

Teen Zine



Fall 2019

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The 700 Club (Part 11) – by Melanie Andersen

Meanwhile, I've been saving up money to buy a new coat from JC Penney's.

I laugh a little bit to myself as Lauren leads me through an unnecessarily large hallway after taking off my coat. We arrive in her kitchen, which is bigger than my entire dorm. She points at a barstool that's in front of an island with marble countertops and a bowl of fruit on it. I seriously doubt the fruit is real; it looks too perfect.

"So? Can I fix you up anything?" she asks, smiling. "And don't worry about your luggage; I'll go grab that for you later."

"Um." With the size of her kitchen, Lauren probably has the ingredients to make me whatever I want, but it still feels awkward asking. Honestly, I was hoping I wouldn't come around meal time so I wouldn't have to face this awkward situation, but Lauren told me to, and I want to respect her wishes.

She notices my hesitation and pipes up. "Honestly, I was thinking I might just pop a pizza in the oven, but I can't eat it all myself."

I catch her obvious hint. "Sounds good."

Lauren heads over to her freezer and pulls out a frozen pizza, putting it in the oven without a word. Once it's cooking, she makes her way over to me again.

"So, how are you liking the place? Good enough for you?"

"Ha, ha. You know, with my college student standards a one-room schoolhouse looks like a mansion to me. This is a literal mansion."

"I'm not sure about that, but I'm sure it's bigger than you're used to."

"Yeah. Honestly, I'm surprised frozen pizzas are even allowed in this place. Don't you have a chef or something?" I question, causing Lauren to shake her head furiously.

"Don't be silly. Joshua may be a businessman, but he's no prince. Trust me, if there were a prince around here I would've gone for him instead," she replies lightheartedly. "The only person who works for us is Gabriel, the watchman. Joshua and I prefer to be alone most of the time, so having other people around would just be a bother. Besides, I've got to learn how to do things for myself, right? Except I don't care much for cooking, so frozen pizzas are a staple at this household."

Seems kind of like a waste of such an elaborate kitchen if nobody here even likes to cook, but I guess that's not the point of it. It's all for show, really, even if Lauren claims to not like having people over. In reality, she has guests staying all the time, and often tells me outrageous stories of some of her friends puking on her thousand dollar rug or peeing the bed or something to that extent.

My throat goes dry. I sure hope she won't tell embarrassing stories about me.

"Well, I'm still thankful to have you cooking for me," I say, then switch the topic of conversation. "You really seem so pretty still. How do you even do it?"

"It's the plastic surgery," she replies nonchalantly. I nearly choke on the air.

"What?" I croak out, but then decide I should probably try to be more polite about it. "I mean, wow. You look great. It seems completely natural, uh..."

"That's because it is, doofus." Lauren rolls her eyes. "Plastic surgery, at my age? Please, I'm fine as a dime and will continue to be so forever."

"Your confidence is truly astounding."

"When you got it, you got it."

She looks me over, finally taking note of how I changed since high school, though there's not too much different about me. My hair is still flat and brown, and while my body is a lot more slender, my face still manages to retain my baby fat. To be completely honest, I'm not very pretty; rather, I've got an average face and body and I'm okay with it. There's really no need to look like a Victoria's Secret model if that's not your job.

Lauren, on the other hand, looks absolutely adorable, but I suppose that's necessary since she's basically a glorified sugar baby.

"I'm waiting for you to say I don't got it," I playfully respond, causing Lauren to gasp.

"You're ridiculous. Be kind to yourself."

"You're not denying it," I tease. Lauren smacks me on the shoulder, and it's kind of funny how she's getting more worked up about this than I am. I've accepted how I look a long time ago, but for some reason everyone else hasn't. It sure does make them fun to toy with, however.

"You could get any guy you want with a single wink, so shut up," she snaps, half-joking. "Joshua's going to meet with us in the den after we eat, so look forward to that."

"I've been looking forward to it since the day you mentioned he's rich," I joke. Lauren nods in agreement.

"I know that feeling."

* * *

Joshua McKinney looks like a stereotypical tall, dark, and handsome figure, and it's terribly annoying. He has deep brown hair, black orbs for eyes, and manly stubble. When we walk into the den (which, as it turns out, really isn't that different from a living room, except that a den is more for informal occasions) I see that he's wearing a sharp black suit. It seems a bit ridiculous as he's just resting at home, but I figure suits might be the only thing in his closet. I wouldn't be surprised in the least.

Joshua sits up stiffly on their brown leather couch, watching some local tennis match on TV. He quickly shuts it off once he takes notice of us, standing up and shaking my hand.

"I'm Joshua. It's a pleasure to meet you," he greets, his voice surprisingly deep. I throw a questioning look at Lauren, who's grinning widely. She pecks him on the cheek.

"Baby," – I cringe at the sound of the pet names – "This is Alexis Fowell. She'll be staying here for a little while while she visits her grandmother."

"Ah, yes. Lauren has told me a lot about you." He raises an eyebrow. "Magic history major, right?"

"Uh-huh." I glare at Lauren, who sheepishly looks away. There's nothing to be ashamed about for being a magic history major, but having Mr. McKinney here already knowing way more about me than I know about him makes me a little uncomfortable.

"You know, my ex-girlfriend's kindergarten teacher is an Enchanted," Joshua needlessly mentions. Lauren winces slightly at the mention of his ex, but he doesn't appear to care at all. I just nod.

"That's great."

"So, what kind of field are you going into? I can't imagine knowing a lot about the history of Enchanteds would be incredibly useful in most jobs." I'm suddenly thankful he's leaving tomorrow. Joshua is not exactly a pleasant person to be around, unlike his girlfriend.

"I'm going to be a magic professor myself," I answer, ignoring his rudeness. He almost starts to chuckle.

"You do realize that is not exactly a way to make a living, correct?"

Says you. Your girlfriend didn't even go to college and yet you have the nerve to tell me I can't make a living? What a douchebag.

"You know," I say, feigning a smile. "I really am not in this for the money. I genuinely have an interest in what I'm doing with my life, so I don't think something like that really compares."

The tension in this room is obviously rising, and so Lauren starts giggling at nothing in order to break the tension.

"I think tonight we should all go out to eat at Nathan's Pub, don't you, baby?" she asks, clapping her hands together. "They serve the best sandwiches there. Cross my heart, Alexis, you'll die for them."

"I can't go. I have something to do tonight," he responds vaguely. Lauren's obviously upset by this, but she tries to mask it by smiling way too widely.

"That's alright. Some other time, then?" Joshua doesn't reply, so Lauren turns to me. "I don't suppose you have to see your grandmother tonight, do you? I was hoping we could spend some time catching up before you get too busy with her."

I really should try to speak with Ryan Kisher as soon as possible, but the amount of hurt in Lauren's voice from her stupid rich boyfriend rejecting her idea makes me swallow my refusal.

I guess she sort of deserves to have an asshole as a partner because his handsomeness and money is what initially attracted her to him, and she still decided to stay once she found out his personality was less than appealing, but there's still something quite sad about their relationship.

"I'll go with you," I say. Lauren's whole face lights up. "I can visit my grandmother tomorrow instead, no big deal."

"Yay!" she exclaims, overjoyed. "This is fantastic. Till then, why don't we all watch a movie? Or play ping pong? We just got a new ping pong table in the recreation room, Alexis, and it's *amazing*. I'm so good –"

Joshua's phone starts to ring from his pocket. He answers it without so much as an apology and exits the room to take the call. Lauren watches forlornly as he leaves.

She may not love Joshua, but it's apparent she at least likes him, and his rudeness towards the both of us seems to suck the life out of her pixie-like face.

And just as I think Lauren's about to cry, she starts to laugh sadly.

Chapter 17

The sandwiches at Nathan's Pub were indeed quite good, and eating them with Lauren yesterday reminded me of the times when we'd go out together after school in high school to grab milkshakes.

Though Gigi is my best friend now, I only met her in college, and Lauren was my closest friend for the majority of high school. Despite the obvious flaws in her character and her values when it comes to relationships, she's a good person. Not a role model, not a saint, not someone who gives a lot of charity or goes to extreme lengths for those she cares about, but it's easy to tell that she's a good person.

It's in the way she laughs so constantly, no matter if something terrible just happened, or she just struck gold, or she found out she's pregnant. She's always laughing just like she did back in school, and just like she probably did when she was a child. There is definitely something youthful within her that keeps her looking bright and happy on the outside, and I'm certain that it's her capacity to laugh.

Once we came back to her house after we ate, I decided it would probably be best to call everybody who was so concerned about me coming here and let them know I'm okay. I contacted Andrew and Amorie first, and they were very happy I am all safe and sound in this unknown place. They also reminded me to call them if I need help for whatever reason, and then our call ended.

Professor Lontelle was mostly interested in giving me tips for staying safe in my admittedly dangerous situation. She told me she'd prefer to be left out of the details so that she doesn't drive herself mad with worry, but instructed me to let her know the second I come across a major issue. She's willing to sacrifice some sleep for me and my ridiculous quest, and I'm thoroughly thankful for that.

Gigi, on the other hand, was not too invested in how I was when I arrived and how I'm doing and what I plan on doing next. Instead, she decided to relay to me how her day went, just as she always did back at the dorm when she came home. Honestly, it made me very happy to hear her carrying on just like usual. I knew she'd be able to handle herself fine, but with a roommate as quirky as Gigi it does lead one to wonder just how much trouble she's capable of causing in a month.

But to my relief, she sounds perfectly fine, and I plan on calling her every day to make sure she stays that way. My brother and the Professor are both adults who take care of themselves all the time, so I really have no need to call them unless I need their help or it's been awhile, but there's no way I'm not checking up on Gigi. I don't want to come home to our dorm in ruins.

After I made sure everyone knew I wasn't dead already, Lauren and I watched a movie together while Joshua left for some reason. I wasn't initially suspicious, but now as I'm lying wide awake in my new bed, an idea starts creeping into my brain.

Obviously, Joshua can't be all bad because he agreed to stay in this town far away from his job just to please Lauren. He buys her whatever she wants just to see her smile, and though their relationship certainly isn't a healthy, ideal one, it worked for them. Lauren never complained about his behavior before, and only recently does it seem he's acting strange.

Last night at dinner, Lauren apologized for his behavior and assured me he's normally a lot more conscientious about what he says, but these past few weeks he has been growing distant. I assumed they were just growing apart, as is inevitable for two people like them, but now I'm starting to think this isn't the case.

Maybe, just maybe, a member of the 700 Club is housing me right now.

The thought sends chills down my spine, but I start to wonder if maybe I really am just jumping to conclusions on this one. There's no way that Lauren could be living with a kidnapper and not realize, is there?

I don't know, the house is pretty big.

I throw the thick white sheets off of me and sit up, rubbing my eyes. I glance at the digital clock sitting on a wooden nightstand to my right. It's eight o'clock, and time for me to get going. Just because I'm on a break from school doesn't mean I get to waste my time sleeping in late. In fact, I'd rather not spend longer than a week on this, much less the entire month, but I'm prepared for the worst.

Grudgingly, I step out of bed and gaze about my room, trying to process just where I am. I've always been a little bit slow in the mornings, and these new surroundings aren't helping very much.

The carpeted floor feels soft under my bare feet, and the room smells of fresh laundry. There's not much in here besides the queen bed and nightstands on both sides, but there is a fireplace facing the bed which has a large TV

on it. The sun is peeking out through the slits in the blinds, so I shuffle over to the window and open them completely, squinting in the sudden light.

The rest of the house really is quiet at this time, and I feel like I should be, too, so I tiptoe over to the closet and try to figure out what to wear. I definitely didn't pack a month's worth of clothes and pajamas – I brought enough for maybe a week and a half – but with my budget it's not like I own many more clothes anyways.

After deciding what to wear, I quickly pull myself together and try to figure out where the kitchen is. I stumble through a hallway filled with more guest bedrooms (thankfully, they're empty; I'm not sure how I would feel living with more strangers, though the amount of excess bedrooms really does seem unnecessary) until I reach the staircase I first spotted when I came here.

I pad down the stairs in my socks, hoping Lauren and Joshua will be fine with that. I don't care much to wear shoes inside wherever I'm staying, but I don't want to seem rude. Ah, well.

I stroll into the kitchen, where I see Lauren with messy hair eating a bowl of cereal and reading a magazine. Since I'm wearing socks, she doesn't hear me come in, so I gently cough so she knows I'm here. She looks over at me and smiles.

"Good morning, Alexis," she greets, somewhat sleepily. It looks like she just got up, too. "Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, thank you," I answer, awkwardly standing in the doorway because I don't know whether or not I'm allowed to raid her pantry for breakfast.

Lauren notices my discomfort and gestures to the fridge.

"Now that you're staying here, make yourself at home," Lauren grins. "Which means you're free to make yourself food whenever you want."

"Okay," I nod. Ten minutes later and I'm at Lauren's side, munching on some toast and debating whether or not I should mention Ryan Kisher. Of course I wouldn't tell her what I plan on doing, but I wonder if she's heard of him. Eventually I decide against it and instead say, "So, today I'm going to visit my grandmother. Will you be all right alone? Isn't Joshua leaving today?"

"He left already," she informs, pushing her bowl of cereal away. "Three a.m. I really wish he would've told me what time, but all he mentioned was that it was early. He made a fuss when he was leaving, too. I'm surprised you didn't hear him."

"I was out light a light. The bed was really comfy."

"I'm glad." She then grins brightly at me. "But I'll be fine alone. I usually am. He's gone all the time, but I guess that's what I get for telling him to move here. I just really liked the small town charm, and the city makes me nervous. Everything falls apart in cities, you know. Your job becomes your focus, your relationship turns to shambles, you turn to drugs to compensate for the fact that you're cheating on your girlfriend."

"You're worried Joshua will leave you?" I ask, raising an eyebrow. She shrugs.

"I don't know. He's never been the most faithful guy. He dumped his girlfriend for me, actually, and that's how we got together. She was none too pleased."

I almost gasp. "How come you never told me this?"

"It's not exactly something to brag about. I'm not entirely proud of myself for any of this, but I'm happy enough with where I am, and that's what matters at the end of the day." I don't know how to feel about what she's saying, so I stay quiet. "Tell your grandmother hello for me when you go, all right? I hope she's doing well."

"All right." I stand up, lifting my tray and coffee cup off the table. "Do you know what time visitors are allowed in?"

"I'm not sure. Ten o'clock is a safe bet."

Just enough time to figure out where he lives.

"Great."

And then I'm ransacking her house to find a phone book.

* * *

A half hour into my searching and I finally find it sitting on a large wooden desk in the second office I stumble upon. This one is smaller and neater, and I figure it must belong to Lauren because it doesn't have nearly as many official-looking papers or file cabinets all over the room. In fact, besides the computer, the address book is the only thing on her desk.

In no time I locate Ryan's address, and after quickly glancing at my watch – it's nine forty-five – I call the home phone and pray that no one is terribly bothered by my calling in the morning. A woman answers on the third ring.

"Hello, this is April Kisher speaking." Must be his mother.

“Good morning, Mrs. Kisher, I’m Alexis from the Creek Daily and I am calling about a follow-up interview about Ryan’s current condition.” Good thing I had taken care to figure out what newspaper the article was from, otherwise I would be screwed.

“Well, he’s not too different from last time, I can tell you that much,” she grumbles. I’m not entirely certain what she’s talking about, but I stay silent. “Though I guess you’re a different person now, huh? You’re not Rodney, thank God for that.”

“I’m terribly sorry ma’am, were you not satisfied with the article Rodney published?” I question, hoping to gain insight on her personality, so if I need to convince her on why she should let me interview her son I can.

“Are you kidding me? His headline was insulting. The article made it seem like Ryan’s popular because he cheats in football, and the photo he include with all of us was hideous!” she snaps. “At least he didn’t include the whole green eyes thing.”

Green eyes thing?

I have no idea what that means, so I ignore it.

“Yeah, that’s actually why we need a second interview, so that we can publish another article that shows the public who you are: friendly, beautiful people.” I almost cringe at how much I’m sucking up. Unlike my brother, I know when to play it nice, but it doesn’t mean I enjoy it. Mrs. Kisher just “hmphs” in response, so I add, “Also, Rodney is being fired for publishing such an inaccurate article.”

This definitely grabs her attention. I can almost hear her smiling through the phone.

“Really?”

“Yes.” Then I try my luck and push it one step further. I’m pretty certain this lady doesn’t have extensive knowledge about the journalist hierarchy, anyways. “Actually, I am his boss and I fired him personally. I want to interview your family properly to make sure I get everything right.”

“Well then, that’s fantastic,” she states triumphantly, seemingly excited that Rodney got fired even though he most definitely still has a job. “I suppose you can come over later today. Does eleven work for you? At twelve we’ve got family coming over to see Ryan, so I’d rather you be gone by then.”

At least she’s direct.

“I’ll see you then. Have a nice day.”

Mrs. Kisher then hangs up, and I’m left with an appointment with her at eleven and a sort of shameful yet enticing feeling for lying through my teeth and getting away with it.

(to be continued...)

"I also have friends, good
friends. But one of
these good friends
is dead, and so I
carry his life,
and his death,
inside me,
too."



- Paper Covers
Rock
by Jenny
Hubbard

Princess for Rescue (Day 10) – by Samantha Andersen

When my heavy eyelids grudgingly open up, I nearly close them again, but something moves next to me and it freaks me out. It better not be Aamon again.

I perch up on my elbow and lean over to remove the blanket. Blond hair trickles over one of my pillows and sleepy blue eyes open.

That's what that nagging feeling was about...

Eve's eyes grow to the size of saucers and she screams louder than I've ever heard her voice go. Her hand flies up to her chest and she breathes deeply a few times. "Oh shrieking souls, it's only you. You scared me, Azazel!"

"I'm- I'm sorry," I stutter. She's dressed in a pink nightgown and her hair's all ruffled up. She's still beautiful, just a different kind of beautiful.

She rubs some sleep out of her eyes. "When I said I would see you in the morning, this isn't exactly what I meant."

"I'm so sorry! I didn't mean..."

She smiles fondly at me. "It's alright."

I jump out of the bed a little too fast and my head pounds. "Ugh..."

"Are you alright?"

"Yeah, sure. Why wouldn't I be?"

Eve slips out of bed and walks over to a... vanity? When did that get there? She smooths down her hair before turning to me. "I have been thinking about yesterday."

I groan. I really don't want to be talking about it. Especially when I feel like I was just run over with a chariot. "Look, I don't really think we need to discuss this anymore."

"But I wanted to say-"

"Enough already! I get it. You don't like me that way. Well, you know what? I don't like you that way either...anymore."

Her smile falls. "You don't?"

"No, actually. I was doing some reflection myself last night and I realized liking you? Well, it was just a fleeting emotion." I don't really know why I'm saying all of this. But I can't seem to stop.

"Fleeting emotion?"

"Yeah. Remember those butterflies I had in my stomach? They're moths now. Dead moths. That smile I used to like? It's just annoying now. I mean, why would I ever be interested in a prissy, silver-spoon sucker who is just like her obnoxious father."

Her mouth drops open. Perhaps I went a little too far.

"How dare you!" she cries. Tears well up in her eyes.

"How dare I? Did you forget where you are? You're in *my* realm. You're lucky I didn't just throw you into the arms of the first clone who came to rescue you. Which I'll be doing with the next clone who comes. No matter what you think of him."

"You are serious?"

My voice is traced with venom. "As death."

She steps back as if I struck her, and I instantly regret everything that flew out of my mouth. Until she says, "You really are an underground rat."

Before I can fire back a response, Aamon bursts open the door. "Sir!" He looks at our enraged faces and shakes his head. "Oh, Sir..."

"What do you want?!" I roar.

He shrinks back, but quickly regains his composure. "We have another intruder, Sir."

Eve and I both simultaneously yell, "*What?*"

This threat is happening faster than I intended it to.

"Yes, Sir. And this one seems to mean business. He already shredded the banners in the entryway and he's extinguishing the lit scones."

"The monster!" I look to Eve who seems to be at a loss. Guess she's waiting to see if I'll make good on my word.

"Come on. We have to get you out there before he destroys the whole place."

Her glare is hard. "I cannot meet my future husband looking like this."

And the pain keeps coming. "Doesn't matter. Let's go."

"I am not going out there until I change. Stall him while I get ready."

"You're not the one giving orders around here!"

She points to the door. "Out of my room!"

"It's my room!"

"*Out!*"

Aamon drags me away just as the door slams behind us.

"Sir, that didn't sound like you were repairing things with Eve."

I drag my feet over to the stairs just below the cage. "I don't need you judging me, Aamon."

"Sorry, Sir."

A figure emerges from the entrance stairs shouting, "I am coming for you, demon king!"

Eve walks up to my side dressed in a dark blue gown with her hair pulled back in a braid. She smells especially flower-like and it ticks me off. "Shrieking souls, it is Lucas Lionhart!"

I whip my head to her. "What? Like *the* Lucas Lionhart? The one you said you wanted to marry...?"

"The very one," she squeals. "I always dreamed he would be the one to save me, but I never actually thought..."

She takes a few steps in his direction, but I quickly grab her wrist. "Not so fast."

"What are you doing?" she demands, pulling away. "You said you would throw me into the arms of the next person who came to rescue me."

"I've changed my mind." I try to tug her away, but she keeps resisting.

"You can't do that!"

"Yes I can, because once again, it's my realm!"

"Why are you being so mean?"

Suddenly a searing pain shoots up my arm, and it causes me to let go of Eve. My hand reaches for the spot and I find an arrow sticking out. That lunatic just shot me in the arm!"

"Are you alright?" Eve asks as I pull out the weapon. "He shot you?"

"Yeah! What kind of a- ahhh!" A matching pain in my leg lets me know another arrow was shot. I lower myself to the ground, no longer able to walk.

The lunatic approaches us with another arrow on the ready. "Stay away from the Princess of the Land of Light, you fiend."

Fiend? Did he just call *me* a fiend? He's the one shooting the arrows. He lowers the bow and arrow and pulls out a sword.

"Aamon!" I shout. "Where's my staff?"

"Sorry, Sir. I am a little preoccupied at the moment."

I look a few yards behind me and there is Aamon, pulling three arrows out of his wings and arm.

"You shot my second-in-command!"

"And I am going to do a lot worse to you!" He raises the sword above his head, and honestly, I'm kind of fearing for my life. Is this guy seriously going to kill me?

"Stop it!" Eve shouts, stepping in front of me. "Leave them alone."

Lunatic grabs Eve's hand and pulls her towards him. "Princess Genevieve come with me. It is not safe here."

"Don't touch her!" I leap at him and bash the sword out of his grip. I also manage to separate him from Eve. "You can't just take her!"

He punches me in the face and that's enough to stop me from moving again. If I thought my head hurt earlier, that is nothing compared to how it is now.

"Azazel!" Eve cries. She tries to make it to my side, but he takes her hand again and drags her away. The last thing I see before blacking out is Lunatichart dragging away my Princess while she looks back with tears in her eyes.
(to be continued...)

Quinten Malvolia Was Last Seen in All Black (Part 1) – by Melanie Andersen

The first thing my father taught me about dark hypnotism was that if you don't *really* need to use it, don't. Don't sneak into movie theaters or make someone forget their name for laughs or punch a guy in the face and convince him you're a saint.

Karma doesn't like dark hypnotists. If you give it a chance, it will destroy you.
I think he was speaking from personal experience.

* * *

When I was eight years old, my father, Quinten Malvolia, began to teach me what he knew about the art of dark hypnotism. He learned it from his own father back when he lived in London, where it originated. When he immigrated to America, he brought the practice with him.

While Americans liked to think they were ahead of the time with all their hoity toity meditation-hypnosis, they were basically just glorified therapists, and when my father came they recognized their inferiority.

They could make their clients sleepy, sure, but Father had the power to make them forget, and I quickly learned that this was one of the most powerful abilities a man could have.

Everyone knew he was the best of the best. He was often referred to as the "Dark Hypnotist in All White," because his incredible abilities earned him so much fortune, he was always seen making business deals while wearing luxurious white suits that made him stand out from the others in all black.

When I got home from elementary school for the day, Father would pull me aside and start teaching me what he knew while my little sister, Scarlet, did her homework. He'd take me to the balcony, sit me down, and stare off into the city streets as he began to relay me the skills that would shape the rest of my life.

The first time he did this, Father opened up with, "Your grandfather told me once that he could kick me in the face and I would never know it happened."

Naturally, I was intrigued and horrified, because who says that to an eight-year-old? I stayed quiet as he continued.

"That was how he first taught me about dark hypnotism. Dark hypnotism is, put simply, forced forgetting." Father finally looked at me. "Do you know why forgetting is so important, Ellis?"

"No. Aren't you 'posed to remember stuff?"

Rather than answer my question, my father shook his head and asked me another one. "How much do you know about my job?"

I thought back to what my mom told me, about how I wasn't supposed to ask much about his job because he worked for "bad men," about the hushed conversations my father would have over the phone, about the strangers in the dark suits. Admittedly, I was always curious, and way more unafraid than I should have been.

"Mom said you do business with bad men and not to ask questions because it's dangerous."

At this, my father laughed.

"Bad is subjective," he pointed out, then stared back out at the streets. "These men aren't any different from you and I, they're just trying to make their money in different ways. Lots of money. Don't you want to make money, Ellis?"

My eight-year-old eyes lit up. "'Course."

Father chuckled at this, but he seemed oddly proud. "Ellis," he began, rolling up his sleeve to reveal a shiny silver watch. I looked at it curiously. "Dark hypnotism can make you a lot of money. These Americans, they've never seen anything the likes of this before. Their hypnosis-typic hypnosis, it's called, - it's so simple, and extremely ineffective.

All his words started confusing me, but I knew that I was being let into my father's world after he had alienated my family from it for so long, and I wasn't about to mess things up. I was hungry, I was eager. What I wanted most was to be just like him, and I was finally getting the chance to.

"So what can dark hypnotists do then? Can I make people think they're ducks?"

"It's powerful, but it isn't magic," Father explained with a small laugh. "Typic hypnosis is about making people relaxed and then leaving suggestions in their heads and hoping they'll stick, which they usually don't. Two times out of ten it will work, extremely useless that method." He pointed to his head and continued, "But dark hypnotism takes it one step further. While you can't just make someone think they're a duck, you can make them forget they're a human, forget their name, forget what they look like. While they're out of it, you can leave them the suggestion that they're a duck, and then if there's some sort of proof, no matter how sketchy, well, they'll start quacking in no time."

Admittedly, I was still a little confused as to what my father was talking about, but all I knew was that he was very much implying I could make someone think they were a duck, and that delighted me to no end. The kind of havoc I could wreak on my teachers if they pissed me off was just too tempting to pass up.

"Teach me!" I begged, reaching for Father's watch, but his arm snapped back as if I had the plague. "What's wrong?"

"Ellis, dark hypnotism is nothing to mess around with," he said sternly. "You have to promise that you'll take this seriously. You don't understand what is at stake."

"I understand-"

"No, you don't" he barked. "You absolutely must not use hypnotism unless it's wholly necessary."

"But Father-"

"While you may think it's funny to make a guy parade around thinking he's a duck, every time you hypnotize someone, they build up an immunity," he explained coldly.

I raised my eyebrow. "What's that?"

"Let's put it this way: you get hired by a powerful man to make someone forget about a kidnapping they've witnessed. You agree, only to find out that the poor chap you have to hypnotize is the one you've made think he was a duck. Mind you, it takes a lot to make a man think he's a different species, so his brain's become kind of immune to you. Now you've got to explain to this man that you can't hypnotize a witness because you've made him think he's a duck. Mr. Businessman doesn't find it nearly as comedic as you did, so now he's gotta shoot the witness and have to clean up a murder. He's sending assassins after you because you failed him, but they're also going after your family now, too, and BOOM, now your sister's been shot in the head and it's your fault because you thought you'd have yourself a laugh."

I was rendered speechless by my father's words, tears pooling in my eyes due to fear.

"Don't do what's not necessary," he warned as I backed away from him, throwing open the door and running back into the apartment, covering my ears.

* * *

The Son of the Dark Hypnotist in All White.

It was a title that I wore proudly, it was something that I strove to be. My mom loathed it; apparently, she hadn't wanted any of us to get involved with Father's business, but he had other plans. Whenever Mom got fussy, he reminded her that the entire reason we were as well off as we were was because of him, since he was the only one working. So she turned a blind eye, figuring everything would turn out alright.

Teaching a nine-year-old hypnotism, what could go wrong?

I practiced every day, putting more effort into my hypnosis studies than I'd ever put into my schoolwork. My father's praise became like a drug to me, and I pushed myself beyond my limits just so he could tell me I was doing a good job.

I knew Scarlet was feeling left out, but I didn't care. After all, what would a seven-year-old girl want to do with hypnosis.

I pushed my friends away. My father finally hypnotized me so often that I wasn't able to be hypnotized anymore. I was trying to be so much older than I actually was.

At nine, I did everything I could to get my father's approval.

At ten, my father left us.

* * *

When Father was with us, we didn't live like kings, but when he was gone we quickly realized we wouldn't have enough money to stay in our relatively large apartment for long, and started looking at places not much larger than a storage closet. Mom had to get a job at the local grocer, and Scarlet and I scraped up what we could by collecting the loose change from vending machines at school and prowling the streets for lost wallets.

Scarlet and Mom were devastated when Father left, and they spent most of their time crying and comforting each other while I sat around in thought. I wasn't broken-hearted, because I knew Father was going to come back eventually. I knew that this was just another little test he had left for me.

I had to find him and bring him home.

* * *

"Scarlet, stop crying, please," I said, bending over to hug my little sister as she was sobbing on the floor. I looked down at her with concern. "What's wrong?"

"I miss Daddy," she cried, leaning into my hug and beginning to snot all over my shirt.

"Ew." I pulled back from her and looked down at my clothes, scrunching my nose up in disgust. Hearing her still crying, my face softened. "Don't worry. Let me tell you a secret."

Scarlet looked up at me, her eyes red and puffy, but I could tell I'd piqued her curiosity.

"What secret?"

"You don't need to cry because I'm going to find him," I whispered conspiratorially. Immediately her ace lit up and she got to her feet so she could speak to me better.

Despite her delight, she put her hands on her hips. "How are you gonna do that? Do you know where he is?"

"No," I admitted. "But I'm gonna find out. Father's testing me."

"He is?"

"Yes." I leaned closer to her and looked at Scarlet seriously, her tears no longer flowing due to the good news. "But don't tell Mom."

"Why not?" she whined, folding her arms. "Mom's waitin' for Daddy to come back. She could help!"

"This is *my* test," I growled. "If you tell Mom, it'll ruin it. I know it. I have to find him on my own."

"Fine." Scarlet pouted. "When's he gonna come home?"

"Soon." I grinned. "Maybe tomorrow if I'm super good, which I am."

"If you knew Daddy was testin' you, why did you wait so long?" Her face shone with betrayal, but she very well knew why I waited a month to begin my investigation. By now, Mom finally started to calm down; a couple weeks ago, if I even implied I ever had a father, she'd just break down crying, which was not something I was well-equipped to handle.

Instead of answering her, I simply whined, "This is why I didn't wanna tell you. You complain too much."

"I'm gonna tell Mom you said that!"

"No, Scarlet, *I'm* going to talk to Mom, remember?" I shook my head. "I'm beginning my test, and she knows more about Father than anyone else in the world."

"Okay." Scarlet bit her lip and looked down at her feet. "Bring him back."

"I will."

I left our bedroom with a new determination in my step, happy to finally be beginning my search. Quite obviously, Father hadn't *actually* abandoned my family, because he loved us too much. He still had way, way more to teach me about dark hypnotism, after all, but he was always giving me little tests to prove how skilled I was. But those were just little tests, this was a massive project.

I definitely wasn't going to let him down.

"Mom!" I called out, practically running into the kitchen, where Mom was cooking ground beef over the stove. She looked down at me affectionately, reaching one hand out to ruffle my hair.

"Yes, Ellis?"

"I was wondering..." I bit my lip. I knew I was supposed to be delicate about a situation like this, but really, what's delicacy to a ten-year-old? "Did I get an inheritance?"

Shock was plastered all over my mother's face, and it was clear she no longer cared about the meal she was cooking us. She stared at me like I had grown an extra head.

"Whatever do you mean, dear?"

"Inheritance," I repeated. "Inheritance? When someone leaves and you get their stuff?"

Mom's face fell, and she turned her attention back to the ground beef, clearly trying her hardest not to look at me. "That only happens when someone dies," she explained stiffly, standing up straighter. "Now, run along, I know your sister wants to play."

"So Father didn't leave me an inheritance? Would he have, if he died?"

"Ellis, this is not an entirely appropriate conversation to be having. Go play."

"So he doesn't have any stuff lying around? Anything he accidentally left behind?"

"Go."

Mom's hands were shaking as she held the frying pan in a death grip, so I finally realized I was pushing it. I ran back into my bedroom and jumped onto my bed, staring up at the faded white ceiling decorated by water stains. Scarlet was still sitting on the floor, looking at me eagerly.

"Know where he is now?"

I shook my head. "This is going to be harder than I originally thought."

* * *

Scarlet and I were supposed to be going to the Y after school while Mom was at work so we could do homework while she stocked shelves and tried to earn a living wage.

Of course, what we actually did was stand in front of the building, a crumpled photograph of our father in both our mittened hands, holding it out to strangers and asking them if they'd seen him.

Many people walked by without a word, while the kinder souls at least spared a glance and shook their heads to let us know they didn't know who he was. We kept this up for an hour, then two, and we were finally about to turn into the building when a thin woman with stringy hair stopped in her tracks.

"Is that Quinten?" she took a step closer to us, eyeing the photograph critically. "Quinten Malvolia?"

"Yes." My eyes lit up, and I practically shoved the picture into her hands. "Do you know him? He's my father."

"Oh, he is?" the woman looked down at us, eyes softening. "You're trying to find him...?"

"He's been gone for weeks," I say blatantly. "Have you seen him?"

"I'm so sorry," she replied quietly, shaking her head. "My name is Annabella, but I know Quinten because of my husband, Lucas. They were good friends; he came over for dinner quite a few times. I'm not sure where he is, but I could ask my husband to see if he knows."

Hearing that my father had such close friends that I'd never even heard of before made me feel funny, but I nodded at the woman anyways, because the prospect for new information was too enticing.

"Yes, please."

Scarlet looked at me excitedly, tugging on my jacket as Annabella slipped her phone out of her pocket and held it up to her ear. She hummed as it dialed, and I felt my own excitement beginning to bubble up when she cleared her throat to greet her husband.

"Lucas, love," Annabella started warmly, "I have a question for you."

There was a brief pause as Lucas replied, but I couldn't hear it. Scarlet and I exchanged eager glances.

"Quinten Malvolia, have you talked to him lately? I stumbled across his two children at the Y; they've been looking for him." She bit her lip as her husband talked to her and, much to my surprise, slowly held out the phone to me. "He wants to talk to you directly."

"Okay..." I reached out and grabbed the phone, clearing my throat to mimic what Annabella said. Unsure of what to say, I decided to go with a professional, "Ellis speaking."

Lucas laughed loudly right into the mic, so I pulled back for a moment and threw a weary glance at Scarlet. "Definitely a Malvolia," he chuckled. "How long has your pops been missing, kid?"

"Three weeks."

"Well, I hate to break it to you, but he's not coming back."

"Oh, I know," I responded quickly, though I felt my throat go dry. "He's waitin' for me to find him."

"No he's not, kid. A man doesn't leave his family for three weeks to play a big game of hide and seek. He left for a reason."

"Do you know why?"

"No." Lucas paused. "I didn't mean to be the bringer of bad news, but let me tell you, Quinten doesn't do anything without a purpose. If he runs, you won't catch him. If he hides, you're not gonna find him."

My hand started shaking as I gripped the phone tighter. "You're wrong," I started firmly, then hung up and handed it back to Annabella. She looked down at me with concern in her eyes, but I didn't say anything to her. Instead, I grabbed Scarlet's wrist and pulled her into the Y, my father's photo still in Annabella's hands.

* * *

"Come back with your mother, and maybe we'll be able to do somethin' then, alright?" Officer Clemanto said, looking at me holding Scarlet's little hand with what could best be described as poorly masked disdain.

"Please," I begged, dropping Scarlet's hand and taking a step forward to the front desk. "I need to find my father."

"Your mother filed a missing person's report already," he responded shortly, typing on his computer. "But I can't legally disclose more than that without her present."

"But I'm family!"

"You're a kid." The officer glanced up from his computer and turned his attention to Scarlet, raising an eyebrow. "Shouldn't you be here with a parent anyway? She looks six."

"I'm eight," she piped up, stepping forward to be by my side. Officer Clemanto appeared unimpressed.

"Listen, if you don't go home soon, I'll have to call your mother to pick you up," he warned, resuming his typing. My pulse quickened.

"You can do that?"

"Can't I? we have her number on file since she reported your father."

"Please don't do that!"

(to be continued...)

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Please join us at our next meeting!

teen zine is a publication of the Huntley Area Public Library's teen writers' club and includes members' work as well as submissions from area teens in grades 6 – 12. If you would like to submit your writing or artwork for review and possible inclusion in a future issue of the zine, please fill out a submission form (available at the library's Information Desk), or use our online submission form: www.huntleylibrary.org/teen-zine

