



Silence

Marjorie has been at Sugar Grove now for a few years. She quietly walks through the halls and observes all that goes on. She takes some solace in being quiet, but now, her voice needs to be heard. All the encouragement in the world can't get her to speak words. Her drawings; that is another story. Marjorie's drawings have become her words that unlock doors to reveal hidden events that happen at Sugar Grove. For her friend's sake, Marjorie has to grab her inner strength and quietly save the day. Can she do the same for herself?



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Marjorie walks into the community room this morning and looks around at the scene for today. Over to her left she sees Mr. Martone doing what he always does, playing chess by himself. Poor thing, she thinks to herself, after all those years of teaching music, an accident caused him to go deaf. Marjorie watches his silence with empathy. Scanning the wall further she sees ‘the twins’ dealing out cards to each other. They aren’t really twins, but ever since they have been here at Sugar Grove they have been inseparable; the staff keeps an eye on them anticipating mischief; only Marjorie knows they’re harmless and actually quite protective of the people around them. The far wall has had its drapes drawn so everyone can see and/or go to the courtyard outside, Marjorie sees that her favorite bench is free so she heads outside but not before she takes a quick peek to her right to verify that everyone else is in their normal places. Satisfied, she continues on out the door to her bench under the willow tree, the one that has four bird’s nests in it this year.

Marjorie has been at Sugar Groves for many years now, since right before she turned sixteen, to be exact, when her father did not know what to do with her anymore. He was told that she has withdrawn from the world and needs a place that can bring her back. Marjorie thinks putting her here was simpler for her father than having to find out what had happened. She doesn’t blame her father; she loves him and understands why she is here. She also likes the solitude it has given her. The day silence took over her life, the day she became invisible to everyone, was also the day she decided that the only ones who cared about her, don’t need to hear her voice. They ‘listen’ to what she doesn’t say. The staff here has been nice, as long as you avoid Nurse crabby, Marjorie doesn’t know what her problem is lately, but she does seem overly crabby in recent days. She has never been particularly pleasant, but lately, it’s been worse. Marjorie will keep her ears open, she is likely to find out the answer before anyone else. That is the advantage to being silent, everyone assumes you can’t hear either.

Sitting on her bench gives Marjorie a chance to think, think about all those chances she has had to speak up but still chose not to. Speaking up always got her in trouble in the past, or someone else. It seemed that every time she spoke up, someone in her life either left or got hurt. No good comes from speaking the truth. People only want to hear lies; they like to fool themselves into thinking that all is right with the world in general and that all is right within their own world too.

On a clear day, like today, Marjorie likes to think about her young self. Things were different then, her family was intact, her friends were still her friends, and her school still appeared to be a safe place to be. It is on days like today that she would have run over to friend’s house to play all day outside. They would hop from one house to the other playing different things, eating lunch at a different person’s houses each time and sometimes dinner at yet another’s. Now the thought of being around those same people only churns despair.

Imagine walking into someone’s house and seeing someone you knew there. One minute you are playing with your friend, then a man comes in the room and you recognize him and jump up and say, “Hi Fred!” because you have seen him a dozen times before. Imagine also, a woman walking in at the same time and watching her cry. The next thing you know, Fred is gone from your life and so is your friend. They moved away a week later.

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That was Marjorie’s first stint of quiet. She remained quiet for a long time because the whole situation felt like her fault, she had no one to talk to, that person moved away. Her mom was upset too that Fred moved away. It was a real downer. She would walk around her house and listen to her mom cry, she would listen to her say things like, “I never knew, oh god I never knew.” Then her dad would come home and ask why she was upset and her mom would answer, “someone I know died.”

That hurt even more. Did Fred really die? Did her friend die? No one would talk about them and when she asked her dad he said, “Her father got a job transfer honey, no one is dead. I’m sure she will write to you soon.”

Shortly after that Marjorie received a letter in the mail from her friend, it had two sentences that’s all, she remembers them specifically. “Thank you for ruining my life. Tell your mom to sleep in her own bed for once.” At the ripe old age of nine, Marjorie did not know what to do with this letter. Her mom had been so upset by Fred leaving, she didn’t think to show the letter to her. Instead, she showed it to her dad.

The next thing she knew her parents were fighting every night. Her brother saw the letter on their dad’s desk and came to yell at her too. Then, as he saw her crying, he realized she did not understand what it said and he sat down and explained all of what was meant in the letter to her in a way that a nine-year-old could understand. Either way she looked at the situation, her best friend leaving was her fault. She opened her mouth to say hi to Fred. That WAS her fault after all.

Marjorie shivers at the slight breeze blowing from her willow tree today. This has been her thinking spot since she first came here. She knows that if she looks straight out from here, her house is about six miles away as the crow flies. There are twenty-five people in this facility now. When she came there were only eighteen. Most of the patients are really nice, they seem to respect and understand her silence. She is one of the youngest ones here. The staff has a hard time dealing with her silence sometimes. The upside though, is when she walks the halls some days to occupy her time, they will all talk around her because they know she won’t tell anyone what she hears. What they don’t know is that Marjorie writes everything down, though her writing is as silent as her voice. One day, someone here will figure out how to read what she writes. Her father and brothers know how, she writes them letters all the time and they respond in kind.

Her father and younger brother come by once or twice a week together and her dad comes by a couple more times to chat and let her know how things are going at home. He loves her and she knows he does, he keeps telling her the minute she wants to open up, he is there to listen. Her birthday is coming up, she should have graduated from high school with her class but instead her father brought her all her studies here and she finished all her work and handed the books and papers back to him. He had made arrangements with the school, and they accepted all her work. Sometimes for exams, he would bring the teacher so they saw she didn’t cheat. But now high school is over and she will be turning nineteen, a year when she should have been in college, not here.

Marjorie would like to go to school one day, but she is not sure how she can hold down a job and never speak to anyone at the same time. She has promised herself it will happen before



she is twenty. She told her dad that too, he cried that day. Marjorie is not sure he believes her but he wants to, she can tell.

Most of the staff here are easy to avoid when you want to, they like to leave her alone. ‘The silent one’ is how they refer to her amongst themselves, she hears them say that phrase all the time. Marjorie is not sure how they think she can’t hear. She hears more than they know. She hears the conspiracies being made between the night staff personnel in order to get some of the day shift in trouble, she hears Dr. Pang and nurse Harper in the closet all the time. She knows they have been giving some of the patients more medicine than they need so that they ‘stay calm’ as they put it.

Marjorie knows all, she writes it all down too. The who, the when, the where and even some of the how, all in her books in her room. Her dad keeps her supplied with journals and she uses her wooden stick to “write” in them. It’s better than invisible ink. She presses down and writes all she sees and hears.

Never again will she open her mouth up but maybe one day someone will learn to read what she writes. Then she won’t have to speak up again. Part of her wants to believe that she can help someone someday and not ruin another life. She knows her dad can read them but he never asks what she has written so far, he only asks her to tell him when she needs a new one.

Marjorie gets up from her bench and starts walking around the compound, no she starts to run because her mind is going back to places she does not want to visit and running helps her clear her head. Out of breath, she leans over and puts her hands on her knees and takes a few deep breaths but the memories keep flooding in. Why now? Why this? Marjorie gives in and lets the memory take over thinking that when she does, it will be out and done and she can go back to her bench and relax.

It was the summer of being eleven. All of her friends were going to the same day camp and her mom convinced her that she should join them. On the bus they were happy each morning, during the day they each had their own set of activities and they would report to each other on the bus ride home. That all changed on the first day of second session. Marjorie remembers very well:

When they all got to camp, the girls were sorted into different bunks than before so that they can meet new friends. The day started off easily as most camp days do. Then it was lunch time. One of the girls opened their thermos to a powerful smell. Marjorie knew that smell, it was alcohol, because her dad would have a drink once in a while after a hard day at work. But this wasn’t work nor was it hard so she didn’t understand why this girl needed any. Marjorie did what she does best, she watched. She saw the girl pouring some of her drink into one of the other girl’s drinks and then sat down and watched. Soon the girl came back all hot and sweaty and took a large drink, but then the unexpected happened. She fell to the floor and was flopping around like a fish out of water. The counselors all came running and when they asked what happened everyone at the table went silent, except for Marjorie, she pointed right to the girl and said, “she poured alcohol from her thermos in that girl’s punch,” thinking she did the right thing.

The rest of the day she had been worried about the girl who left in an ambulance. She couldn’t take her mind off of what she saw happen to her. She had walked around the camp grounds aimlessly when she was suddenly ambushed by the rest of the girls that were at that table



earlier in the day. She was punched and kicked for what felt like an hour and they all were yelling at her about how stupid she was for reporting on their friend.

No one at camp asked why she was bruised up the rest of the day. When she got home, she told her mom that she can’t go back to camp because they kicked her out for fighting. She told her mom she fought a girl who was trying to hurt another girl. Her mom was proud of her for sticking up for someone who couldn’t do it themselves and allowed her to quit camp. No questions asked. But the rest of her summer she thought about that girl and how she looked on the floor, never knowing what happened to her.

That school year her mom transferred Marjorie into a private school because she didn’t want her around the girls from camp if they were such a bad influence. Here is where she found some good people to talk to. Simple people who liked doing the right thing like she did. Kids who enjoyed watching the clouds go by without talking, like they saw the teenagers do, but they weren’t yet there, her friends were the kind of friends who still wanted to be eleven and not rush to be fifteen yet. Here, she was happy, for a couple of years anyway.

Life went on as usual. Day in and day out until the day a new girl showed up. She was different than most and yet something about her seemed familiar. Marjorie could not put her finger on what was familiar. She watched this new girl as much as everyone else did. They weren’t sure what to make of her. She was quiet all the time and barely spoke loud enough in class for anyone but the person next to her to hear.

One day, in Science class, the teacher was discussing the dangers of certain chemicals and how they can affect a person if accidentally ingested. How some items can literally kill you from the inside out and that they are found in your home, so everyone went home that night to make sure none of these items were in their house, and if they were, making sure they were labeled as dangerous. Upon inspecting one pantry, Marjorie came upon a hidden bottle of wine. It was the kind that Uncle Leon always brought over for her mom. She left it there thinking it was supposed to be a surprise to him for a birthday or something. Then, as she walked away, it hit her, she went running out to her mom and said she thinks that the girl from camp who was seriously injured from the alcohol incident is in her school now.

Her mom spoke with her about how she should befriend the girl and find out before she made any assumptions. The next day in school she did that. She found the girl before first period and said her name from behind her. The girl turned around but then looked to the ground. “What’s wrong Annie? Don’t you remember me? We went to camp together years ago. I was the one who told the adults what that other girl put into your drink? Please tell me you remember me?” Marjorie remembers saying this so many years ago as clearly as she remembers saying hi to the new doctor in charge of the facility yesterday.

Slowly the girl had looked up at her. She found her eyes, Marjorie stood there smiling. In one sentence Marjorie’s world was crushed, “The girls at camp told me you were the one who put it in and that is why you left camp, that you got kicked out.” Marjorie had taken a step back from Annie and thought about how that could have happened. Oh, yes, they needed to get back at her even more. She looked at Annie and gave her a complete account of what happened and even



showed her the scars on her arms from where they had hit her with sharp objects and where they had dragged them across her forearms.

Annie looked at her and asked, "How do I know you're not a cutter?" Marjorie remembers being completely put off by this. She thought about Annie's words for a minute and then asked if the girl who had done the horrible act was actually in camp when she got back. The answer was no, she asked if the other girls beat her up too so that she would never tell on their friend again. There was a long pause to that one. Marjorie knew the answer. To this she said, "believe what you want, I thought I was doing the right thing. Clearly, they hurt you more than me. If you need a friend here, simply holler," and then she walked away.

Annie did not come back to school the next day, or any time after that. Marjorie was already formulating the concept that her words were poison from other experiences, now she was almost sure that it is true. Her formal silence began about a month later. She was fifteen then...

Marjorie stands up, she finally realizes that she has been hunched over this whole time. As she gets up, she is obviously a bit light headed and she takes a step back for a moment of balance. Nurse Crabby is walking towards her, no actually running towards her. She stands still and waits for her to arrive. The nurse slows down as she gets close to Marjorie. "Hey honey, I saw you leaning over for a while. I came running because I thought you might be throwing up or something. But I see you haven't so I've run for nothing, huh?" she says.

Marjorie looks at her in surprise, she didn't know that Nurse Crabby cared enough to watch out for her. She looks back at her straight in the eye hoping she will 'hear' her today. As Marjorie looks into her eyes and tells her that it was only a bad memory, the nurse takes a step forward and puts her hand around Marjorie's shoulder and says quietly, "I see you are shaken by something, a memory perhaps. You're safe now, walk with me ok. I'll take you straight to the common room, they are serving the good ice cream for a snack today. The new head doctor says everyone loves ice cream and that if everyone is in a good mood, they're most likely to have better afternoon sessions. What do you say?" Marjorie shakes her head yes and walks slowly with the nurse.

She sees that everyone has left the courtyard and they are all probably inside eating ice cream. Coming through the doors, she sees the twins in their spot, eating the same ice cream flavor in the same color bowls. She sees Mr. Martone actually looking up from his chess board to eat, he looks right at her and lifts his spoonful like one would do a toast, she nods back to him. On her right and on her left, people are happily eating their ice cream. Marjorie chooses to walk straight past everyone and continues walking until she comes to her room. She needs quiet and solitude now, not happy and excited people on a sugar rush. Yes, this, her room, will do fine.

Outside her door she hears some of the staff complaining about the new policies from the new shrink in charge, it is sad they don't call him doctor. Marjorie knows he is one, it isn't nice. He wants to get to know everyone here and *why* they are here. He told the staff that they need to find out the reasons everyone is here, from the patient, personally, he is tired of looking at charts. Marjorie is sure that Nurse Crabby is writing her own opinion down without even speaking to anyone. She has never shown any amount of compassion to anyone here, in fact she never has shown anyone any kind of kindness, even the simple things. Except for today, today she showed



she cared. She came straight to Marjorie when she was fighting her demons and didn't push or question her. Maybe that sad face she carries all the time, is actually concern? Marjorie sits on that for a while to think about that thought. Has she misjudged the nurse so badly?

Something is going on across the hall, Marjorie wakes from her nap and hears cries, they are from the girl across the hall, - she hears another voice too. Still as can be, she stands at her door and listens, as she always does. Dr. Tiny's voice can be heard, her friend is crying and saying the word 'no' many times over, Marjorie sneaks out of her room carrying a chair and stands on it outside her friend's room and turns on the video camera that is in all the rooms in hopes that someone will see what she suspects is going on, no what she fears, to be going on in there.

She runs back into her room and prays by the door that someone will see, "Please watch," she says out loud for the first time in years. Her heart hurts her knowing what is happening to her friend, but Dr. Tiny is a big man and there is no way, she can get him away from her friend on her own.

She sits down to think, thinking helps block out noises. The day her 'neighbor' moved in, Marjorie knew there was something different about this girl. She didn't belong here. She was scared out of her mind but not from anything that happened before being here, it was from being here that made her scared.

Marjorie and her neighbor became instant friends, she sat on Marjorie's bed and told Marjorie her story. Rather than wait until she recovered, or seek private counseling, her mother forced her to come here. Being here meant her mom can tell people she is studying abroad, dealing with the issue at home meant people would see her mom at a counselor's office and start spreading rumors. Marjorie 'told' her that she is old enough to make that decision herself and that if she wants to leave, she can work that out with the new man in charge. He appears to be understanding. That was six months ago. The girl has yet to find the courage to speak to him.....

Marjorie is startled out of her memory with noises outside her door. She sits on the floor and prays that it is the right kind of noises now. That she did the right thing for once. Even though she knows it will mean her friend will leave. This time, it's ok. Her friend doesn't really belong here.

The yelling now is from Dr. Tiny. He is screaming all kinds of things about how he is helping the patient, over all that noise, Marjorie hears the distinct whimpering of a woman who has been beaten up. She recognizes that voice all too much. She longs to open her door and check on her friend, but she can't. Then they will know who turned on the video and they will be after her too. She doesn't know who, but someone will get her back for reporting Dr. Tiny for this, she can feel it inside her.

The bell for everyone to get to their rooms goes on. However, no one is coming down this way because of the scuffle outside her door. She hears sirens outside and within a few minutes there are more people in the hallway. Marjorie slowly slides down the wall to sit on the floor with her arms around her knees. She lets the tears flow, for the first time in years. Her friend is going away and even though it was right, her heart still hurts. She jumps up and gets her pad of paper and 'writes' a letter to her friend, in case she is leaving, she wants to be able to tell her how much she is her friend and how much she wants to keep in touch with her.

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By the time Marjorie finished ‘writing’ her letter, there is silence again outside her door. She stays on the floor and doesn’t move. The letter is done, she will have to find a way to give it to her. There has to be some way. A couple hours pass and there is a soft knock on Marjorie’s door, she knocks back and Nurse Crabby walks in smiling. She reaches down for Marjorie to stand and Marjorie gives her hand so the nurse can help her to stand up. Marjorie notices that when she stands in front of the nurse, they are about the same height.

“Look in my eyes Marjorie. I want to tell you something. You did nothing wrong today. Do you hear me? Nothing. I know the only person who could have turned on the video button was you. I know because I saw you go to your room instead of stay for ice cream. Whatever memory you had earlier must have really knocked you down, I haven’t seen you all day. I’m sorry if the memory was so bad for you. But in a way, thinking things through means you could be making progress towards some recovery. That said, you should know Dr. Tiny was arrested for attempted rape on the girl across the hall. I know I’m not supposed to tell anyone, but I knew in my heart you needed to hear the truth. If it wasn’t for you, he would have succeeded. You saved someone’s life today by speaking out in your own way and you should feel good. I’m sure you know she will be leaving now. She is going to live with an aunt across town. Someone who understands what she went through before she got here in the first place. Nod if you’re taking all this in.” she pauses. Marjorie nods slowly and decides to look her back in the eye to tell her to continue.

The nurse does continue, “I know you are healing my dear, you have to believe that you are. You are one brave woman I have to give you that. No one else would have done anything today and you did the most you could. In your silence you have spoken volumes today. You have told us you care about people other than your dad, we all know you love him deeply. Oh, and your baby brother John.”

The nurse puts her head down for a moment, then she slowly looks back into Marjorie’s eyes. She is waiting for more and the nurse obliges, “Your new friend is leaving tonight. You can go see her soon.”

Before she could say any more. Marjorie produces the letter for her friend and hands it to the nurse. “This is your goodbye?” She asks Marjorie. Marjorie shakes her head yes. “OK, I was going to tell you that she is a bit bruised up and may not want to see you, but you beat me to the end. I will deliver this to her right now. Do you believe I will do that? I am not going to open it up, it’s your private message.” She holds it to her heart then she reaches out and hugs Marjorie briefly and whispers in her ear, “I wish I had your strength.” Holding her at arms-length, the nurse looks into Marjorie’s eyes again and says, “You need to come down to dinner though, ok?” Again, Marjorie shakes her head yes.

Dinner is Marjorie’s favorite tonight, noodles with cheese sauce, broccoli, and some grilled fish fillets. ‘This new doctor sure has improved the food around here’ she thinks to herself. Marjorie feels her friend’s presence before she is upon her, she turns around and sees her. Marjorie stands up to greet her friend with open arms, the whole staff is watching this interaction, it is the most they have seen Marjorie do with another patient since coming here.

The friend holds up her letter and starts to cry. “This is the most beautiful thing, I’ve ever seen. You are my best friend, no, my savior. I will be in touch with you soon, ok? I am going to



stay with my aunt but I told her I will only come if she brings me back here to visit with you and she promised. Oh Marj, you saved more than my life today. I have no words, I know it was you somehow, and standing here I can see it in your eyes and feel it in your hands. You ARE a good person, don’t let anyone tell you otherwise, even yourself.” With that she leans in for another quick hug before Nurse Crabby and Doctor New Boy bring her to the front of the facility where her aunt is waiting patiently.

As they pass by the front desk the doctor asks why she is holding on to a blank piece of paper so strongly. The friend thinks about her answer for a moment. Marjorie saved her life, now it is time someone did something for Marjorie. She waits for the nurse to leave, seeing that she is in good hands with the doctor, she does so, and goes back to the dinner room.

She takes a deep breath and says, “Look closely, this is the most beautiful piece of poetry I’ve ever seen. That woman has a heart of gold and only wants to make the world better but is afraid to speak up, so she writes it all down, only she does that silently too, she is a closet genius. Look at the paper again, go on, I don’t mind sharing this one. But you have to promise you won’t tell her I showed you.”

The doctor takes the paper into his hand and stares at it really hard, then he feels the page and sees the words, they are all there scratched into the paper like an embossing would be. He reads Marjorie’s private words and feels a lump in his throat. The young lady is right, this is one of the best poems he has seen:

Friendship is like a breeze

Gusts of a generous wind,
bring pleasure with a spin

Though closed, my eyes still see,
and bring my mouth a grin.

My clothes they rustle like thunder,
flip, flap & ripple from under.

It comes quick, quiet, & quaintly by,
only to tickle, tangle, mingle & sigh.

You’ve made your claim,
and paved the way,

you came and went with great precision,
no man has greater a mission.

You came and went, your job is done
to please us all, not just one

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So long my weary friend,
can't wait till you come again.

"You see dear doctor, she has volumes in her room. Each and every one of her journals is full of whatever it is she writes. Ask her dad, she writes him nearly every day, and her brothers too. Thank you for helping me today. I'll be ok from here. Ok Auntie, can we go now?" She turns to her aunt and the two of them walk out, hand in hand.

Meanwhile the good doctor is still pondering the concept of quiet or silent writing. The art of which, Marjorie has mastered. He makes a promise to himself to investigate this further.

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Marjorie misses her friend a lot, Nurse Crabby reminds her every day that she did the right thing, and every day she writes her friend another note of apology, she misses her so much. It has already been a whole month and Marjorie has not heard from her friend at all.

She has been watching the new doctor closely, he is getting to know each patient, as he said he would. He has completely changed eating schedules for everyone and the food itself has been upgraded. Marjorie's dad is coming today, he told her so, and she can't wait to see him. She is pacing the courtyard when she finally sees him. Today she practically jumps into his arms, almost not seeing her brother. She jumps on him a second later and has a hard time letting him go, he is her best friend and she is happy she hasn't lost him too, yet. The three of them walk out into the yard and sit down on the ground together.

John starts in on the newest gossip from town. "Guess who got fired down at the mini-golf center?" he asks. Marjorie pushes her hand high above her head and then uses her other hand to make it look like she is playing with her own beard. "Oh my god, how does she guess these things, yes, it was Mr. Hardly ever at work, but seriously, yeah, it was him. Yeah, everyone is kind of sad about it, but don't you worry, he is a good man and someone else will hire him for sure. It's those big corporations who are buying all the small place up and they won't let the "Old" administration stay anymore. Even the mini golf center was bought by the strip-mall next door," he continues to babble for over an hour and Marjorie and her dad laugh most of the time, he with his mouth, her with her lips and facial expressions.

Marjorie loves listening to her brother spin a story, he can even make a disaster sound funny and entertaining. They always teased the old man at the mini golf center but they all respected him too, and he knew they did. He would laugh with the kids and tell jokes right back at them. Part of her is sad for him but her brother is right, he is a good man. She would know that first hand. He was the one who pulled her out of the water on that crazy night years ago.

Marjorie gets lost in a memory again while her brother and father talk about the goings on around town. *The last time she opened her mouth was when she was out with her dad. The two of them were walking through the park as she always does on her way home from school, when suddenly she saw Uncle Leon. She became very excited to see him because he had not been*

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around much lately. She tugged on her dad’s arm and said to him, “Look over there its Uncle Leon!” in an excited voice.

Her father had turned to her asking who Uncle Leon was. Without missing a beat, she laughed thinking he was joking and pointed out the man across the way from them. She thought she was playing along with a joke when she said “Mom’s brother silly, over there in the red shirt.” Her father was not amused, he left her standing there and was off running. She could barely catch up to him, and when she did, she was sorry she had. The two of them were arguing loudly, they almost came to blows if it hadn’t been for the men around them stepping in to stop the argument from going any further.

Uncle Leon glared at her before he bounded off in the opposite direction that they were headed. Marjorie knew then, it had to be her last outburst, especially about a person she knew. Lucky for her, they did not have to drive home, but the walk was more like a run and it was a silent one.

Upon getting home, her father softly walked into the kitchen where her mom was cooking dinner and he said, “Leave now, before I fully lose my control. Pack your bags, I don’t care where you go, don’t tell me, I won’t be getting in touch. Ever.” Then he began to walk out but turned to say one last thing, “By the way Uncle Leon was less than pleased to see us in the park today,” with that, her mother had turned white as a ghost.

Her brother heard the whole exchange and quickly pulled Marjorie towards him so she wouldn’t be in their father’s path. He went to his office and closed and locked the door. His calm was even scarier than having him scream. Their mom slowly walked out from the kitchen, it was clearly a walk of shame. She could not even look at her kids.

After she went upstairs, the siblings went into the kitchen to finish making dinner. At least for themselves, they were not expecting their father to join them. The house remained still and quiet. They heard their mom moving about upstairs, she was not in a hurry but she wasn’t throwing things around either. So, they kept busy in the kitchen, cooking and cleaning far more than necessary.

A short time later, their mother left through the front door, without a word to them. Marjorie remembers looking at her older brother and he sat her down and explained again what had happened. In Marjorie’s defense, she never thought of those things, didn’t know about lust and affairs, didn’t know someone could lie to her that way and that that person could be her own mother. Didn’t know her mom was an only child either.

Their father joined them for dinner. At first, he was quiet but he ate with them, then he looked at them all and asked, “How many uncles do you guys have?” Marjorie was afraid to speak, her older brother held her hand and spoke for all of them. He told their father the names of all of mom’s “brothers”. They had known them for years and assumed she was telling the truth, they had no reason to believe otherwise. He explained how they all went out to dinner sometimes like they would with their father’s siblings. No one ever slept in the house while their dad was away, he made sure to say that.



Their father looked crushed. Then he asked the worst thing he could possibly ask a child, “Have I been such a bad father? Have I been a neglectful husband?” and the worst question of all was, “Do you believe I have done the same thing?” He had tears in his eyes.

Marjorie and her brothers jumped up to hold him and the group of them stayed there for a long time. Together they cleaned up the kitchen and simply went to bed. The next day was school/work as usual. At least for most of them.

Marjorie’s day at school was filled with terror. Everywhere she looked she saw men that knew her mom. She felt pain all day thinking, could this be another one? Did her mom ever love them? Want them? Were her siblings and her a burden to her mom?

She walked home as she always did, through the park. Uncle Leon met her there but he was less than friendly. He began berating her about how stupid she was and how she ruined the best thing he had going. She tried to walk away from him but he was much bigger and faster than her. He pushed her along towards the tree filled area of the park where there was a lake you could rent boats.

Each time he pushed, he slapped the back of her head. No one appeared to take note of what was going on. They were all too busy with their own lives. They were standing right near the edge of the water covered by trees and in a very low voice, he told her, “I should do to you what I do to your mother. If your mother is a whore, you probably are too.”

She remembers trembling at the thought and looking down upon herself. He began to smirk, “Holy crap you’re a stupid virgin?! I could snap you like a twig.” At that point there was a shout to them about leaving the girl alone. “Always causing trouble. Tell anyone about this and next time I see you I will split you in two. It might even be fun. For me anyway.”

With that he picked her up and threw her into the pond as if she was nothing more than a bag of apples. Good thing she could swim. The shouting had continued towards Leon but he moved faster than a jack rabbit and was out of there before the person yelling could get to the pond. Marjorie snagged her clothes on something and it was holding her down in the water. The man from the mini-golf center came into the water and pulled her out, first unsnagging her skirt.

“Are you ok?” He asked with concern.

Marjorie was in full silent mode now. She shook her head.

“Should I call the police? Or just take you home?” he asked her holding onto her shaking hands.

Marjorie had to speak at least to him, he saved her. “I can walk home. He is someone I know and he was angry I broke something of his. His temper is big but his threats are soft. Thank you for helping me,” she said meekly.

“Ok, but I’m walking you home, to be sure. We can walk in silence if you prefer,” she nodded, it was as if he understood.....

“Marjorie, Marjorie honey, are you ok?” her father calls to her.

Marjorie stumbles out of her memory to see her father is the one holding her hands now and she is not walking home but aimlessly walking around the grounds. She must have been pulling him along. She looks into his eyes and the eyes of her brother and grabs onto her mouth in fear and starts to cry. Her father picks her up as he would a small child and she wraps her arms



around his neck and whimpers into his shoulder. It is the first time in years he has heard a sound from her mouth. Hearing this is beautiful to his ears yet sorrowful to his heart.

They stand there a few minutes and then he carries her all the way to her room. The whole time she is holding onto his neck and shaking her head no. She does not want that man to be without a job. He needs a job, he told her that day on their walk home that he has to work to support his large family and that he considers all the kids who come to the mini-golf to be part of his family. He also told her that if she ever needed someone to speak up for her about that day, he would do so with pleasure.

She did good with her neighbor here, the nurse keeps telling her so, maybe now she can do good with him too. In her bed now, she sees she has scared her father and brother. She holds both their hands and tries to smile. Her brother speaks first, “It’s ok to cry, sis. We have all shed many tears since the day mom left but she is not worth crying over so I hope that isn’t what you were remembering. I hope you remembered the time I put ice down your shirt and you couldn’t get it out,” he says with a smile.

His father slaps the back of his head, “Sure that’s what she was thinking about,” he looks back at his daughter who is feverishly ‘writing’ something on a piece of paper. She pulls out her father’s hand and lays the paper on top of it and folds it in half then folds his fingers around it and looks him straight in the eye. “Ok, I’ll wait till I get home. But remember what we always say, we are here when you are ready to speak or when you are ready to come home. We miss your chocolate chip cookies, your brother can’t bake to save his life.”

They always leave with a laugh. Always. He kisses his daughter on the top of her head and her brother does the same. “Take care man, be good ok?” he smiles at her and she returns the favor.

With a heavy heart her father walks out. Today, he heard his daughter cry. It was the best and worst thing to happen all at once. Seeing her lost in a trance-like state, one that put her in such a bad place, nearly killed him. He could not save his daughter. It’s the same feeling he has always had since putting her in here. Failure is a hard thing to accept when it comes to your own kids. His sons feel the same way, they’ve talked about this feeling of loss when it comes to Marjorie, a lot. They failed her and feel they continue to do so because no one knows the key to open her up again.

“Excuse me sir. Sir! Can you wait a minute?” Someone is calling to him. He turns around and sees the person his daughter refers to as Nurse Crabby.

“Can I help you Nurse?” he asks.

“The bigger question is will you help us. We have a new head physician who is trying to get to know all the patients here from their own words. He has made amazing changes so far and would like to continue to do so. Clearly, you realize your daughter is the only one he can’t get through to. Could you give us five minutes right now? I promise it won’t be longer than that,” she smiles.

The two men look at each other and his son speaks first, “It’s been a rough visit, five minutes is about all we will have the strength for,” he looks back at his dad, who shakes his head in agreement.

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They walk towards the back rooms where there are offices. Before she opens the door for them, she states, “I personally think your daughter is the bravest woman I’ve ever known,” she proceeds to tell them how she saved her friend’s life a while back. With that, she opens the door and introduces them to the new head doctor.

“Please sit. Thank you for your time. Before a patient recently left here, she showed me a poem your daughter had written her. Not only were the words poetic but the surrounding border on the page was exquisite. I have it here if you’d like to see.”

“We see it all the time. She is an avid writer and has always been artistic. Her pictures are full of precise details and her words tell it like it is,” the father answers very coldly.

“I understand that you’ve had quite a visit here. We saw you from the courtyard window sitting one minute then running after her the next and before we knew what was going on, you were carrying her back to her room. I won’t ask details. I want to be brief. Can you tell me anything that would help me help her?” he asks in a quiet patient tone.

Her brother comes to her rescue, “We don’t get paid to come up with solutions, you do. Sure, our family has its share of drama but everyone does. Our mother no longer lives with us due to her adulteress ways but Marjorie’s silence is not new. It’s only, that this time, it won’t end. When she feels life is her fault she shuts down, simple as that. We have to go now,” he stands up and his father is right behind him. His dad turns his head and says, “Watch her, she will give you all the clues you need. We hear her loud and clear,” and they walk out with the father’s arm around his son’s shoulder, like too old pals.

The doctor sits in his now empty office with the door closed. He looks over the poem again and again. Then to distract himself he goes back to doing his paperwork and research on this facility. Something is not adding up, figures from the morning don’t match those of the evening. Medication doses are being given willy nilly, almost as if it’s an experiment, but by whom? There is a scratching sound at his door, he looks over in time to see a piece of paper being slid under his door. He slowly gets up to get the paper and when he realizes it’s Marjorie’s paper, he quickly opens the door, but she is nowhere to be seen. With a sigh he returns to his desk.

He empties his pencil sharpener on top of the paper and smears it around because he has no chalk dust in his office to use this time. The letter reads as follows:

My good friend lost his job. My brother told me. He is a good man, he supports lots of people. Is there a job for him here? He is the one who used to run the mini-golf center near the strip mall on Kearny Street. You have to help him it’s soooooooooooooooooooooooooo important. He CAN’T be without a job. Too many people count on him. Too many lives, it’s crucial. M

The doctor is not sure what to do about this. On one hand, she is reaching out to him, on the other, what job could he give the man that would be comparable to running a business. That’s it! Running a business! He can’t do both, he needs someone to run the business side of things so he can successfully run the medical side of the facility. There is definitely enough money to give someone a good salary for that. He spends the rest of the day looking up all that he needs to know, contacting the board of directors for approval, one of whom knows the man and wholeheartedly agrees that he would be perfect for the job. He told the good doctor that he will have him come



out to the facility the next day for a formal interview. Although he already knows they will offer him the job anyway.

When asked how he found out the information so quickly, the doctor merely answered a friend of his had heard about the buyout and let him know in turn. Either way, he won’t be without a job for very long. The board member agreed.

Before leaving that day, the doctor stops by Marjorie’s room. He knocks before entering even though she could see him in the doorway. “I saw your dad came by today. I hope you had a nice visit.”

She shakes her head yes and pleads with him in her eyes to say the reason he is here. He sees, no, he “hears” her ask him. “As you know I’ve been getting to know everyone around here. I hope you’ve noticed that there have already been some changes.”

Once again, she nods but this time she picks up her hand as if she had a fork in it and puts it to her mouth, then she puts her hands together and pulls them to her nose and sniffs deeply. “Yes, the food is better and I’m glad you like the flowers. It was Nurse Crabby’s idea.”

Marjorie looks down at her hands. “Didn’t think I knew her nickname? She is the one who told me you named her that. She likes the name, by the way. It keeps everyone around her on their toes when she walks in. She isn’t actually crabby, you know, she has a lot on her mind. The last head nurse quit in the middle of a shift a while back and she has been trying to take over her job and keep up with her own responsibilities. When she mentioned it to the last doctor in charge, he told her to keep up the good work. Me, on the other hand, I made her head nurse and we are now looking for someone to fill her old position. Her name is Carny by the way. Starts with C too.”

The doctor is looking for some kind of response, smile, or acknowledgement, anything would do. Marjorie holds the doctor’s eyes in hers, she ‘speaks’ to him and he “hears” her again. “Yes, I received your note. I am working on that too. I think he may come help me run this facility. Would you like to see him tomorrow when he comes?”

Her eyes start to well up with water. She shakes her head yes. She did a good thing; her friend is safe and now her other friend may get a new job. Her words matter now. They really matter. How she wishes she could see her friends more often. “You’ve helped a lot of people with your words, when you’re ready. I’d like to hear more of them,” he looks around the room and for the first time, he sees she has five shelves all filled with journal-looking books. He thinks to himself, ‘if only I could read one, try to understand her’ He looks back at her. “When you’re ready,” he says again before he leaves.

~ ~ ~

On their way home Marjorie’s father calls her older brother and says it is time for him to come home for a visit. He tells him he thinks Marjorie is about ready to open up and that he should be here, he needs him, his brother needs him and so does she.

Marjorie’s older brother hasn’t had as much time to see her being away in college then graduate school. But she is everything to him, always has been. “Ok, I’ll get in a car in an hour, I’ll be home for dinner. Don’t read her letter until I get there,” his father agrees.

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Marjorie is pacing her room. She does not know what to do with this unsteadiness inside her tonight. She said something to her father that she never said before and she knows he knows this too. She is not sure if this is going to break things up again or somehow make life better. She decides to wander the halls again, no one ever sees her, they never watch her at night.

Her father had given her a camera that takes night pictures because he thought she might appreciate taking pictures of darkness, or in the silence of the night, he said. But tonight, she takes her drawing pad and her scratching pencil. She passes Mr. Martone’s room and hears a bit of a shuffle. She peeks in and sees two of the night staff in his room, one is pouring out his meds and the other is putting something else into the bottle, then they put the bottle back into its locked box.

In this facility each patient’s meds are left in a medicine cabinet or locked box in each of their rooms. Then she sees the unthinkable, each one of them takes more than one pill and swallows them. Now they are walking out laughing. Mr. Martone is almost deaf so he does not hear anything, but she sees it all. Her heart sinks again. Not Mr. Martone, they can’t hurt him. What if they gave him the wrong thing? It’s not right! What can she do?

She walks some more, she can’t go outside because the doors will sound an alarm. She can’t go back to her room because the two staff people are headed in that direction. Instead she goes to check out who is sleeping in the nurse’s room tonight to see if she can tell them. No, it’s not a good nurse, this one takes sleeping pills so she doesn’t have to hear the patients even if they do need her.

Marjorie begins to panic, she can’t see him hurt. He is so gentle, it’s not his fault why he is here, maybe other people did things to him too and that’s why he is here. Marjorie is running faster and faster, she keeps looking back behind her to make sure no one is following her. She is running along the walls so she won’t be seen when suddenly she turns the corner and **BAM!** She falls backwards from hitting someone’s chest with her face. She looks up and sees the good doctor is still here. But it’s the middle of the night, that can’t be. Her heart starts to panic, something is wrong, she is in the wrong place, her world is spinning. Everything is going wrong, maybe this is all a nightmare, she screams to herself in her head to wake up but the eyes in front of her are still watching her for signs of pain.

The doctor squats down and looks her in the eye. “I don’t know why I’m here either. Something woke me up in my sleep and I only live five minutes from here so I came right over. You know something don’t you? You always know what is going on. Please Marjorie, tell me, somehow, tell me what has happened, what you saw,” he pleads with her and she shakes her head.

In the dark she quickly starts scratching on her pad of paper. Faster than she has in a long time. The doctor watches in amazement as she finishes one page and turns it to another and yet another. As she slows down, he says to her, “Ok, let’s go to my office, it’s only a couple doors down from here,” he offers her his hand, and she takes it. He helps her up and they walk to the office.

She rips out the pages and he gathers his pencil shavings, and rubs them on the first page. It’s a picture of the outside of a room. “Mr. Martone?” he questions her and she shakes her head yes.

The next page is a split picture he sees people at the medicine box in one and someone emptying it in the next. The final page is also a split picture, one is how they are filling the



medicine box again with a different box and the last picture shows them taking the pills. Her details are incredible, he feels he can even make out which two people did this.

He picks up his phone and waits, “Hello Carny, get here quick, we have a huge problem that needs to be fixed. Now,” he looks over at Marjorie who is pensive at best. She is still shaking from what she saw.

“You did the right thing here Marjorie,” then he picks up the microphone to the facility and says, “All staff please report to the front room immediately. I expect to see all of you there within minutes this place isn’t that big now, GO!”

Then he looks at Marjorie, “Go back to your room please. I’ll stop by or Nurse Carny will, ok?” he leads her out of his office and in the direction of her room. Marjorie looks back and shakes her head no really loudly. “Ok, sorry,” he folds the papers and puts them in his pocket. “You’re right, I should not show them to anyone. You have my word. Maybe Nurse Carny? She has to help me,” Marjorie gives her head a nervous shake.

The doctor meets everyone in the front hall, he is watching his stopwatch to see how long it takes everyone so show up. There are two men who are clearly much later than the rest of them. They saunter in and are looking quite dazed. He watches them as they come in very carefully. He wants to rip them to shreds only they are on medication that takes them down and they won’t be able to comprehend what is going on.

He takes out his private phone and calls a friend. “I need you to pick up two people immediately. Possibly more,” he paces in front of everyone as someone would if he was a sergeant inspecting his troops. After chewing out the lot of them, many become quite nervous as to if they are even going to have a job by the time their shift ends. Nurse Carny shows up in time to watch the spectacle.

She eyes the doctor and he sends her a message back with his eyes. She knows now it was Marjorie to the rescue again. She walks close by him so he can tell her to go check on Mr. Martone, she runs out of the room. Everyone loves him, who would harm that man? She wants to wait to see who, it is but then she sees two men leaning into each other, like they can’t stand on their own and the whole picture comes to mind as to what happened.

She gets to Mr. Martone’s room and his vital signs are lower than they should be, she calls over to the local hospital and calls in a favor. “Help is on the way Mr. Martone, don’t you worry Marjorie is looking out for you,” she sits and waits now.

The people from the hospital, as well as the police, show up at the same time. Marjorie sees the ambulate pull up and her heart rate starts to hit warp speed. Without thinking of herself she goes running down to Mr. Martone’s room. ‘He has to be ok’ she thinks to herself.

She makes it to the room at the same time the people from the hospital do. Nurse Carny is there too, ‘oh no this must be really, really bad.’ She covers her mouth because she can’t hold the whimper in this time. Nurse Carny sees her and runs to her side and pulls her out of the room.

“Look at me Marjorie. In the eye. He is ok, his blood pressure is low and his heart rate is too, it made me think it has something to do with the medicine they gave him before he went to bed. They put him in a deep sleep with medicine. These people here are my friends, they are taking his blood and will run the specimen over to the lab immediately; we can’t do that here. He



is safe I promise you. Do you believe me?” she is looking into Marjorie’s eyes and she is receiving a warm reception. Marjorie involuntarily gives her a hug. The nurse whispers in her ear, “you are the bravest woman I know, I’ll say it a hundred times, to anyone,” she takes Marjorie’s hand and leads her back to her room where she stays until Marjorie falls back to sleep.

Meanwhile, in the front room, the doctor has begun to really yell at each and every one of the night staff. He can tell that the nurse on call is on something because she can barely keep her head up, be it legal substance, or not, he does not know, but he is subjecting everyone to a mandatory blood test on the spot. The people from the hospital and the police force are all too happy to help. One of them knows Mr. Martone personally, he was his music teacher back in high school.

The doctor is quick to add, “Those of you who feel this is against your rights are free to leave now, go home and check your contract, it’s there. If you choose to leave now, do not come back tomorrow. Quality staff is out there and I aim to make sure that is all we have here. People who care about the welfare of the patients here. I’ve already found many discrepancies from the morning staff and the evening staff, someone is lying here, all will be straightened out by week’s end. If you have anything to add, put it in writing and leave it in my mailbox. I will be here all night. As of right now, I can no longer trust the lot of you. Consider yourselves on probation,” he walks towards his office.

Marjorie notices that the nurse is still there, even though she is feigning sleep. It usually fools everyone else. She decides to sit up and face her. Nurse Carny sees Marjorie sit up, “I didn’t think you could sleep. Marjorie, you know Mr. Martone will be ok, yes?” Marjorie shakes her head in the affirmative. “You also know that he is deaf because of an illness he had?” she asks. Marjorie looks at the nurse very puzzled. “He was an amazing musical talent. He could write a score for a twenty or a two hundred piece band easily. He could sing like a nightingale too. Mr. Martone became ill about five years ago. One of the side effects to his illness is partial hearing loss, only his went further than most and he can no longer hear the music. Unfortunately, he is in a bad state of depression, the new doctors are working with him to help him see how much of life he can still enjoy.” The nurse sighs, she knows she is not supposed to share this information with anyone, and it’s the second time she has done so with Marjorie. However, each time she does, this young woman does something remarkable and she wants her to realize how much she can do for a lot of people, if she would only open up.

She continues talking to her favorite patient. “Marjorie, your artistic abilities can help a lot of people. Your big heart has already helped two of the patients here. How much more could be done if you actually had actual lead in your pencil, huh? We could use some nice artwork around here don’t you think?”

Marjorie smiles, this nurse is actually really good. For the first time in a long time, Marjorie feels she has some self-worth. However, her letter to her dad can destroy everything she has worked for. Keeping her family together. She is not sure what made her finally blurt out that information but something inside told her it was time, so she did, and if she didn’t do it at that moment, she would not have had the guts to do it later, or ever.



Marjorie grabs the doll her brother John had given her when she turned thirteen. It’s a silly old black and white polka dotted thing, but he saved his own money to buy it for her, it feels like diamonds and gold to her. She aimlessly starts to stroke the doll. The nurse is watching this but says nothing. She knows that Marjorie is lost in thought now, she stands to leave and says, “Try and get some sleep Marjorie, you can’t save the whole world in one night. Although you sure as hell can try, can’t you?” she smiles and leaves the room.

Marjorie watches as the nurse leaves. She thinks to herself, ‘I’m not trying to save the world, just myself. I want to go home. I want to sleep among my own toys, my own memories, even the bad ones. They keep coming out here now and I don’t like that.’ Slowly, she slides back down and goes to sleep. Surprisingly she sleeps well.

~ ~ ~

Back at home, is a rough night. Marjorie’s big brother comes home and the three men do not know what to do with the letter that was written. First John describes what happened during their visit that day, how they actually heard her whimper. Baily is shocked.

Their dad speaks about how the doctor is trying to get her to open up and what she did to save the other girl in the facility. Baily can’t believe his ears. These are all signs that his little sister is coming back to them. They talk and talk about a plan to go see her tomorrow and how they could maybe get her to break her silence, at least in her writing or better yet in her drawings.

“That’s it!” Baily exclaims, “Let’s bring her a new pad of drawing paper, the really good kind with those special pencils that she likes from her old art classes. We will buy a new pack, in case the ones here bring back any bad memories.”

Now that they had a plan, the three men decide to do what they do best when together, order pizza and watch bad movies together. They completely forgot about her letter until morning when they all see it at the same time on the dining room table. Looking from one son to the next, the three of them sit down to read it together.

Their father takes out the chalk dust and rubs it across the paper. They read it in silence, then sit back in their chairs and try to swallow what they see in front of them:

Daddy,

Don’t hate me for telling you this

2 things

Ask the man from the mini-golf about the day Uncle Leon tried to kill me

Uncle Leon always said that John looked like his side of the family, does that mean he is not my brother? Tell John I love him from my head to my toes, he is in my heart always.

I love you

Ps - thank you for saving me today ☺

M

Baily is the first to speak, “Did she say you saved her today? Dad that’s phenomenal don’t you think?”

John is still taking in the whole of the letter, “Pop, she opened up. I mean, she really opened up,” he slides over towards the letter and reads it again and again, his hands shaking.

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Their father looks at it once more over John’s shoulder. “Did either of you hear that same phrase?” They both shake their head yes. Their father looks at John and says unequivocally, “You ARE my son. Fathering a child and being a father are two different things, don’t you two ever forget that.”

“Are you going to do a test Dad?” Baily’s voice sounding shaken.

Their father simply states, “Why?”

John sits up a little further in his chair, “Yeah, why Baily? And why do you look so nervous all of a sudden?”

“There were so many. Are any of us really yours?” As the words came out Baily regrets them. His father’s eyes are welling up with tears. He walks over to Baily and holds him as if he is about to disappear. “My son,” he chokes out the words and puts another hand on John’s shoulder and squeezes, “my son, no man can take you away, no love will ever be stronger than how I feel about you three. You Bialy, look exactly like my brother Petey did at this age, I’ll show you pictures, you’ll laugh. Marjorie is the spitting image of my mother and John here always has shared his mother’s nose but the eyes and build of my dad. If I am wrong on any of these counts it only means, that I see you as an extension of me. You ARE my children. However, if *you* want the DNA tests done, I will oblige,” he says with a quiet voice.

John stands up and faces his dad, “You’re right Pop, it takes more than sperm to make a man a father. There is no other family I’d rather be part of. Marjorie must think I am leaving now, every time she became quiet before, someone in our lives, or hers more exactly, left her. We have to be there before noon today agree?” he looks at the others in the room. Baily is still visibly shaken.

“I’m sorry Dad, it’s just.....” Baily breaks off.

“I know, all the lies, but I’ve never lied to you about my love for you have I? Who knows how to get in touch with the man she mentioned?” he asks calmly.

Baily goes to look up the number in his room, he is sure he has it somewhere, he used to call him when he was in trouble, so did everyone else in the neighborhood, damn corporations. He decides to make the call himself and asks if he could come over the house. Thankfully, the man gives him a positive answer. He comes down to see his father and John sitting with the photo albums out in front of them. This brings a smile to his face.

“He will be here within the hour, is that ok with everyone?” he states.

“Look here at my brother Petey, here he is hanging upside down from the monkey bars down at Indian Lake and here is you doing the same thing. Almost identical isn’t it?” he asks facing Baily. Baily looks over his father’s shoulder and smiles. He is right, one picture is black and white and the other in color, but they look the same. He puts his hands on his dad’s shoulders and squeezes as if to say thank you.

The men are so busy in their trip down photo album alley they almost don’t hear the doorbell ring. Their father stands up to open the door. Mr. Hardly is standing before him with an envelope. He moves aside to let him in.

All the men are now sitting on the couches, they offer Mr. Hardly a drink. “No, I have a feeling I know why I am here. Marjorie finally sent you to ask me a question. Yes?” They shake



their head yes, and Baily walks over to the table to get him the letter. He reads it and shakes his head.

“Yes, I thought so. I’m going out to see her later today. Seems she is the one who asked the doctor in charge to give me a job. He offered me one before I even met him. Says to come over and fill out paperwork, no real interview necessary. Seems a few members of the board already know me from my other job. I’m going to stop by her room, is that ok with you all?” The three shake their heads as if they are all attached to the same neck.

“I won’t keep you. It feels like so many years ago, I was walking through the park when I saw a man pushing a girl to walk towards the boating pond. I could tell this was not a friendly visit between the two of them. He kept slapping the back of her head and she kept stepping to the right or left but he was a rather large man, so I took to follow them, ready to step in if necessary. I had my camera around my neck so I took a couple of pictures while they were walking, they are from behind.” He takes a deep breath and continues.

“I heard some of the words about being like her mother, giving to him all her mother did. How if she said anything, to anyone, he would kill John here, if he lost his job or his wife and security blanket he would come after her in a heartbeat. The whole time Marjorie was as strong as could be, never once screaming or calling attention to herself. As they neared the pond, I had a bad feeling something was going to happen so I started to run and yell at him to drop her.

He had her above his head as if she was a twig, the next thing I know he hurled her into the pond. He took off running, I did not get a look at his face at all, I was more concerned with her.” He watches the three men as he continues his story, “I jumped into the pond to grab her because I could tell her clothes were snagged on something. Getting her free took a few minutes, but never once did she complain. In fact, she told me she intended to walk home alone. Of course, I did not let that happen. I had thrown my camera off of my neck before jumping in, I picked it up and we walked quietly and slowly together to your home.

She swore me to secrecy, and all this this time, I felt I owed her that trust. I apologize to you for that,” now he holds his head low and fiddles with his fingers in his lap.

Baily speaks first, “what’s in the envelope?”

Mr. Hardly looks up for a moment, he had forgotten all about them. “Ah, yes, it seems I must have hit the button to my camera a few times more than I had originally thought. Either that or through my running my camera kept hitting my leg and taking pictures. Most of the event is caught on camera. I told Marjorie she didn’t have to speak, that the pictures would speak for her, but she was scared for John. She told me she can’t live with the knowledge that it would be her fault if he died,” he says.

He stands to leave, there is nothing left to say. Baily jumps up and hugs him, harder than he has ever done to someone who is not family. John joins as well as their father. The men stay that way for a few moments. As they break away, their father walks him to the door. “We’ll take it from here,” the two men smile to each other. There really is nothing more either of them could say.

Facing his sons, he takes a deep breath and says to them slowly, “First, we need to assure her that we are all family come hell or high water. We will visit with her as usual, around 2:00



instead of noon, so we don’t scare her, I don’t want her to think we changed anything because of her letter or that we are scared for John and need to rearrange our schedule. Until then, we will go to the art store first thing like Baily said, and buy her all she needs to start making her drawings with color. When we leave the store, we go together to our lawyer, we will let him deal with the police. Any questions?” He watches his two boys as if they were men and this is the deal of the century.

“Pop, you’re right, business as usual, I was wrong to suggest we go early. She will freak if we show early. Especially me, I haven’t exactly seen her a lot lately. In answer to your previous question, I already know who my father is, no need to find another, especially now.” John reaches out his hand as they do a team huddle again, Baily puts his hand on top and their father puts his on top of that. A stronger pact could not have been made.

The men break off and walk back over to the family albums sitting on the table. Baily picks up a picture of a man he does not know and looks over at his dad. “It’s my brother Harold. He is no longer with us, cancer at the age of twenty-five, died before you were born son.”

“Dad, he looks exactly like John, look at his chin and the birthmark by the eye,” Baily is feeling much better now. “I’m going to bring this picture with us to show Marj. She will want to see proof, don’t you think?” Baily watches John stare at the picture, it’s almost a little scary.

He starts to pace, John is moving back and forth from the dining room to the kitchen door, and back again, and again. No one is really paying any attention, everyone is trying to absorb what has taken place today, each in their own way. Until the moment he stops suddenly, “Pop! Baily! That’s it! Marj has decided not to speak because every time she does someone leaves. Like I said before, think about it; that man Fred left first, I remember him giving me gum balls all the time then all of a sudden, he never came, she had a friend in camp that she spoke up for too. Baily, think, what else, actually, who else?”

The three of them start to pace around the house, every couple of minutes someone would yell out another name, another incident, another reason that they never saw that brought Marjorie into this state of being mute. Baily finishes with, “Mom, Marg is the one who mentioned Uncle Leon in the first place, isn’t she? On your walk with her Dad. Oh my, poor Marj, I need to leave the house, this place is getting too small. Let’s say we head out for lunch, go to the art store and continue on to see her?”

Everyone agrees, now is a great time to leave. Before leaving John and his father look around the house. They look at each other, speaking with their eyes like Marjorie does to them, they break into smiles. Together they say, “paint job” and with that the three of them start their day’s adventure.
~ ~ ~

Marjorie is pacing today, first in her room, then out in the courtyard, now back in the community room. She has to appear calm somehow, the nurse told her she is getting a visitor right after he meets with the doctor. Mr. Hadley will be here, this means he has a job.

For the third time in a not so long timeframe, her words have helped. But who knows what is going on at home? She is not sure what possessed her to speak out to them. They are probably packing up John’s stuff right now. Before she can control herself, she whispers “John,” and puts



her hand over her mouth. Quickly, she checks to see if anyone heard her, so far so good. She makes a bee line for the courtyard door and takes refuge under her willow tree.

She is still unsettled, nothing is going to make her feel better until she sees him. No, maybe that will be worse, he will hate her. Her baby brother is going to hate her. Oh my, she didn't think before she wrote her words, she finally felt her dad should know about Uncle Leon but why, oh why, did she have to say both? What could be so urgent? Leon is going to kill him and she couldn't bring herself to say the words 'I love you' before they left yesterday.

Panic starts to set in and she feels her heart racing, her breathing is becoming faster and the need to bolt is so strong she jumps up without even noticing that there is someone standing right near her. The nurse grabs her quickly and pulls her in for a hug. Marjorie's arms are flailing around as she tries to break free.

Her mind pulls her back to that moment of tangle in the water, she is being pulled on by something under the water and the current is pulling her out as well. Her first thoughts then as they are now is that she can't say goodbye to her father. Tears start flowing down her cheeks uncontrollably and whoever is holding her is doing so even harder. It's a vice grip she feels, then the words in her ear start to calm her down.

"Marjorie" a voice whispers "it's ok. Carny is here for you child, don't be scared. Face those demons and pound them to the ground. Use all your strength and pound the hell out of them. You are bigger than they are. You have the strength of many inside your heart, conquer them. Now breathe slowly, deep breath in.....that's it. Blow it out, and again Innnnn oooooout. Let your arms hang by your side. That's a girl," Nurse Carny looks at Marjorie in the eye at arm's length now but still holding her shoulders.

"There is someone to see you. Are you up for a visitor?" Nurse Carny ignores what happened and focuses on the present. She has seen Marjorie outside many times and recognizes that look of fear on her face and came running. This job certainly takes a lot out of you, but the gains are immeasurable. "Oh, and I forgot, this," she hands her an envelope from her pocket. "This came this morning."

Marjorie looks down at the envelope. It has not been open, it's a letter from her friend, the one who left. Quickly she peels it open to see a simple note.

Margorie,

Sorry I haven't written you yet. I'm doing well and only have time to tell you I miss you. I'll write more soon. I miss your smile and your laugh, it always lit up in your eyes. I take that strength with me every day. I promise I'll see you soon.

Xoxoxoxox

Ps. My auntie says hi too, she can't wait to meet you. ☺

She looks at Nurse Carny. She holds up the letter and smiles, "Yes, I know who it's from. I told you it will take time for her to get settled. She is a real friend Marjorie. Now, let's go meet your gentleman friend who came by to see you, shall we?" The nurse puts out her elbow for Marjorie to take, and she does. Together they walk back into the community room. Marjorie stops when she sees Mr. Hardly standing before her looking dapper in his suit.



He puts out his arms and she runs into them. “Ah child,” he whispers, “giving a man a job is like saving their life. I guess this makes us even,” she pulls away and nods her head. She hugs him again, and he is all too happy to hold on to her as well.

“I hear you’ve been writing a diary here, is that true?” he asks simply.

She nods her head yes. Mr. Hardly puts his pointer finger on her chin and pulls her face up to see him. He looks her straight in the eye and says, “The whole truth and nothing but the truth?” Marjorie knows he is trying to ask if she wrote stories from her head or from what she saw. She makes a peace sign with her fingers and puts it on her face, to indicate that she wrote all she saw. Each finger pointing to an eye.

He smiles and says, “It will help the doctor save even more people. Especially if there is anything in those books of yours that will show him how to make things better. You understand that now, don’t you? That sometimes even when words hurt, they can also help,” his trusting eyes have a hold on her and Marjorie feels herself being pulled in.

What she has seen recently, proves his point. She pulls on his hand and brings him over to Mr. Martone, who has recovered nicely from the pill incident. She taps on Mr. Martone’s shoulder to get his attention. A smile comes on his face when he sees Marjorie. She reaches out for his hand and he gives it to her slowly. She pats it with her other hand and pulls Mr. Hardly’s hand towards his to shake. Putting her hand on both of them she smiles at Mr. Martone to tell him this is a friend.

The doctor watches this whole exchange. He is amazed as to how much she can communicate without saying a word. He hopes that his new business manager can get through to her about the books. He watches as she takes him around to each patient and introduces him with similar gestures and always a smile. “Smiles are good,” he says out loud to no one in particular.

After having lunch together, Mr. Hardly leaves to go work with the doctor. Marjorie takes to walking the halls and she notices that there are many changes already. Each door is equipped with a video monitor as before but this time they are being monitored by a security guard on each wing. Having them around makes it harder for her to walk around unnoticed. It’s the only change she doesn’t like. They all know her name and call out a greeting each time she passes so she knows they know she is around. Doctor’s orders, but she doesn’t know that.

Nurse Carny has become her friend and she has found another equally nice person to be on staff as well, to be the other head nurse. The night staff has all changed except for Dr. BB. No one knows his real name, everyone on the staff calls him BB, it’s even on his white jacket. Nothing gets passed him either.

The medical boxes in each room have been removed and now there is a whole system of making each patient responsible for coming to the nurses’ station to get their meds. This place has become a lot more comfortable, and friendly. Not that it wasn’t before, it’s simply better. Because the changes were simple, the board approved them right away and most have been done since Marjorie’s friend left on that bad night.

~ ~ ~



John finds his sister sitting under her willow tree. He calls her name and she all but jumps out of her skin. She doesn’t even see Baily until after she finishes crying upon seeing John. ‘He still loves me’ she thinks to herself. Without any prompting he whispers in her ear, “You’re the best sister ever. You can’t get rid of me that easy.” And he pulls away to show her Baily is home too. Today is not a day for self-control, her whimper into Baily’s neck is barely audible, but the three men hear the sound of a tuba blast. Marjorie’s father pulls out a blanket and sits down, John is next, then Baily and Marjorie, still holding Baily’s hand.

Her father hands her a wrapped package. She looks around, it’s not her birthday, what could this be? It’s too big for a new journal. She rips it open and stops. Color pencils, she hasn’t used these in years. The paper is heavy gauge and is in a spiral bound book. She questions her father with her eyes. “We thought you might want to express yourself in color. Like you used to do on the back porch at home. Remember how you would listen to music and draw what you heard?” he is speaking softly and trying to be encouraging.

Tears roll down her face uncontrollably. Feeling the colored pencils feels like home. Her dad would hang every picture she ever made in his office. People thought it was client’s work because there was so many but he would proudly say, they are his daughter’s.

She puts her fingers on her mouth and then on Baily’s and shakes her head yes. Baily instantly starts to hum one of their favorite songs. She closes her eyes and falls into the rhythm of the tune. Slowly she picks up her colors and creates swirls and shapes that blend together to make a sound. She hands it to Baily with a black pencil and he writes the name of the song on it for her. The doctor has seen this take place from an agreed upon distance, and is astonished at how beautiful the picture is, he is also impressed with the strength of this family. They have never stopped being encouraging. He wishes more families would show this amount of care, maybe some of the patients could get to a better place emotionally if they knew someone cared. The idea sounds simple, but so many don’t understand that being here shouldn’t mean, being forgotten. He may need to find some long lost relatives or old friends to help each one out. Possibly even volunteers.

Marjorie stares at her work and gets an idea. She stands up and takes the picture from Baily. She starts to walk back to the building in a hurry, her family follows quickly. She scans the room and finds Mr. Martone. Softly, she taps his shoulder for the second time today, he looks up smiling at her again and she hands him her picture.

He stares at it and then questions her with his eyes. She points to the title, thinking that if anyone would know the rhythm, it will be him. He looks down and then back at the picture, down and then back again. His hand begins to move as if he is conducting the music himself. He follows her ebbs and waves of color with his eyes and he knows exactly what she is hearing at each change of color too.

With tears in his eyes he stands and extends a hand to her father. The men exchange glances and immediately understand each other. Her father now knows that Mr. Martone is deaf, and Mr. Martone understands that her father loves his daughter, beyond her silence. Baily has always had a beautiful voice so Marjorie tells him to sing it this time. Before he begins, he takes Mr. Martone’s hand and places it on his neck so he can feel the vibrations. People around the

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room are watching Baily sing and are enjoying him. No one knows why Mr. Martone is involved, they are simply enjoying the song. When he finishes everyone claps and so does Mr. Martone.

Baily and John walk back out to collect Marjorie’s new supplies and their blanket. Marjorie holds onto her father’s waist as if she never wants to let him leave. Today it’s going to be particularly hard. Things are going well, if only they will stay that way. She still has fears about John.

Her father feels her heartbeat getting stronger and says goodbye to his new friend and walks his daughter to her room. The boys show up moments later. “Baily, show her the pictures we found at home,” Baily takes out the picture of their father’s brother with the birthmark on it. They don’t tell her he is gone, they will do that another time. These gestures are understood without dialogue. Marjorie understands what they are trying to say but she saw the hatred in Leon’s eyes, she can still picture him in front of her.

She can still remember the letter she received only a few short weeks after that.

Listen Little one – where has John been? He hasn’t been at practice for three days, are you hiding him from me? If you are, that means you did something really, really bad and we all know that will only lead to you getting hurt or worse.

Once I’m done with you, your little brother will have taken his last breath. If you think it will be easy for me to get you, just think how much faster it will be to take care of him.

He had better be there tomorrow, or I’ll know you are hiding him and I’ll come find you.

Yours always

Uncle Leon

Heheheheh

She can still hear his menacing voice in his written laughter. Marjorie looks around the room, they are watching her fall back into memories again. But this time no more. Nurse Carny told her that her words are doing good, so she will try once more. She takes out a paper and scratches on it for her dad. They know this means she is done with the visit because she usually gives them a parting letter.

She hands it to Baily this time and shakes her head yes. Baily takes out one of her new pencils and colors lightly over it right there and then.

Baily,

Look in our old hiding place, there is an envelope, it can be shared now.

M

He shakes his head and tells her, “Not to worry, I’ve got your back my dear sister.” This is their code that he will keep it secret even after he gets it. They had a place in the back of the shed where they used to hide letters to each other. It was their way of telling each other secrets without anyone knowing. Some of which were very private. All letters were destroyed after being read.

When everyone leaves that day Marjorie’s feelings of dread have diminished. So much so that she goes back to her room and takes out volume I of her journals. She walks quickly towards the doctor’s office and knocks. This time she waits for the answer. When the doctor sees her, he tries not to look completely surprised. “Hello Marjorie, how can I help you today?”



She nods yes, and hands him the book. Then she walks away. Finally, feeling proud that she kept all this information, and that someone will be able to use it the right way, to help others. She loved helping Mr. Martone today. She is thinking of making him another one tomorrow. He was so happy with today’s picture.

The doctor takes the book and allows her to walk away without engaging her in conversation. He has a long night ahead of him, he sees there are around seventy-five pages in this journal alone. Who knows how many in the others? He will start with one.

Marjorie enjoys eating dinner with everyone today and she goes to bed relaxed for the first time since coming here.

The doctor spends hours poring over all she had written. Medication mishaps, cover ups from the night staff, who, thankfully, most are no longer with them. Instances where cleaning was ignored and the worst part was seeing how the staff interacted with each other. Not very professionally he notes.

He can’t wait to get to volume II. However, he has to go home. He will share these books with his new business manager. Mr. Hardly has already found several places where things don’t look on the up and up. Prices and quantities of items are not making sense. It’s possible, with Marjorie’s help, they will find other ways to improve and even clean up the facility.

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Two weeks have gone by since Marjorie first received her colors and her new drawing pad. Everyone in the facility has asked for a drawing, and she has given them exactly what they asked for. Even “the twins”, they actually asked for different designs, after all, they aren’t even related. The staff has asked her to make a couple for the front lobby as well as the community room. Marjorie spends her time under her willow tree with her colors. She is starting to feel like her old self again.

Mr. Hardly walks up to her with a smile. “Good afternoon, my friend, and what are you drawing today?” he asks.

Marjorie glances up from her work, not because she heard him, but because she feels his shadow on her. She pops out her earphones and is about to show him when he says, “ahhhh, another musical piece is it? For Mr. Martone I presume,” he smiles

She nods, she has made him four so far. Each of his favorite pieces of music. He wrote them down for her and she has listened to them while drawing. This one is tough though, it’s a long classical piece and she has to pick only one part of it to do, otherwise she will use up her whole pad of paper. She holds up her earpiece for Mr. Hardly to hear what she is doing.

He takes it from her hand and puts it in his ear. Listening for a moment, he smiles, “Ah good old Bach. A great classical writer. I know him well. My youngest daughter plays piano all the time. But that is not why I am here my dear,” before he can present her with what he has, he sits down beside her, knowing this may be difficult he wants to be in position to run after her or grab her quickly.

Slowly he hands her today’s newspaper. Marjorie takes it and unfolds it to reveal the front page. Uncle Leon is there in full color, she looks above his picture and reads; **LOCAL**

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**BUSINESSMAN FOUND TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN 4 ATTEMPTED RAPES, ONE ATTEMPTED DROWNING AND MULTIPLE DEATH THREATS.**

One large tear rolls down Marjorie's cheek. Mr. Hardly puts his hand on her shoulder and whispers, "You did the right thing. The pictures were only the beginning. Once they started to investigate him, they found the other four incidents. You saved people again my good friend. His reign of terror is over," he stands when he sees how calm she is; before he actually leaves, he turns to say, "Your books have been a tremendous help to us. Myself, the good doctor and even the board of directors have gone through each one page by page. Soon there will be a lot of staff changes here but no one will ever know we received the information from you. They will think it's all me being the nosey new person I am. Don't you worry," he smiles at her.

She looks up and she reaches out and grabs his hand. She pulls on his hand towards her and lays it on her heart, then her cheek, then she kisses him ever so tenderly. She folds his fingers into his hand so he can hold on to her kiss.

Mr. Hardly stands dumbfounded, part of him wants to hug this brave young lady but the rest of him knows he can't right now. He settles for "putting the kiss" into his shirt pocket and pats it for safe keeping. Walking back through the doors of the community room, he sees her father and both brothers coming in, he simply shakes his head to indicate that she knows already. They all thought it was best that he gives her the news.

Baily pushes through everyone and runs to his sister's side, she jumps into his arms like a small child. Baily holds on to her tightly, his head spinning, his heart pounding, hands sweating. "I'm sorry, I didn't know, sorry I didn't understand what you went through. I love you, you've always been my favorite girl," he whispers into her ear.

Marjorie's whimpers are coming to his ear as loud as a thunderstorm. It never felt so good to hear someone cry. John and their dad show up moments later and wait for them to release each other. When it doesn't look like it's going to happen, their father gently pulls them apart. Marjorie jumps from Baily's arms into her dad's arms.

Their favorite nurse, Nurse Carny, comes by to say hello. "You have another visitor Marjorie, can I send her out here or should I ask her to wait?"

Marjorie looks at her new friend and smiles, she thinks to herself that Carny said *her* which means her old friend is here for a visit. She stands straight up and stamps her foot down while pointing to the ground.

Carny laughs, "Ok, I get it, right now, huh?" she walks away laughing. Baily is the first to pick up on what they all saw. "Hey Marj, do you think it's your old friend from across the hall?" The other men nod in agreement. Marjorie simply smiles.

John points to the door and says, "Actually there are two of them here."

Everyone turns towards the doors. Marjorie sees her old friend and she is smiling but there is another girl standing behind her hiding her face. Could she know her? Marjorie shakes her head no.

Big hugs are given with apologies for not coming back sooner. Marjorie's friend talks so fast John starts to laugh. Marjorie lovingly hits him on the shoulder. Her friend takes a deep breath and says; "Marjorie, I believe you know my cousin. Annie. You met a long time ago in camp and then



again in school. I’ve told her all about you these past few weeks. She could not believe that you are the same person. Was that slow enough, John?” she says rather teasingly. She had met him before so she knows his name.

For a moment everyone is silent, then there is round of chuckles that envelope the whole group. Everyone except Annie that is. Finally, she steps forward. Cautiously she approaches Marjorie who easily walks up to her and gives her a giant welcoming hug. In her ear she whispers, “Welcome back,” the first words she has spoken in years.

The men are watching in amazement. Tears are running out of her father’s eyes. He thinks to himself, ‘there is hope, an end in sight’ He walks up to Annie and speaks softly, “I agree, welcome back, and thank you for coming, Marjorie has told me all about you over the years. Are you in school now?” he asks in a very fatherly tone.

Annie shakes her head no, “No sir, I still have a hard time being in crowded places like a school. My cousin here told me that Marjorie here saved her life, I thought it was only fair for me to finally say thank you for when she did the same thing for me,” she looks towards Marjorie. “I understand that the gift of your words is a precious one and I promise never to throw them away again. Friends?” she puts out her hand.

Marjorie pulls her in for a second hug. She brings both the girls over to her bench and shows them her drawings. She puts the earphones on them to share and watch the picture come to life. Annie speaks up first, “Marjorie, we could sell these drawings online and make some real money. I’m really good at doing that. I sold a ton of old stuff for my cousin here. But these are real, we can make a website and sell them to music and art lovers alike. With your drawing abilities and my computer knowhow, we can actually make this a business. Neither one of us has to talk to anyone but us. Everyone wins, right guys?” she looks around at the crowd of men around her.

Marjorie’s dad is stunned at the prospect. “I believe, that if we do it the right way, then yes. I would want a trademark on all of them so people don’t use them for free. How about I meet your mom and we can all discuss this prospect. Marjorie would you be ok with that? It might mean you have to leave your friends here,” he concludes with caution.

Marjorie looks around the facility. The idea of going home is very exciting. Eventually, she will talk, maybe at home the words will come out. For now, she is not as afraid, the world has righted itself again.

She smiles to her father and, ever so softly, says the word, “Yes”.