hair raise on my body as a flash shot past me and into the duke.

Britney -

Lightning is the nastiest thing in the world.

David -

It was like a flash bang grenade and a sniper rifle all in one go. All of us couldn't see straight for at least a minute because of how bright it was and our rings were all ringing from the thunder that echoed and reverberated through the stone room.

As our senses got back under our control so we could see and hear what was happening

around us, “Is everyone alive? Britney?”

“I’m not dead! I can tell you that much!”

“Kendel?”

“Present!”

“Pia?”

“It is going to require much more than that to remove me from existence.”

Those that were still on the floor got up and we gathered together in the center of the room over the body of the duke.

Kendel -

“Is he dead?”

I tried not to roll my eyes at Britney.

“Yes, he is dead.”

“Do we just leave him here?”

That one I didn’t know how to answer. Even though he was sort of a jerk I didn’t want to just leave his body in the middle of the throne room. If anything the throne deserved better company than his dead body.

Pia managed to save me from having to come up with an answer. “Leave him here. We can have a servant, or a knight, or someone that survives the attack take care of the body later. For now, we are going to be done with this dream and go back to sleep. He is dead, we made it, time to get back to being normal.”

I had to smile at Pia keeping her eye firmly on the prize, “I don’t think you’ve been

normal a day in your life Pia, but sure, you can get back to that. Let's just make sure that the rest of the castle is taken care of, just so we don't get woken up by getting stabbed, and we can take a nap."

"Deal."

Britney -

The rest of the castle and all of the rioting and trying to take over the throne were taken care of just fine by the other knights. We tried to follow the noise of any fights, but by the time that we made it to try to see if we, and by we I mean Kendel, could help everything had been taken care of. If you were really trying to stretch things you could try to say it was lunch time by the time the castle was back to being under control, and the only real thing that needed to be done was clean up any of the bodies left behind.

I felt sort of bad leaving the other servants out to do the job of having to move dead bodies, but I had a nap to take, and the princess told me that I had to be there, so who was I to try to argue with her?

Pia and I split her bed, Kendel was a true gentle knight and fell asleep near the door using his arm as a pillow and David managed to grab some clothes of Pia and make a rough pillow to fall asleep in one of the chairs in her room.

I drifted off to sleep, and instead of instantly feeling myself wake up like whenever we jumped between dreams, my body rested. No dreams, no switchen realities, no doing whatever it was that we were doing, there wasn't even a hint of having a normal dream without having to share it with other people, it was just one nap where I got to sleep.

Unfortunatley the rest of the group didn't agree with me.

David -

I was sort of looking forward to going back to college, being done with the entire thing and never having to try to understand if I was in a dream or not again. I didn't want to have to worry about evil dukes threatening to take over the throne, and I didn't want to worry about art theft, I just wanted to go back to my life, no matter how lame it was. I wasn't happy to be in that dream still when I woke up, but at least I wasn't as ruined as Pia.

Kendel -

Pia had the worst time with being at the castle when we woke up. Her face scrunched up and she started breathing a bit heavy and I knew exactly what was coming. "Pia, don't worry, we'll get out of here. There just has to be something different than taking Omel off of the map. It just has to be something else and we'll make it back to being at home."

"Right, because you are an expert on this topic and have practically written the book about whatever it is that we're going through. You have just been playing stupid about the whole scenario up to this point because you didn't want us to look stupid. How could I forget about your passion for temporal and psychological paradoxes?"

Pia -

I couldn't decide what took more balls on Kendel's part - going up against the duke in a sword fight, or standing up against Pia and telling her that she was being crazy and needed to

calm down.

“Let’s just get through the rest of this day, help out people clean up after the mess, and then get back to bed when it’s time to go back.”

Pia’s nose flared just a bit at the command to give it up and to walk away and my bet was quickly put that it was more dangerous to deal with Pia than it was to deal with Omel in a swordfight.

Britney -

We had to go back to reality, it was just a dream. None of it was real. I wasn’t a princess, I was a college student that was going to start her own business. Being pushed around and having people do everything for me is not my personality, I was meant for studying and getting perfect scores on my tests.

The king was not my father, Kendel was not a knight, and there was no way that David could actually cast real magic. It was all just a dream, and we had to get back to reality.

Kendel -

After about four days she stopped talking, and even started to talk about refusing food. She was convinced that if she didn’t get back to reality that she would starve herself there. She lost at least twenty pounds, and for a person who was little to start out with, losing twenty of those pounds wasn’t healthy.

It was around the week mark that we started a rotation with her and who would stay with her, and that put her into professor mode.

Daivd -

Professor Pia, Kendel's nickname for her, not mine, was a weird one. She had managed to get a quill, ink, and lots of parchment and paper and she was working on trying to write down everything that she could remember about any advanced subject just to make sure that when she finally made it back to reality that she wouldn't miss anything.

I remember walking into her room and seeing parchment filled with ink covering the entire place. "Hello Pia, how are you doing?"

She didn't look up from her desk and kept writing, "... is why when you work with reverse transcriptase that you need to remember the base rate of mutations through using it is one out of every 17,000 base pairs. With no way to double check its work mutation is a common occurrence."

At least it was better than her calculus phase. I didn't like it the first time that I took it in college, and Pia didn't help. The scary part about Pia doing calculus in a castle was that there were no calculators. It sort of says it in its name that you need a good calculator to do calculus, but for a day and a half she managed to go through all basic algebra and geometry and did calculator free trig and calculus. I didn't know if I should have been impressed or freaked out. After her switch from calculus to microbiology, I was voting for freaked out.

Britney -

After about a month we had gotten used to our schedules. Kendel took mornings, David took the middays and dinner times, and I took night watch to make sure she didn't try to do

anything in her sleep. For about a week she was on a real kick of trying to hang herself.

Pia -

Britney was always nice, she brought me food, but I never allowed that to distract me from my work. I was working on rewriting the periodical table from memory. I was able to rewrite the names and atomic numbers for each element without too much hassle, the problem came when trying to remember their specific atomic weights.

There are easy ones like Oxygen, number 8, weight is almost 16, but not really quite there; or even hydrogen with 1's all over the place with its information. The tricky ones that I could not remember were always transition metals. No one ever cares about Rhodium, most people wouldn't even be able to tell you if that was even an element on the table, but I could. I knew it was number 44, I just couldn't remember its atomic weight. That was always the hard part when dealing with chemistry.

Britney was waving her arms in front of me, "Pia? Hey! Pia!"

I blinked at her.

"Your food is here, and you were doing it again."

That caught my attention, I would have never expected for Britney to be the one to notice patterns in the world around her. "Doing what?"

"Singing."

David -

Pia had gained a tick. When she was most upset about being stuck in the castle she would

sing, the only problem was that she was upset about being stuck in the castle all the time, but she would get stuck on one part of the song and sing it over and over again no matter who was, or wasn't, in the room with her.

Kendel -

I was never really planning on having kids before, but after hearing Pia sing nothing but that one line over and over again and hearing it echo around the hallway outside of her room made me promise myself that even if I did have kids they would never learn that song.

Sometimes she'd get back to the start of the song and it wouldn't be so weird.

"Row, row, row your boat. Gently down the stream"

Britney -

"Merrily, merrily, merrily," but if she ever got to that line she always sound super sarcastic and then she would automatically kick into the line that would stick with her for hours, even if she was thinking about something else.

Pia -

"Life is but a dream."

"Life is but a dream."

"Life is but a dream."