

# Phase

When Submission Is Not An Option



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# CHAPTER I

"Dianne! I need help changing!", a loud voice called out from down the hallway, demanding attention. My gaze lifted up from my studies, sighing before getting up and replying, "I'm coming, Jayden." *Can't he change himself?* Walking down the hallway of our house, I caught a glimpse of my sister packing her bag but searching for something else...Her tiny figure dashed around the room, almost wrecking everything, "What are you looking for?" Natasha stopped running around, turning to me with teary eyes, "I can't find my notebook for school and I can't remember where I last put it!" My gaze softened ever so slightly before stepping closer, "Did you look under your bed? In your drawers?" She quickly looked where I asked her if she looked and sure enough, she found it. *Just be patient with them.* Before she could thank me, Jayden yelled louder than before, "DIANNE!" My eyes narrowed slightly before calling out over my shoulder, "Yeah! I'm coming!" Natasha held back a giggle before shoving her notebook into her bag and tossing it over her shoulder. Quickly, I turned away, striding to his room with more tension than before and opened his door, seeing him on the bed, head and foot stuck in his shirt. *How is that even possible?!* A chuckle escaped my lips as I leaned against the door frame, crossing my arms, "Wow...You almost got it." my voice was tinged with sarcasm, getting a glare from him. "Can you just shut up and help me?!", demanded he, his face red with frustration. His gaze was still blazing with anger but that didn't bother me one bit. Instead, I kept teasing him as I helped him, him just quiet taking the tease.

After a few painful minutes, his head and foot was out, everything in place. *You're welcome.* Jayden hesitated for a few moments before muttering a thank you and pushing past me. *He's still a softie even if he doesn't want to admit it.* That just left me unfinished. I still had to pack everything up and get changed but I

could do it later, my class starts at 12:45 am, which leaves me with...five more hours to go. "Guys! You're going to be late!", a deep stern voice called out from down stairs, making Natasha and Jayden run down stairs with their bags. I followed them and saw mom in the kitchen, making waffles, the sweet aroma filling the air, making everyone's mouths water. *Oh my soul...Mom always makes the best waffles.* Dad sat in the dining room, reading a newspaper, his glasses on the tip of his nose, making him look as stern as always. His piercing blue eyes flickered up, glaring at all of us. "Do you have everything? I'm only driving once.", his voice sent shivers down all our spines and I saw Jayden tense up. Everyone frantically nodded, not wanting to get on dad's bad side whilst mom placed a gentle hand on dad's shoulder, trying to break the ice. "Honey, don't be so hard on them, they're just kids.", her voice was as gentle as a feather. His eyes softened a bit and he just tilted his head back to look at her, a small smile playing on his lips. Jayden's face scrunched up in disgust at their close faces whilst Natasha beamed with happiness. *Sometimes I just wonder on which side mom is. Our side or dad's side...* "Dad, can we just go? We're going to be late and you know how mean Mnr. Johnson can get!", Jayden's voice cut through the intimate air, causing dad's face to go stern again. *Way to go, Jayden...*

By the time dad and the others left, me and mom were the only ones home. The atmosphere was peaceful and light as we spoke. "How's the studying coming along?", asked she as she washed the dishes and leaving them for me to dry, "It's going alright, just a lot, but I'll pull through." Her soft green eyes met mine, making all my tension ease. *I still don't know how she does that...She just does...* My lips twitched up into a small smile and she smiled in response.

After cleaning the entire house, it was time for me to go to school. I threw on some classic clothes and pulled my hair back into a messy bun. "Notebooks, check. Pencil case, check. Text books, check. Alright, looks like I have everything..." my voice slowly cut off when I heard a scream...An ear-splitting sound, cutting

through the silence. "Mom? Are you alright?" A few minutes later, mom's voice came through, light and cheerful, "Of course! I'm just starting with the food! Why?". Confusion struck. *If it wasn't mom who screamed, then who did?* I shrugged off the sense of unease before grabbing my bag and running down the stairs, yelling, "Bye mom! I'm off! Love you!" Mom yelled back and I left. As I walked, I still couldn't shake off the feeling that I was missing something...Instead, I took out my phone and headphones, playing some calming music. *Hopefully, I don't come home too late. I still have so much to do.*

# CHAPTER II

The moment I step foot in the house, Natasha ran to me with open arms, clearly happy to see me. Jayden leaned against a wall, crossed arms as he stared at us, looking disgusted. *Rude*. Dad was in the kitchen with mom, helping with dinner whilst Natasha ran off to fetch something in her bag. When I closed the door, the same scream echoed in my ears, louder than before...My eyes narrowed ever so slightly, trying to silence the scream without making it obvious that something was wrong. "Mind setting the table?", asked dad, making me jolt at the sudden voice. Mom looked at me with soft, concerned eyes before going back to cooking. I nodded and started setting the table. *The same scream? How is this possible? Same tone, only louder...* Natasha came running to me, waving her spelling paper up at me with a wide grin, "Look! I got another A+!". Her energy was infectious. A big smile played on my lips, happy for her. That was until another scream echoed through my ears, the sound ear-splitting... My face scrunched up in pain but I instantly put on a forced smile, trying to keep my cool before I lose it.

After dinner was done, the table was filled with chatter and laughs. Mom talked about what happened at home, dad who ran meetings after meetings, Natasha who got another A+ and Jayden failing yet another one. I just talked about my boring High school life. *Heh. Some things never change*. Suddenly, Jayden blurted out, "Someone was watching me at school!" A pin drop silence fell across the table, everyone's eyes on him. My eyes snapped to his face, searching for any fear but found nothing, no fear, no nothing... Dad looked furious whilst mom looked concerned, "Honey...Are you serious? When did this happen?" Jayden picked up a fork and took a bite, speaking with food in his mouth, "Just some random guy wearing black clothes and a weird clown mask. No big deal. He was probably just some cosplayer looking for attention." *No big deal? No big deal?!* Dad finally spoke through gritted teeth, his jaw tight, "During recess or during class time?" It took a few seconds for him to reply and when he did, my

blood ran cold... "Both.", said he, looking unbothered. Natasha was staring at him with wide eyes, looking scared whilst mom had her hands in front of her mouth. A sudden tension filled the air threatening to consume all of us... Jayden glanced up and offered a reassuring smile, adding, "I can protect myself, don't worry about me.". Everyone was quiet once again... *I sure hope he can protect himself...*

After dinner, I decided to help Jayden out with dishes. Jayden kept complaining and begging not to do it but the moment he heard that I was going to help, that mood turned upside down. I started washing and gave him the job to dry them. *Better than washing isn't it?* Unfortunately he didn't look too thrilled to dry off either... *What was going on with him?* Slowly, I looked at him and asked, "You sure you're okay?...It's not easy to...you know..." Jayden looked up, narrowing his eyes ever so slightly and kept quiet. *Seriously? I'm his sister, he should talk to me!* When I didn't get an answer, I pressed for answers, "Talk to me, I'm here to listen, really. I can help with support or give advice-" He cut me off with a sharp and raised tone, making my heart break, "Shut up! I'm tired of being belittled! I'm tired of everyone thinking I'm weak and I that I can't take care of myself! Just drop it! I'll deal with it on my own!" With that, he threw the cloth down and stormed to his room, leaving me there, frozen. *What? We haven't belittled him once... Does that mean he's getting...No...He couldn't possibly be getting bullied...* That thought made my blood run cold... *I have to tell mom and dad but...that isn't what he wants...*

I layed in my bed, staring up into the ceiling as I recall the conversation in my mind. *What do I do? I can't tell them but I also can't leave him to get bullied...What kind of sister would I be if I let that happen?!* I screwed my eyes shut, trying to keep the negative thoughts out without forgetting about the conversation earlier. My gaze swept across my room, landing on a picture of all of us looking happy... *What went wrong?* I got up, rubbing my eyes before going to the shower. *Perhaps a nice warm shower will do it...I hope...*

A wave of relief washed over me when I stepped out of the shower, drying my hair. Just then, there was a knock on my bedroom door. "Come in!" I called out, trying to fix my hair. The

footsteps were light, signalling mom's arrival. She stood in the doorway, smiling a bit, "Need help?" I chuckle and nodded, "A lot of tangles." Mom instantly grabbed a brush and started working out the tangles gently but firmly. *Man... I missed moments like this..Just peaceful and no distractions-* My thoughts were cut short when I heard a faint humming sound...Sounds like a...woman... I strained my ears to hear if I could zoom in on that sound but it abruptly stopped... *That was weird...* I decided to let it go and just relaxed further, letting her work out the tangles. *I'll be here a while...*

Finally mom finished and kissed me goodnight, before leaving. *I hope Jayden's feeling better...* I got into bed and switched off my lamp. *Well...I can't keep worrying now..gotta sleep, big day tomorrow...*

# CHAPTER III

The sound of my alarm blarring, made my eyes snap open in a start. Quickly, I looked over at my alarm only to see I'm late! *I'M LATE!* I threw off the covers, jumping up and running to get ready. *I can't be late!* I threw on some clothes before braiding my hair but looking at the time and deciding to just clip it up. *I don't have time for this!* Quickly, I ran down the stairs, greeting everyone and leaving. *I just hope I can still make it...*

Running down the streets, I couldn't shake off the feeling that someone was watching me...Everytime I looked behind me, I saw nothing nor no one... *What's going on?* Before I could think further, a car whizzed past me, missing me by hair's breath. My whole life flashed before my eyes as I stood there, feeling like my whole world turned upside down... *What. The-* My eyes followed the black car that's racing down the streets without a number plate. That's...weird...I quickly snapped out of it and when I turned around to return to running, I bumped into someone. "I'm so sorry! I-I didn't hurt you, did I?" I asked, looking up at them and the moment I did, my heart skipped a beat...There he stood...The same man with the clown mask and black suit...A cold shiver slid down my spine, making every nerve in my body spike in place. He cocked his head slightly to the side, staring at me. *Run...Dammit. RUN!* That's when I ran. I ran for my life. His feet pounded on the pavement, echoing through the streets, people making way for us. *No, no, no..This is bad. This is really, really bad!* My eyes snapped behind me, trying to see how close he was and oh my- he was close... Panic struck and I pushed myself to run faster. My breath came in short, ragged gasps, trying to escape...

The moment I turned a corner, I was greeted by a dead end. *NOT NOW!* I instantly spun around, seeing him standing there, his chest heaving slightly. My eyes widened with fear as he came closer, slowly reaching into his pocket...He pulled out a dagger and approached me, his movements smooth and predatory...*My life can't end here!* My eyes scanned the alley for any escape route



but found nothing...I cautiously took a step back before my back hit the wall. The guy stopped in front of me, tilting his head a bit and raising the dagger to my cheek. My heart thumped against my ribs, threatening to pop out and as if he could hear it, he lowered his head to my ear and whispered, his voice deep and raspy, "Don't tell anyone about this or you'll be the next thing at your parent's doorstep." The threat hung in the air, making my breath catch in my throat. I frantically nodded and he stepped back, tucking his dagger away... Relief washed over me as I looked at him. He looked at me one more time before turning away and walking off. The sound of my heart was still beating in my ears... *What just happened?! I didn't die, but I could've!*

By the time I stepped into the cafe, my boss stood behind the counter, his arms crossed over his broad chest...*Oh yeah...I'm late...* I lowered my head as I approached, knowing I would get the scold of my life. "You're late.", the sound of his deep voice giving me an instant migraine...*Okay...Let's just get this over with...*

*Finally, my lunch started...* I went to the back door to quickly eat something and continue my shift. One thing I noticed, no one was outside... *What?* My eyes scanned each corner and each direction but saw no one else. *Strange, usually this place was crowded with other workers...* With the wind whipping through my hair, I sat down and started eating, checking for any new messages. *No new messages.* As I was eating, a strange smell filled the air...The stench of decay and blood made my nose scrunch up in disgust. *What the hell is that smell?* I stood up and tried to follow the smell to try and get rid of it, but when I approached the garbage bins, the smell got worse... Hesitation kept me in place, staring at the bins, debating whether I should look or not. Grabbing courage, I opened the lid and my heart dropped in horror... *No...* In the garbage, a body decayed and brutally killed with a message carved into its head... *Never Wake Up.* Instantly dropping the lid, I stepped back in horror, my hands tightly over my mouth trying to stifle a scream. My vision blurred with unshed tears when I turned away and screwed my eyes shut, trying to get the picture out of my mind. The moment I closed my eyes a second time, a vivid image flashed in my mind... *A knife. A..Knife?...* I quickly opened my eyes, trying to forget about the knife and muttered, "I've got to tell someone about this.." *Whatever it takes...*

# CHAPTER IV

That night, I walked through the door, staring blankly at the floor. Dad sat in the living room, reading the latest newspaper whilst mom was making dinner. "Hey honey, how was work?", asked dad, glancing up from his paper, his glasses sliding off slightly. I forced a small smile and replied, trying to hide the fact that I was crying, "It was good, made at least a hundred-dollar tip." Dad looked at me, his expression shifting from friendly to a little more cold... "Were you crying?" My eyes widened, quickly shifting away, "What? No. I wasn't crying..It's just allergies." *Way to go Dianne. The oldest trick in the book.* Before dad could sell me out, mom called out that dinner was ready... *Thanks for the distraction mom...*

At dinner, I was quiet. Answering no questions asked and not saying a single word. *How do I tell them without creating an argument?* "Dianne!", the sudden call of my name, made me snap out of my thinking state. Glancing up, I saw Mom looking at me with her soft, concerned eyes whilst dad glared at me for not responding earlier. "Yeah? Sorry, I was just thinking about something.." Jayden poked his food as he made a witty remark, "Probably about something she saw but not wanting to tell us.." My gaze snapped to his, stunned. *How did he know?...* A billion question filled my mind, trying to make out how he knew I was hiding something. *Tell them, Dianne. It's not so hard-* "Mom, Dad, I have something I...want to tell you-" I was cut short when mom's phone rang and dad's watch beeped. Mom instantly apologized and picked up, smiling brightly when she heard her friend. Dad sighed, rubbing his temples before getting up and going to the study. Devestation hit, making my heart clench. *Now? I-I wanted to tell them about the body...* Natasha got up as well, gathering all the plates and utensils, taking them to the kitchen, leaving me and Jayden alone. Jayden glanced at me with a wide, mischievous grin. "What?", I asked him, trying to keep my cool but ended up failing miserably... "Come on, do tell", replied he, folding his arms over

his chest. A sigh escaped my lips and admitted, "I...found something and...I...can't forget about it..." Slowly, I glanced up but Jayden already left... *Why won't anyone stay to listen to me? Maybe I should just...let it go...*

As I lay in bed, I couldn't help but to replay the actions of the day. *The chase, the threat, the body...Who was this guy and why is this happening?* Closing my eyes, I let myself get lost in the dark of the night. *Perhaps I could...Figure everything out myself? Should I just let it go or try and find whatever is causing this madness?* My eyes opened again and I stared up at the ceiling. That's when I heard an ear-splitting scream coming from Natasha's room...Panic struck and I jumped up, sprinting to her room. *Please be okay...* I barged through the door, glancing around for any sign of her but saw she was...*fine?* Natasha looked up from her studies, looking me up and down, "What's wrong?" I stared at her with confused, worried eyes. "You..screamed?" She fully looked at me, looking just as confused as I did, maybe even more than me. "I didn't scream, I didn't even speak." *If...she didn't scream, then what was happening?* Slowly, I just stepped out of the room, quietly closing the door behind me. "*DIANNE!*" the brutal and devastating cry echoed through my mind once again, causing my face to twitch in pain. *Just ignore it, Dianne... Don't give your mind the satisfaction it wants...*

Braiding my hair in my bedroom, Dad suddenly entered. "You busy, kiddo?" I kept quiet and just continued with my hair. He closed the door behind him before coming to sit on my bed. "Everything okay?" I slowly stopped braiding my hair and turned to him with puffy eyes. "No.." Dad's expression changed instantly, opening his arms and inviting me for a tight and comforting embrace...That's when the dam broke. Tears fell freely, gripping his shirt tightly as I cried into his shoulder. He held my hair with his left hand whilst rubbing my back with his right. *I shouldn't be crying but...it makes me feel better...* Dad murmured, "It's okay...Cry it out...I'm here.." Just those words made me feel lighter. Like the whole world was lifted off of my shoulders and onto his. Dad's comforting words suddenly stopped and his whole body tensed up...I hesitantly pulled back and looked up at him only to see his gaze fixed on something behind me. Following his gaze, I saw nothing when looking at my closet. "Dad? What's wrong?", I asked carefully,

trying to grab his attention again. He snapped back into reality before answering, "Nothing, kiddo. Just thought I saw something. The sleep deprivation is finally getting to me." Dad added a dry joke at the end, trying to lighten the mood and I couldn't help but to crack a smile. Dad let out a light chuckle along with me before getting up and planting a soft kiss to the top of my head, "Good night, sweetie. Sleep tight." his voice was soft and loving... *Why couldn't he always be this loving?* I followed his movements all the way until he finally left, his posture slightly tense... *It's just the lack of sleep, he's been very busy the last few days...* I hope.

# CHAPTER V

Logan

After my encounter with Dianne, my mind kept returning to what I saw. Seeing myself walk past us when I comforted her made my hair stand up...Wearing the exact same thing I was wearing with the same hairstyle...*It's just your imagination, Logan.* Walking down the stairs to the kitchen, Amy stood washing the dishes, looking as beautiful as always. The moment I started approaching, a faint voice made me stop, *"Don't"* The voice was hollow and raspy, causing me to question my own sanity. Amy turned around and looked at me with a questioning gaze. "How's Dianne?", asked she, her tone gentle and sweet. I pinched the bridge of my nose, admitting, "Not good...She started crying and she still doesn't want to tell me what's wrong..." She strode closer, her footsteps light and took my hand in hers, "Just give her space...She'll come around, I promise..." I gently squeezed her hand before letting go and asking, "Are Jayden and Natasha in bed? They're writing test tomorrow and I don't want them staying up too late." Amy nodded and relief washed over me. *At least someone's listening...Now...For the meeting...*

Sitting in the study, I kept my eyes on the laptop screen as the other members spoke. The sounds of their voices started to become distant as I replayed the conversation with Dianne. I stared blankly at the screen rarely focusing on the task at hand. A sudden giggle filled the room, childish and muffled. A shiver ran down my spine, making every hair on my body stand up. I looked up and the giggle abruptly stopped...*What the...* Slowly I returned to the meeting when the giggle came through again...Louder and louder...My gaze snapped up and the moment it did, I wish I hadn't seen what I just saw...There I stood...Staring at myself with a twisted smile...Anxiety and fear mixed together like oil and water, not knowing which one to feel...Trying to shift deeper into my chair, the guy came closer and the smile twisted more. *What the-* My thoughts were cut short when the guy suddenly spoke, "Admit it." I blinked and then...he was gone...Rubbing my eyes, I glanced back at the door again and still didn't see him again...*This sleep deprivation is seriously getting to me...*

Waking up with a massive headache, I glanced at the alarm. *07:30 am.* A groan escaped my lips when I sat up, rubbing my temples. *Another sleepless night...* Throwing off the covers, I got up and started getting ready for work. Combing my hair and adding gel, I glanced at the mirror, my eyes roaming across my own face. *Eye bags...Great..Now I look even more tired than usual...* Turning on the tap, I washed my face but when I dried my face, my heart almost stopped. There he stood again, behind me in the mirror with his twisted smile. His eyes were wider and his smile grew after last night... *What's going on?!* I closed my eyes and took a deep, opening them again, he was gone... *I think it's time to get a sleep therapist to get some serious help. I'm going insane.*

On my way to the therapist, I couldn't shake off the feeling that I was being watched. Everytime I turned around, there was no one. Turning a corner, I was caught in traffic...Slamming my head against the steeringwheel, a heavy sigh escaped my lips. *Just the perfect day to get stuck in traffic...* A black car pulled up beside me, also getting stuck, the windows tinted darkly. I couldn't help but to glance at it when the window rolled down. *What does this guy want now-* The driver was wearing a clown mask with a black suit...Wait...The guy slowly looked at me, making me tense slightly. *Isn't that the same guy Jayden said was watching him?...* Quickly avoiding eye contact, I returned my gaze to the road up ahead. *Act cool, act normal.* The moment traffic got better, the black car sped off, leaving everyone else in the dust.

"Yes, an appointment for 12 pm is fine," I said, as the receptionist wrote down in her book. "Alright, sir. You can come back later for your appointment." She gave a friendly smile and I smiled back, thanking her. *Good riddance. Now I can get my sanity back. Hopefully.* Walking out of the phsyiatric hospital, I glanced at my watch. *Still got an hour before my appointment, might as well make the best of it. Coffee shop, here I come.* As I was walking, I saw that the streets were more crowded than usual...A sense of unease washed over me the moment I heard a woman speak, "Did you hear about the incident?" Pushing past them, I just decided to ignore them, thinking they were just being paranoid but when I came to the crossing, the whole world turned upside down... *What...happened...* On the pavement before me, laid a man, crooked and broken, blood pooling around his head...My eyes were

frozen in place, staring at the man... *Who...would do such a thing?...* Before I could turn away, something caught my eye. In the corner of my eye, I spotted the same man with the clown mask earlier, staring at me as if I was his next target...Fear finally gripped me, feeling like a hand was pushing down onto my chest. It's getting harder to breathe. *Get out of there, Logan...Get out of there!* Even though I wanted to run, my legs wouldn't cooperate...The sound of people screaming finally came through and that was my key to run. So, I ran. I ran for my life. *Coward. You're being such a coward!*

Bardging through the coffee shop's doors, everyone's gaze landed on me, staring at my trembling and exhausted figure. *I'm not used to running like this anymore...* I flashed my best 'Don't worry about me' smile before going to the counter to order a caramel latte. *That should take my mind off of things.*

Waiting in the waiting room of my new therapist, I couldn't help but to bounce my leg with anxiety. *What if I'm too crazy? What if he can't help me? What if it's just the lack of sleep? What if-* The 'what if' thoughts were cut short when the assistant called my name, "Mr. Logan, he's ready for you." Slowly standing up, I followed her, trying to keep my anxiety to a minimum. The halls seemed longer than before...More quiet...

"I've been seeing myself walk around and...having a weird, twisted smile...I've never seen that and I think I might be losing my mind..", I admitted, staring up at the ceiling whilst the therapist was taking notes. "Where have you seen it?", asked he, looking up to get my reaction. "In my study, in the mirror...", I trailed off, trying to recall all my encounters with myself. *Why does all of this feel like a lie?* "It's just the sleep deprivation that's getting to you. I'll give you some better sleep medication and a new eating schedule. You'll be good as new after a week." John helped me sit up and handed me the perscription.

*I seriously just hope this will work...*  
*Don't let this just be a damn lie...*

# CHAPTER VI

"Dad, is everything okay? I heard you were at the phsyiatric hospital.", asked Natasha, her eyes big with curiosity and confusion. Mom was next to him, hand on his back whilst Jayden was fuming with rage. I tried to calm him down but ended up starting an argument instead... "You can't expect me to calm down if there's something wrong with dad!" growled he, his dark eyes sharp. My eyes narrowed to slits and I retorted, "It's hard enough to struggle and put up with your complaining all day! Why can't you just, be normal for once? Stop being such a disgrace!" The whole room went quiet, even Jayden... For once in my life, he looked... hurt... *Dianne... What have you done?...* Jayden balled up his fists and fought back tears as he turned away and stormed to his room. The sound of the door slamming shut made the house sound emptier... I turned to Natasha and she stared at me with shock and disbelief, questioning my own thoughts... *I... didn't mean to say that... I...* My gaze shifted to mom's and dad's but... they couldn't even look me in the eye.

Softly knocking on the door of Jayden's room, he called out, "Go away.." *Had he been crying?...* "Listen, Jay... I'm... sorry... I didn't mean to be so crude... I... I'm just worried about you and dad, and sis..." I trailed off, hesitating to push further... Before I could continue, the door opened and he stood there, gaze down, trying to fight back tears. Slowly I lowered to my hunches and took his face in my hands, "Jayden... Look at me... I'm sorry.." Jayden finally lifted his gaze to look at me, his eyes shining with unshed tears. "I'm sorry if I'm making it hard for you to stay focused..." Those words made my heart to break into more pieces than it should've. Without thinking twice, I pulled him into a tight hug, trying to comfort him as much as I could. His hands balled up in my shirt, finally crying in front of me. *He never cried in front of me or us before...* I murmured into his hair, "Better?" Jayden nodded his head slowly and I let go. "You're never a disgrace okay? You're the strongest person I know... Don't let anyone tell you otherwise." He nodded with a little more confidence, showing that his heart was lighter.



The next day, I sat in the living room, reading my newest book. It's a little more empty at home since dad was out of town for a business trip, Jayden at a sleepover and Natasha at a school fare. Which meant it was just me and mom at home. *Finally, some peace and quiet.* As I was reading, a sudden image of a fire filled my mind...*Strange...There was no fire scene in my book...* Confusion filled my thoughts but I pushed it aside and kept reading. Minutes after that image, mom got a sudden phone call from Jayden's best friend's mom... "Hello? Yes, this is me. Is everything okay?" , asked mom but what she heard next, made her drop her phone. I instantly sat up and asked, "Mom, what happened? Is everything okay?" Mom was too shocked with grief that she couldn't speak...The sudden feeling of unease filled the air causing my stomach to turn. "Jayden's dead..." mom's whisper hung in the air like a cold reality... My pupils dialated instantly, feeling my whole body going numb. "He...burned to death..." Realization crossed the moment she had said that...*The fire...The fire in my mind...No...No, no, no, no, no...* A cry of grief escaped my mouth and I fell to the ground, crying my heart out. Mom joined me, holding me tightly but not even her hugs helped to get the feeling of guilt and pain out of me. *This is all my fault...If I hadn't started that argument, none of this would've happened...*

Sitting in his room, eyes puffy and red, I stared at our family picture. My eyes roamed over his face, taking in each freckle and each mark on his face...*What went wrong?...*My vision started blurring with unshed tears once again the moment I stared too long at the picture. It was hard to except reality, to except that he was gone...*He was still so young...*I quickly wiped the tears away when mom walked in, trying to appear strong but she could see through my facade. "Oh honey...I know it's hard...", mom's voice cracked with sadness and I looked away, afraid to let her see my true pain. "What happened? How did he...", I trailed off, struggling to find the right words. Mom looked away, her tone dropping to a sad whisper, "They..were in the kitchen, baking some cookies when one of the gas bottles exploded...The friend's okay but Jayden..." Mom sniffled, crying again... "Call dad...Tell him to come home and tell Natasha to come home as well...We can't keep this from them.."

Hell broke out when the others heard the news...Dad almost had a heart attack of anger and grief whilst Natasha kept denying reality. I couldn't bare to see my whole family fall apart like this so I ran upstairs to my room, slamming my door shut.

After what felt like hours of crying, I finally found the courage to continue with my studies. Grabbing my books out of my bookshelf, I looked at myself in the mirror, but the moment I did, I saw something that made me freeze... *I saw you...* A cold shiver ran up my spine into my neck. *Saw what?...* Quickly looking away, I brushed it off and sat at my desk, opening my math book. *Just shut out all the distractions and focus.*

# CHAPTER VII

A few months after Jayden's death, things were never the same...Mom was more protective over us whilst dad grew more strict. Natasha was never allowed to sleep over with her friends nor go to late night events at school. As for me, I wasn't allowed to go to the library alone anymore. Either dad would take me or I wasn't allowed to go.

"Mom, can I please go to that science fare? It starts at twelve. Please mom...", begged Natasha, trying every trick up her sleeve...The puppy eyes, the jutting lip, everything. Mom let out a long sigh and reluctantly agreed. Natasha was beaming with joy and pride, knowing she got to her. I couldn't help but to let out a light chuckle at her silly nature. The atmosphere was lighter and more fun when mom also started laughing. *This was what I was used to...The light atmosphere, the jokes...* Natasha suddenly grabbed my hand and dragged me to her room. "Help me pack for the science fare!", she didn't ask, she just assumed I would help. "Hey, where's the please?" , I asked, raising an eyebrow. She gave a sheepish grin and answered, " 'Please' can you help me?", there was a way she emphasized the 'please' that made me raise my eyebrow even more. *Was that sarcasm?* Before I could return the sarcastic remark, the sound of shattering glass suddenly filled the air. Loud and clear. *What the-* My head whipped behind me but I saw nothing, the windows weren't broken, the pictures were intact, vases weren't broken... *What...Where...* She must've seen my shook up body language because she asked, "Are you okay? You just whipped your head as if you heard something.." Putting on a brave face, I brushed off her concern and replied, "I'm okay, just heard something. Our neighbours are greek, remember? They're probably having a party." Natasha chuckled and I grabbed her hand, "Come on, let's join the party."

Running down the stairs with her hand in mine, I grabbed two plates in the kitchen without mom knowing and handed her one, "Let's smash these to bits." We both ran outside to the backyard and on the count of three we smashed the plates whilst chiming together, "WHOMPA!"

Our laughter mixed together that filled the air, creating a much lighter atmosphere.

By the time we arrived at her school, we were a bit late. *Most likely 10 minutes late.* Natashia ran to her stall and packed everything out. "Go, Natashia! Show them your big brain!", I beamed, throwing my hands in the air. She shot back a bright smile and stretched her arms before doing her new experiment. *Wait...Why isn't she wearing the safety gear?...* Slight anxiety pushed up to the surface but I decided to push it back down, telling myself I was just being delusional. That's when disaster struck...

As she was mixing up the substances, a bird suddenly sat on the table and she got the scare of her life...With that scare, she mixed too much of one substance that the base exploded...*NATASHIA!* Each shard shot into her neck, cutting the main pulse and she fell down... "NATASHIA!", the desperate cry got ripped out of my throat, sprinting to her as fast as I could. The air was filled with gasps and screams but I couldn't care less about them. The moment I turned to look behind the stall, a gasp escaped my lips. I could feel my eyes shake with horror as I stared down at her...Her chest wasn't rising, nor falling..She was just...still...

*No...No...What...How...Why...* I dropped to my knees beside her, reaching out with trembling hands. Brushing a strand of hair out of her face, my finger tips brushed against her cold skin...Blood pooled around her neck, the shards lodged deep into her skin...*It's...too...late...She's dead...*A strong pair of hands grabbed my arms, pulling me away from her and I cried out in anguish. I tried to dig my heels into the ground to try and stop them from dragging me away but they wouldn't budge. *WHY WAS THIS HAPPENING?!* My whole body strained against their grip, trying to get out, but no luck...They just kept dragging me away from the scene and into the empty school.

Looking up at the person, my heart almost stopped. The...clown man...Just when I wanted to scream, he clamped my mouth shut with a gloved hand, staring at me. I swear he must've heard the speed of my heart beating because he asked in a hollow voice, "Scared?" A frantic nod made him let go of me and I scrambled back. The guy was on his hunches, staring at me as I tried to get

away from him. Without breaking eye contact, I bumped into someone behind me...Turning around I jolt from the sudden appearance of dad. "Where's Natasha..." asked he, barely containing his fury. I didn't answer, instead, I turned around only to see the guy was gone...*How does the guy keep dissapearing like that?!* Dad grabbed my shoulder and turned me to him, his eyes piercing into my soul. "She...died...", I admitted, shrinking away, afraid of the real dad I could see...

At home, dad was shaking with anger, blaming me for the incident...Just standing there, I took the blame, staring at the floor. *It's all my fault...I shouldn't have taken her to the science fare.* Guilt filled me completely and I could feel my heart breaking with each blame.

*I'm so sorry dad...I didn't know...*

# CHAPTER VIII

Logan

It's been a week since Natasha's death...Things are getting worse...I think I'm starting to lose my mind completely...The grief and anger was starting to take me over...*Stay strong, Logan...*

"I can't eat breakfast now, I'm going to be late for work.", Amy looked at me with her beautiful green eyes and a tinge of guilt crossed my face. "Fine...I'll only eat a toast on my way to work." Her smile grew once again and she handed me a strawberry jam toast. Taking the toast, I kissed her cheek and called out, "Bye, Dianne! I'm heading off to work-" I was cut off when Dianne suddenly ran down the stairs and asked, "Dad, don't go...Can't you just stay home? We...need you.." Hesitation kept me from replying instantly and after a few minutes, I finally replied, "Listen, kiddo, I've got to get to work. I can't take off.." The disappointment that crossed her face tugged at my heart...*Don't get guilt tripped.*

Turning my car keys, the car wouldn't start...*Not now...I can't be late...*A long sigh escaped my lips and I got out of the car, slamming my door shut. *Gotta call a car repairer, but now, I'm going to have to take the subway.*

Walking down the busy streets of New York, I couldn't ignore the fact that it was a beautiful day. The sun was shining and there were no clouds in the sky. As I was waiting for the traffic light to go red, I tried to come up with a good enough excuse of why I'm going to be late but nothing came to me. Yet. Just then my phone went off and when I picked it up, I saw Amy's name on the screen. "Yes, love? Did I forget something?" The moment I asked that, her voice came through, panicked and cautious, "Just...be careful. Dianne admitted of something she saw." Unease slowly crept up my back but I pushed it aside, "Nothing bad is going to happen. I'm fine. Just tell her she's being paranoid." With that, I hung up, completely ignoring the warning.

At the subway, it was crowded. More crowded than usual. I looked around at the people around me, remembering everything. To the things I've lost and to the things I still have. Seeing a family

nearby, I was reminded of my own. Jayden, Natasha, Dianne, Amy...Well...Only Amy and Dianne are left...I've lost my only son and my youngest daughter...Tears pricked at the corner of my eyes as I recall all our happy and fun memories...Looking to my right, I saw a rich man wearing an expensive suit with his hair combed back perfectly. Two years ago, I've lost my job as a CEO at this big company called 'Phase corporation'. I was accused of fraud and blackmail...*Damn company...* Looking up ahead, I saw this old woman with what seemed like her son, scolding him. *Heh.* Reminds me of my mom...She would scold the hell out of me...

Thinking about my whole life, I heard a sudden scream echoing through the subway...*What the...* A guy fell into the railway and everyone just stood and watched as he fell. *What's wrong with these people?! Aren't they going to do something?! Where's the security?!* Without hesitating once, I sprint forward to the rails and looked down, seeing a guy laying flat on his face. Quickly, I looked left and right for any sign of the train and when I didn't see it, I dropped down. The rocks crunched under my polished shoes when I landed and I shook the guy, "Hey, buddy. Get up, we can't stay here for much longer. Get up!" No response. *Don't tell me this guy is unconscious...* With my patience running out, I shook the guy harder whilst almost screaming, "Get up! We can't stay here!" When there wasn't a response, I decided to turn him around but when I did, my whole body froze...I laid there, with a twisted smile and wide eyes, following my every move...

Before I could get up, a sudden yell snapped me out of it, "HEY! GET OUT OF THERE NOW!", Looking up, I saw a security guy, yelling at me to respond. Confusion hit since the train was nowhere to be seen and I looked down at myself but I was gone? I looked up again at the guard, not responding or moving but when I wanted to get up, the guard let out a desperate yell, "GET OUT NOW!" Slowly, I looked to my right but when I did, every muscle in my body spiked into place...There was the train...Speeding towards me with unnatural speed. *Move, you idiot. MOVE! NOW-*

The train cut off every thought...The last sounds ringing in my ears were the astonished, horrifying screams of the surrounding crowd.

# CHAPTER IX

It's been four hours since we got the news of dad...Mom was a crying mess whilst I bared too much grief to even cry...Mom wouldn't stop crying and she clung to me as I stared blankly at the wall. *Why was this happening to me?...I'm losing everyone I love...* "Honey, I'm so sorry...Dad's gone...My husband's gone..." I didn't have a response to that at all...All I could think of was...

*Dad's dead.*

Laying in bed, I stared blankly at the ceiling of my once bright room...*First Jayden died, then Natasha...Now dad...What's happening?...Why did they die like that?...It's like they were being targeted...*A massive headache started consuming my mind with a searing pain and I sat up. *Maybe I'm thinking about this too much...*I sat up and decided to go make some coffee. Walking down the stairs, a strange cold breeze hit my face. *The windows aren't open...*I turned to the kitchen and there stood mom, staring at something through the window... "Mom?...Is everything okay? Is there something outside?", I asked, trying to figure out what she was seeing but when I looked in the same direction she was looking, fear gripped my heart. There he stood, holding a knife. The same knife that flashed through my mind... Slowly I reached for mom's hand and she looked at me, confused. "Honey, is everything okay? What do you see?", her tone was soft and cautious. *Wait, so...she..didn't see what I saw?...What's going on?!*

Looking at her, I forced a smile and teased, "Just the most beautiful woman in the world." She let out a sad chuckle and weakly squeezed my hand. *Don't show the fear...*Mom's tears started falling again, "Your father would always say that..." My smile slowly dropped and I just consoled her, trying to take most of the tears I could.

That noon, I was busy cleaning my room when a piercing scream filled the house...*It's just your mind...Don't listen to it...*The scream got louder and more desperate which made me snap back to my senses. *Mom's screaming...MOM'S SCREAMING!* Panic build up and



I sprint down stairs, trying to get to her as fast as I could. "Mom! Mom, are you okay? Where are you?!", I asked with a desperate tone, searching the bathroom, dining room and finally the bedrooms. *No sign of her...Wait...The kitchen!* Stopping in my tracks, I saw mom standing there, frozen in fear...*Mom?...* "Mom...Why are you screaming?...There's nothing-", I was cut off when I saw the guy behind her, gripping a knife tightly but not moving... "Mom...Don't. Move." Before she could move, the guy wrapped his arm tightly around her neck, keeping her in place with the knife pressed to her side... "Woah, wait...P-Put the knife down...", my lips quivered with each word, clearly fearful. The guy slowly tilted his head to the side, staring at me as if waiting for something. Something I didn't know he wanted. "She...She's all I have left...Please...I'll give anything you want...I...I didn't tell anyone about you..." I was desperate, trying to buy me some time to figure something out. A sudden knock made me jump and I looked at the door with a weird feeling. Looking back at mom, the guy was gone... "Honey...Are you okay?...Who were you talking to?...You scared me for a second there...", asked mom, tilting her head a bit. I completely ignored her question and went to the front door, opening it only to see our neighbours standing there, holding a box of pastries.

"We heard about your family and...we made this for you.", The woman held out the box with a gentle smile. I reached out with a shaking hand, taking the box with a slight nod, "T-Thanks, that was...really nice of you..." Her husband smiled and replied, "It's the least we could do. Take care of your mom and yourself, okay?" I nodded once again and they offered one last smile before leaving. My eyes followed them as they walked away, wondering why they brought things now when they didn't bring anything the day we moved here. Mom placed a hand on my shoulder and I just handed her the pastries. *I...feel like I don't know where to go or where to be anymore...*

Opening the door to my room, I got the scare of my life. There sat the guy on my chair, staring at me. "What...are you doing in my room?...How did you-" He cut me off with a raised hand and gestured to the open window. *Well, that explains it...* I slowly closed my door and sat down on my bed, his head following my movements. "What...are you doing here?...", my tone was hesitant

and tinged with fear. He turned to my family picture and picked it up with a steady hand, staring at it...*Don't ask anything...Just...go with it...* "Look what we could've had...", his tone was hinting at something deeper, something more sinister..."What...do you mean?", I slowly lowered my head before continuing, "...I...had that family...They..died-", he didn't give me a chance to finish my sentence when I heard mom's devastating cry of pain... My head whipped up to look at him but he was already gone...The first thing that came into my mind was that he hurt her...

Time stopped the moment I saw mom on the floor, bleeding out with a deep hole in her chest...I couldn't think anymore...Tears filled my eyes and I dropped to my knees beside her, applying pressure to her wound. "M-Mom, please, hold on. I-I'll get you out of here...", my voice cracked as I tried to ignore the blood on my hands, staining my pale skin. The guy stood over us, the knife loosely in his hand, blood dripping from the tip...*Ignore the blood, Dianne...Just ignore it...* Mom looked at me with wide eyes, her voice strained with pain, "D-Don't worry about me, I'm okay...You'll be...okay..." A single tear rolled down my cheek as the colour drained from her face...Her skin took a more pale colour and the life slowly drained from her eyes. *No..No..No..Mom please...Hang in there...* "None of this would've happened if you just admitted...", his bitter voice came through, staring down at me. Sudden screams and cries forced their way into my mind, causing a raw pain...Driving my blood stained hands into my hair, I tried to make the cries and screams stop with words like, 'stop' or 'no' but it made it worse...

*'Admit it' 'Admit it' 'Admit it'*

The voices were silenced when he touched my shoulder and my first reflex was to hit. My fist connected with his mask, cracking it slightly. *Wait...It's...glass?...* His head jerked aside, still. The sound of sirens pierced through the silence...*Someone called the cops...Someone called the ambulance...The neighbours.* Staring at mom's body, all I could think about was mom's death... *Why did this happen?...Why is this happening to me?...* The police barged through the door and pulled me away, assessing the damage, ignoring me completely. *What was going to happen now?...*

# CHAPTER X

The sounds of beeping machines were all I could hear as I stared at the hospital's bedding. *What went wrong?* I slowly lifted my gaze to look around, taking in all the decorations. A gentle nurse suddenly entered my room with a clip board, saying, "Welcome back, miss Dianne..." I just stared at her, my eyes weak and my face pale. She walked closer and placed down her clip board, getting a glass with water. "I'm glad you're awake.", her tone was soft and soothing, almost getting to me. She offered me the glass of water but I didn't take it.

"Tell me what happened, maybe I can help.", she offered, giving me a gentle smile but I just stared at her with lifeless eyes. Her smile slowly faded and concern crossed her face. My gaze shifted away and I stared at a girl who skipped past my room, holding a...clown balloon?! Everything came rushing back...The man, my siblings' death, mom and dad's death...My whole body switched into panic mode. My screams echoed through the quiet room, causing the nurse to jump with fright. Uncontrollable tears rolled down my cheeks and I thrashed violently... The nurse instantly pressed the 'help' button and tried to calm me down with soft words of comfort. *It's not working...I-I can't control myself...* Moments after, a professional doctor came running in with back up nurses. "Calm her down, her blood rate is too high! She's going to have a heart attack!" the doctor sounded worried but stern.

It took at least an hour to calm me down fully. The doctor's chest was heaving with exhaustion, staring at me like I was crazy. "I think it's time to send her to a therapist...We can't keep her...", his voice was quiet as he whispered to the nurse who nodded. *No...I...I don't want to go there...I want to go home...* A single tear rolled down my cheek as I stared at them with a desperate gaze. "Don't..." I whispered, trying to make them change their mind but I couldn't... *It's too late...*

On my way to the phsyiatric hospital, I sat in the backseat of the doctor's car, staring at my blood stained hands. *The blood still didn't come off...* The doctor looked in the rear view mirror and

asked, "You alright? You've been staring at your hands for at least fifteen minutes.", I deliberately looked up, staring at him with empty eyes before looking down again. *I can't believe I'm going to the psychiatric hospital...I'm not going insane...I'm fine...*

Laying on the couch, my eyes were glued to the lights built into the ceiling. *How did this happen?* Looking to my left, I saw the guy sitting on a chair next to the couch, the crack in his mask still visible... *He...didn't bother to fix it?...* "Who are you?...", I asked with a sad and miserable voice, my eyes roaming over the mask. The guy just kept staring at me for a few more seconds before letting his hand rise to the mask, hesitantly pulling it off...My eyes widened with shock as I stared at...her?...*That's...me...* I looked at myself sitting next to me with a somber expression...Confusion was the only thing on my mind...*How...can I be there whilst I'm here laying down?...* I tried to look for answers in her eyes but she showed nothing, only deep sadness and recognition. *Recognition of what?..* "Dianne.", called a voice. Soft and muffled. Looking away from myself, the voice came again, a little louder than before. My eyes narrowed slightly until I heard the same voice again, "Dianne..." *Who's calling me?...* Before I could look at myself again, the voice came through, louder, "DIANNE!"

I snapped out of it.

"Dianne, do you remember?...", asked my therapist, looking at me with deep concerned eyes...My whole world disappeared when I realized the therapist was talking to me. "Do you know why you're here?" It took me a minute to figure out why he asked me that but when I did, I answered, "No..." Doctor Braidy let out a soft sigh and asked, "Do you atleast remember her?" *Her?...He meant mom?...* Tears filled my eyes and I looked down, "The..man..killed my mom...A...guy with a clown mask..." my voice trailed off, letting him know what happened but when I looked up again, he admitted, "There wasn't a man with a mask, Dianne..." I looked at him with sadness and confusion, trying to figure out why he would say that. *What do you mean there wasn't a man with a mask?...I saw it...I saw him...* "I-I'm not lying...I'm telling the truth...", Doctor Braidy cut in gently, "You're lying to yourself..." My gaze fell down to the floor, not believing him until he had to tell me the truth...

"You were five years old when someone broke into your home. Your father got killed in front of you by the robbers, because of that, you developed significant trauma which caused night terrors and hallucinations. The trauma worsened over the years... One day when you turned fourteen, you had a terrible night terror which caused you to hallucinate... Your mother tried to console you but you saw the robber and killed your own mother. She... unfortunately didn't make it and you've been here ever since. It's been three years, Dianne... The shock was so big that your mind couldn't process what you did so you relived this life, acting like you still had a mother and a father with siblings... Everytime your siblings and family died, it was your subconscious who tries to bring you back to reality and accept what you did.", he stopped for a moment to let those words sink in before adding, "I'm sorry, Dianne..." Everything came rushing back like a flood. Everything started making sense and my memories finally came back. *I...killed my mom...* The words felt bitter even in my own mind. "It's time to move on, Dianne... You can't keep living like this... It's not good for your mental or physical health..." he trailed off when I looked at him and tears filled my eyes once more.

"Do you think she can forgive me for what I've done?...", my question hung in the air, making the atmosphere feel heavy with guilt and uncertainty. He gave a soft smile, "You're her daughter, she already did..." My heart burst with acceptance and guilt that tears started falling. Doctor Braidy offered me a tissue but I didn't take it, instead I hugged him. "I'm so sorry...", I whispered, repeating the same words over and over again. He rubbed my back and replied, "It's okay, Dianne. You're okay. We'll try our best to help you remember and forget about what you've done. I promise." Those words were all I needed to hear. My heart was feeling lighter than before and I felt better, knowing I can grow from what I've done and accept the past.

*I'm so sorry for what I've done mom... I promise to grow and forgive myself for what I've done.*

**Phase 1 : Acceptance :** Complete

**Phase 2: Try And Move On :** ...

# The End





