

Forever Night

Jonathan Faz

To Alyssa King
... or, rather, my dear friend Ms. Tomato, as she
would want to be called.

May 15th - Final thoughts on the case involving the King children

Dear Sarnal,

I would very much like to forget the past few weeks. However, mainly for evidence to myself that this whole experience hasn't been some cruelly intensive dream, I've written this entry.

I can still remember that day. It all started on May 3rd ...

My head was hurting, pounding so badly, that I felt I could sleep for a week and it still wouldn't go away. Detective Hastings and I had run into yet another roadblock in the case, which was becoming all too common for us as a group. The good detective hadn't been able to explain satisfactorily why four children went missing without a single clue or trace of their existence, only to miraculously reappear in the same house they had vanished from two years later. The kids had indeed aged in the two years of their absence and there was no visible evidence of any physical harm on them.

Even I, famed psychologist Doctor Samantha Lynn, was baffled. I interviewed each of the children one by one and each one returned the same horrifically unrealistic story. This would have normally suggested that there was some truth to the story, if all four patients told it in perfect harmony, but the contents were so ridiculous, they were obviously the product of some kind of mass psychosis.

All four children started their account the same way: it began with bedtime. Their mother had tucked them in that evening and they all said good night to each other. Their mother turned off the lights and left them. No clichéd

bedtime story or a kiss on the forehead. Their mother had been exhausted from the day, which consisted solely of taking her children out to the zoo for some fun time.

The children were quadruplets and, therefore, their parents found it fit to have them sleep in the same room. The oldest of the children—by about six minutes—was named Kenton. He's the most talkative kid I've ever met. He told me the exact account of what happened up to the point where they all realized they were alone in the house, but I'll get to that later.

All four of them woke up about 8 hours after falling asleep, only to find that their room was still drenched in darkness, the only source of illumination coming from the porch light outside their window. Kenton got out of bed first, realizing that there was something odd. The clock, after all, gave the time of about seven in the morning. Usually the sun would be peaking over the horizon. He told me he thought that the sky was dark with clouds at first, but upon looking outside at the clear velvet sky with twinkling stars, he realized that this was not the case.

The children fell back to sleep, thinking that their clock must be wrong.

They woke up three hours later in a groggy state, and Kenton told me that he was sure he had overslept. Yet the room remained dark as did the sky above.

The second oldest of the four—Leon, a smart and inquisitive child—suggested that he was having a strange dream. Kenton argued against it, because he knew that *he* was the conscious one. Leon then determined that they all were having the same strange dream and they all promptly decided to go back to bed and wake up for real.

Another three hours passed, making the time about one o'clock in the afternoon. Leon then decided that he might have been wrong.

The third oldest child, Lynda, decided to go wake up their mother. Leon told me that he had argued with her

not to do this, but Lynda's stubborn nature was too much to contend with.

Note: Lynda refused to tell me anything when I tried to interview her. Leon recounted Lynda walking back into the room slightly pale. She said that their mother was not in bed, nor was she anywhere in the house. Lynda then began to cry.

Kayla—the youngest of the four—is the quiet one. It isn't a bashful quiet, I don't think. Kayla has large brown eyes that I originally found beautiful, but soon found them rather disconcerting. She has the look of a kid who has a lot more going on behind those eyes than you would think. Yet, it took me nearly two hours to get her to utter more than a few words.

However, it was Kayla who told me the most out of all of the children. She told me about Oscar. Oscar is what the kids called their kidnapper—it *had* to be their kidnapper. I have seen it many times. In order to cope with a distressing event, abductees usually place their taker on a high pedestal, even claim that he or she was their friend. They do this to forget the horrors they experienced.

This was no different. Kayla told me that Oscar showed up at their house shortly after they all realized it was empty—which, incidentally, is another familiar quip of the human mind that has undergone a traumatic experience, namely, a fantasy that their caretakers or parents disappear.

Oscar was their friend. He allegedly took them around the night-fallen city. Kayla finished her tale by explaining how he had taken them to a sunny beach on the other side of the city. This, of course, was nonsense. Our city doesn't have a beach anywhere near it.

When I asked Kayla to tell me what Oscar had told her, however, Kayla merely stared at me with those eyes of hers and said quietly, "I promised I wouldn't tell."

I tried for weeks to get more information out of Kayla, but to no avail. The other three children similarly didn't tell

me what Oscar spoke to them about. Kenton said he didn't really pay attention to what he said. He was too busy having a good time at the beach. Leon told me Oscar looked so hilarious to him that he, too, hadn't really retained much of what was said. Lynda, of course, refused to speak to me outright.

I suspect Lynda remembers what *really* happened, but is too traumatized to recount it. We have already performed a physical on her and no signs of any bruises or rape exist. Perhaps it's all mental trauma.

Detective Hastings didn't have much more success with the case than I had with the children. The only finger prints in the room were that of the children, however they had recovered five cups of milk in their room just after they reappeared. All of the cups were empty.

Detective Hastings was waiting for DNA evidence to show who the fifth person could possibly be, but so far there was no match.

And that was all he had to work with. Like I said, practically no evidence that they had gone missing for two years, other than the fact that the children were two years older.

It was a grim day. I looked at Detective Hastings, who was straightening his papers on his desk. "What are we going to do?" I asked. "We've hit a dead end."

"My guess is we drop it," he said gruffly. "The children are back. That's what matters."

"But Sandra and Allan are petrified that whoever did it will come back," I persisted. "Even though no threat was made or ransom note was sent to them. It will be over their heads for a very, very long time... especially Sandra's."

A small shadow crossed Hastings's face for an instant. "May I remind you that this case has taken the last two years of our life as well? It isn't easy for me to drop it, either, but there isn't much that we can do at this point. We'll have to leave it to the police to sort out."

I wanted to argue, but I couldn't. He was right. Besides, they were a family again. A few months after their children went missing, Sandra and Allan split up. They never got divorced, but I think the tragedy of losing *all* their children made things a little sour. Sad, really. It's times like that when a husband and wife need each other the most.

However, when the children resurfaced, the two patched things up at once. It seemed genuine enough, not one of those "stay together for the children's sake" things.

"Well, I'm going to check the room again," I said at last. "Maybe there's something we missed."

"Missed in the last two years? I doubt it," grunted Hastings. He seemed to think for a bit, then he got up with a determined expression. "But, fine. I'll go with you."

The King residence was an average enough house. Nothing too fancy, but it was a heck of a lot nicer than my humble abode. Detective Hastings and I knocked on the door and were received quite politely.

Allan King was the one who answered the door. He showed us in, saying, "Come in! You two are welcome anytime."

Sandra King was sitting at the kitchen table with her children. She seemed a little taken aback when she saw us. "Oh, you've—you've come to visit!" She smiled at Detective Hastings, who kept a blank face and looked around the house. I wondered if he was thinking that this was a big waste of time. I was beginning to get the same feeling, that this was not really a furthering of the investigation as much as it was a friendly visit.

"Yes," I said, smiling back at the woman. "How are the children?"

"Doing well," Sandra replied, kissing the forehead of Kayla, who was sitting right next to her. I chanced a look at the child and once again got a sense of wonder at her eyes. I pondered over what she could be thinking as she gazed at

Detective Hastings unblinkingly.

“Kayla,” said Sandra, “It’s not polite to stare. These two helped save your life.”

I wanted to point out that we, in fact, had done nothing of the sort. I decided that I should just shut up.

Kayla’s eyes swiveled over to me. “Thank you,” she said, politely.

“You’re welcome,” I replied, with a grin.

The other three were on Allan’s side of the table. Leon was playing with a Nintendo DS and nothing was going to distract him. Kenton was engaging Detective Hastings in conversation now about the weather and how he loved autumn most of all.

Lynda refused to acknowledge our presence and, instead, talked to her father.

“I don’t want them to be here,” I heard her mutter to Allan.

“Shush,” he said. “You should be thankful to them.”

“Do you all want something to drink?” Sandra asked us.

“I would like some iced tea if you have some,” said Detective Hastings, hoarsely.

“No thank you,” I said, shaking my head.

“Actually, I’m thirsty,” said Allan. “I’ll go get the tea, then—”

“You have been through a terrible time,” Detective Hastings interrupted, getting up from his seat. “I’ll go get the tea. No, no, I insist.”

Allan looked both taken aback and flattered. “Sure. It should be in the top shelf of the refrigerator.”

Detective Hastings nodded and left the room. I surveyed the family again and tried to read what each person was thinking. Kenton was slightly disappointed, apparently wanting to continue talking to Detective Hastings. And, I mean, let’s be serious—Hastings probably left for the same reasons.

Leon was still stuck on his game, but he had glanced up

at Hastings as he left the room. A curiously confused expression crossed his face, as if he had just awoken from sleep. He then returned to his game without a word.

Lynda was still complaining to her father. She obviously didn't like us very much. Again, I wondered if Lynda knew what had *really* happened and had become bitter and untrusting with adults.

But Kayla was the most interesting of all, of course. She was looking after Hastings as he departed the dining room. Her eyes were wide and unblinking. Something about the good detective caught her attention. Had he said something that brought back a memory? I certainly hoped so.

Detective Hastings returned with two glasses of iced tea. He gave the glass on his left hand to Allan and sat down. Allan nodded and said a polite "thank you" before tipping the glass to his lips—

"Daddy," Kayla said, quite abruptly.

Allan stopped and did not take a drink. Apparently, it was a rarity for Kayla to speak nowadays, for even Sandra looked startled.

"Yes, what is it, honey?" asked Allan.

Her unusual eyes stayed fixed on Detective Hastings. "I want a drink. Gimme a drink. I'm thirsty."

"Say please," said Sandra, sternly.

Kayla nodded. "Please, daddy. I wanna drink."

"Well, there's no need for that," said Detective Hastings. "I can get another—"

"I wanna drink *now!*" Kayla said it with such force that everyone jumped back.

"Honey," began Allan, but Kayla shook her head furiously, tears forming in her eyes.

"Now now now now now now now now!"

"Okay! Okay, just... here." Allan handed his cup to Kayla, looking very concerned. "Are you that thirsty? I wonder if they deprived them of water when they were away..."

“Oh no,” said Kenton. “Oscar gave us plenty to eat and drink when we were with him.”

Allan and Sandra looked at each other. Detective Hastings looked very worried, his eyes on Kayla. I, too, felt saddened.

Kayla attempted to swallow her tea greedily.

“Oh!” Detective Hastings cried.

A split second later, Kayla spit out the tea and flung the cup to the ground, making her shirt and jeans sopping wet. She began coughing and crying.

“It’s okay,” said Sandra. She turned to Allan, looking worried. “Honey, get a towel.”

“Don’t cry, Kay,” said Kenton, consolingly. “Oscar said that you’ll stop being so clumsy as you get older. Spills are a sign you’re growing up.”

That was enough for me. I had heard about “Oscar” one time too many. As Allan and Detective Hastings got up and exited the room, I got to my feet as well. “Sandra,” I said. “May I see the room again?”

Sandra looked surprised, and I don’t blame her, really. It probably seemed like a random request to her. “S—sure,” she replied.

I strolled to their room and opened the door. The inside was very large since it had to hold four beds and the possessions of four children. On my left as I walked through the entrance was the large closet with some clothes already piled high outside the door. To the right were the windows, dark blue curtains spread apart to allow the sunlight into the room. Straight in front of me were the beds that had been the last place anybody had seen the King children for two years.

I closed the door, wanting to drown out Kayla’s sobbing so that I could concentrate. Immediately I heard ringing and I glanced upwards to see a few ribboned bells hanging from the top of the door. Again, I was left to wonder just how anybody had managed to enter the kids room without

being heard. During my many studies, I had determined with Detective Hastings that Sandra was a very light sleeper, seemingly any noise woke her up. Surely, the bells would have awakened her.

But no sound at all had been heard that night.

How could the kidnapper, Oscar, have gotten in? Or had the children *gone out* to meet him?

I walked across the room to the window. They were locked tightly. They were always locked, I suspected, because of the dry, uncracked paint surrounding the window sill. It was all one solid, smooth white surface.

Of course, Detective Hastings had already covered all of this. This was *his* area of expertise, after all.

The only possible explanation was that the children had *seen* someone outside and had been drawn out by them. They somehow silently exited their room and the house. Sandra must have had a busy day and was so tired she did not wake up like she normally would.

But, how did it happen?

I decided that I wanted to experience the scene as close to the original experience as possible. I closed the dark blue curtains to make the room pitch black, like it was night. It took my eyes a while to get used to the darkness, but when they finally did, the whole room looked remarkably like it was midnight.

I walked to the middle of the room again and looked around. It seemed so peaceful and serene. I walked over to one of the beds and I laid in it for a moment, trying to get a feel for the surroundings. I almost felt myself slip off into sleep, but I forced my mind to stay sharp.

Pretending to hear something at the window, I got up from the bed and stood. Would a child look out the window immediately? Yes, yes they would. Children were usually trusting and not experienced with bad people. As an adult, I would not have opened the curtains completely, but peeked out. Kenton or Leon, on the other hand, would

most likely have pulled the curtains open completely.

But, would Lynda have let them? Somehow, I think she would've cautioned against it.

Again, I felt familiar frustration creep up. Nothing ever fit. It was so hard to piece together what happened when the witnesses were psychologically scarred and there was no evidence to form even a realistic theory.

I ultimately decided that Lynda would've won out. That girl was tough. Kenton or Leon would have then thought about telling their parents, of which I'm sure Lynda would not have minded at all—

Suddenly, there was a tap from the window—or was that just my active imagination? It was as if I were there at night and I was only 8 years old... I ran to the window curiously and swung open the curtains.

The front yard outside the window was glowing with the light of the porch. The rest of the street and the surrounding area was pitch black. I looked up with wide eyes and saw a half-moon in a twilight sky.

I blinked. Perhaps my imagination was going a little *too* crazy. Remembering that I was *not* 8 years old, I ran to the bedroom door and swung it open. That's where I decided I had lost my mind for good. The hallway was dark and brooding. It definitely looked like it was night time. But that was *impossible*.

“Hello?!”

I ran to through the hallway and opened door after door, but each one was dark and empty. I felt tears of fear and confusion crawl down my face as I reached the kitchen and realized, to my horror, that it too was empty and still.

“What happened?! Where's everybody! This *isn't* funny!”

Again, the tap from outside, but this time it was coming from the front door. I swirled around to look at the door and saw, through the curtained window in the door's center, the shape of a person standing just outside.

I panicked. I dashed across the kitchen and seized the

sharpest and longest knife I could find, all the while spilling all sorts of kitchen utensils to the floor. "Who's there?" I called out. I had made enough noise trying to find the knife that it was pointless trying to pretend not to be there.

"Ah," said a muffled voice... a man's, quite aged but otherwise strong. "Finally, someone who isn't a hundredth my age. I suppose I shall be able to finish this after all. Yes, yes. But there is very little time."

"Who's out there?!"

"My name is—well, you may call me Oscar. It'll be easier that way."

My heart skipped a beat. At that one second, I knew that the kids—all of them, Kenton, Leon, Lynda, and Kayla—had been telling me the truth all this time. As impossible as it seemed, they told me exactly what had happened. I knew it was true because my reality was matching theirs.

And, according to the children, Oscar was good.

Despite that, I stepped cautiously forward, holding the knife at the ready. This could still be some sort of dream—yes, perhaps I'd fallen asleep when I had lied down on the bed and this was just a product of my tired mind.

I opened the door slowly and got a glimpse of the person called Oscar. He was a short man, probably up to my chest in height, with ruby colored hair that was long, dirty, and stringy. His chin was covered with an even longer, dirtier, and stringier beard. The man's eyes were beady but friendly enough to look upon. He was wearing a fairly old-fashioned vested suit, the kind that would come with a bow tie—though his long beard obstructed the view of his neck.

He reminded me of Gimli from the *Lord of the Rings* movies, only he didn't talk with gruff voice or an accent and, well, he had a completely different taste in clothes.

"But—" I stammered. "I thought you weren't real. I thought you kidnapped them."

"Oh, I know. I don't expect you to fully understand. But, please, come with me. I have to tell you something, and

quick.” He turned on the spot and began to walk away from the house. For a moment I stood there with the knife still held high. This man didn't seem the least bit threatening... but I decided that I should take the knife with me just in case.

I stepped out into the surreal night that, apparently, lasted forever. According to the children, it had always been night during their two year absence. I followed Oscar into the street and he waddled to the right, beckoning to me.

“What is this place?” I asked as I followed closely at his side, my eyes on him.

“The Realm of Shadows and Secrets,” he said, matter-of-factly. “Depressing, isn't it? Everything is so dark and gloomy. There's no truth here. But, come... there is a weak spot, and that's where most of the deep truths come from.”

“But, who are you? Do you live here?”

Oscar laughed. “Oh, I should hope not, dear woman. Do *you* live in your office?”

I gazed at him incredulously. “My office? How do you know—”

“I am quite fond of truth and facts, you know. I try to learn as much as I can about the people I try to help.”

“So this is where you *work*, then?”

“Yes, yes. My job is to clean up as much of this place as possible. As you can see, I have my job cut out for me.” He gestured around the dark street. I glanced up and saw that we were nearing the end of the street. He turned left and continued walking. I followed.

“So, why did you take the children?” I inquired, trying not to sound accusing.

“Well, first I should like to point out that it was a mistake. Children do not belong here at all. I only had them for two hours, but two years passed for them. Children age faster when they're surrounded by lies. I do apologize for that... No, I was actually trying to take their father. Unfortunately, sometimes I don't do my research

thoroughly enough. I got the wrong room.”

“The—the wrong room?”

“Yes,” said Oscar, thoughtfully. “How foolish of me. He was in the room right *next* to the children.” Oscar smacked his head theatrically.

“No, he wasn't,” I protested. “He was in the master bedroom with his wife, Sandra.”

“You would like to think that,” said Oscar, sadly. “No, but one thing that I *did* get right was that Sandra and Allan King were having marital problems long before the children disappeared. They were already sleeping in separate rooms at the time.”

I gaped at him. “But, they never—”

“Told you? I should expect not. The world is, after all, filled with concealed truths.” Again, he gestured at the darkness around us. We reached a fork in the road. This time, Oscar turned right.

“So you took the children by accident, then. Why were you trying to take Allan to begin with? That's still considered kidnapping.”

“To you, maybe. To me, it's my job.” Oscar chuckled to himself. “Anyways, I was trying to show Allan his own truth, something he *needed* to know. It was a lot harder to reveal to children, but *someone* had to know. I am glad that you have come along, Samantha Lynn. It will be easier to tell you.”

“Tell me what?”

“That will come at the beach,” said Oscar. “We're nearly there. Look.”

I looked up from the short man and saw, to my surprise, that the area around me was starting to look very odd indeed. The morning sun was in the sky, but its glow and light was still swallowed up by darkness. It looked like pitch black clouds were surrounding it in the sky.

My surroundings were even stranger. Yellowish light was beginning to illuminate certain areas of the street, but the

areas the sun did not touch were still very dark. The contrast between light and shadows was immense.

“The beach is my base of operations, you could say,” explained Oscar. “It is where light flourishes and the waters of truth flow in. The more I reveal, the larger the beach gets. I hope that this place we're walking through becomes sunny one day.”

I had to be dreaming. I just knew it. This was all too surreal and...

“You're not dreaming,” said Oscar, reading my thoughts. “Humans don't really belong here. It does funny things with their physical makeup. The children, for instance, aged two years in two hours. You, on the other hand, are having quite the opposite effect. I bet your head feels light, doesn't it?”

I nodded. “So,” I said, trying to clear my mind. “What—what are you showing me, again?”

“I'm showing you what I wanted to show to Allan and what I ended up showing to his children. They didn't understand it, though... bless them. Though, I think the one with the eyes did. She's a clever one.”

“I don't think I should see it,” I objected, suddenly. “If it's something about Allan, I shouldn't intrude.”

“Normally, I'd agree. In this case, though, you happen to be in a profession where people tell you their deepest and darkest secrets. I do not doubt that anything you see here will be considered confidential.”

We continued on in silence. The surrounding area began to balance out and the thick cloud of darkness was lifting around the sun. Eventually all looked like a normal sunny day, except for a fog of gloom deeper into the city that we had left behind.

Before us lay a sandy beach with beautiful blue waters tumbling on shore, the hissing water mixing with a calm breeze. I couldn't believe my eyes. I had never seen a beach so beautiful before.

“Over here, if you please.” Oscar made his way towards the shore and gestured to the water. “In you go.”

“Me?” I looked at the water.

“Yes, yes,” said Oscar, nodding encouragingly. “You must go in neck deep for it to work, I believe.”

“But I’ll get all wet.”

“That’s generally what happens when one gets into water. Do not fear, however. I have some fresh dry clothes for you to change into afterwards. Now, go on. Time is ticking.”

I looked at the beautiful water and then back at the short man. Well, if it was a dream, why should I care if I got wet or not? I stepped into the caressing waves and walked further and further into the ocean of water. Curiously enough, the waves died down, as if they sensed my presence and did not wish to splash or overwhelm me.

I reached a point where the water extended to the top of my neck, then I turned to look at Oscar. I shivered slightly in the cool breeze. He smiled and nodded. “Close your eyes now, dear girl.”

I did as instructed.

And I saw Allan and Sandra King sitting at the kitchen table. The kids were nowhere in sight. The two were quite alone.

“How long have you been doing this?” asked Allan in a wavering voice, tears in his eyes. He was clutching an item in his shaking fist. “How long? How long?!”

Sandra gulped down tears of her own. She looked both horrified and ashamed. “Two months,” she replied shakily.

Allan sighed deeply and slammed his hand down onto the table. When he removed it, I saw what he had been holding. It was a letter signed by a man named Jim. The writing on it quite simply said:

*Sandra, I miss you. We should meet somewhere again and talk.
I've been very lonely without you.*

Love,

Jim

I felt my mouth go dry. Through all my interviews with the family, I never knew, never even imagined that Sandra had been cheating on Allan. That must've been why they split up after the children disappeared. Why hadn't they told me?

"But dear," Sandra protested, suddenly. "Jim is just a friend. He's going through a hard time and—"

"Just a friend?!" roared Allan, getting to his feet. "That sounds a little too friendly to me. Don't try to cover this up, Sandra! It just makes it worse."

Sandra shook her head frantically. "It's not like that! I swear—"

The surrounding area changed quite suddenly, so that Sandra's figure was the only visible thing. I blinked and glanced around, but saw nothing but darkness. I turned back to Sandra to discover that her facial appearance had changed from panic stricken to stony.

"The fire is gone," she said in a toneless voice that echoed all around me. "I don't love you anymore. Jim has shown me what love should be like. Why don't you love me the way he does?"

Unexpectedly, everything went back to normal.

"Then why keep this a secret from me?!" demanded Allan. "If there's nothing romantic between you two, there should be nothing to hide."

"It's my business! Besides, it was nothing, like I said..." Again, everything got dark except Sandra and her voice became monotoned. "I would love to leave right now, but the kids... the kids..."

Suddenly, Sandra herself was concealed with darkness and a lone figure was illuminated in her stead. It was Kayla and she was standing behind the bathroom door, her big mysterious eyes looking on as her parents argued. She clutched a towel tightly and remained silent.

“Mommy? Daddy?”

Then, all was emptiness.

So Kayla knew... she knew her parents were going through some troubles. Was she merely too young to understand the significance of this, or did she keep it from me in on purpose?

Quite suddenly, I was standing in the kitchen again, only there was a definite change in the emotion of the scene. The children had obviously been returned. In fact, this was the very day I had been called into the investigation.

Detective Hastings was sitting in a corner and appeared to be asking Sandra some questions.

I walked directly to Allan. “Mister King, I'm so happy to hear your children are safe,” I said. “If you don't mind, I would like to ask them some questions to find out who did this to them.”

“Of course,” Allan replied. “But, please, give them some time.”

“Are they traumatized?”

Allan paused, giving his children a concerned glance. “Well—well, I suppose not. They seem to be unharmed. I don't think they really know what happened to them, to be honest.”

Everything got dim and Allan was the only person that I could see. “I hope this woman doesn't ruin this all,” he said, his voice toneless and reverberating. I took offense at this statement, for he was speaking about me. “Everything is looking up at last. My children are back... Sandra is back. Why does she have to pry?”

All turned back to normal. “Well, I will like to see them as soon as possible,” I said, giving him a grin that I now regretted giving.

Again, the strange phenomenon of the lights going out occurred, only this time it was Detective Hastings who was in the spotlight.

“Unbelievable,” I heard him say.

The spotlight left him and fell upon Sandra, who was now standing up. "I wish I never met Jim. How could I have been so unfaithful to Allan? I feel so ashamed... so dirty... and now the children are back. Time to make things right."

All turned back to normal. Detective Hastings got to his feet as well and trudged along, passing Sandra up a bit rudely and impatiently. "Oh, you're here," he said to the second me. "I'm Jim Hastings. I've been following up on this case ever since the children disappeared."

Jim Hastings... *Jim Hastings!* Could it be that *he* was Jim, the Jim that Sandra had— I paused my thoughts, watching the scene unfold in disbelief.

"Nice to meet you," the second me said, shaking his hand.

Then, strangely enough, Kayla came to be the one everything centered around again. She was standing in the hallway and was looking at something very intently, as though fearful.

The scene changed yet again. I was standing in Allan and Sandra's bedroom in the middle of the night, of which date I'm not quite sure of. The phone was ringing loudly and Sandra, naturally, was the first one to pick up, as she was the light sleeper.

"Hello?"

Somehow I could hear the voice on the other end and it confirmed my fear and suspicion. Detective Hastings's voice answered on the other end. "So, it's all over, then? You just used me and now you're done with me?"

Sandra remained silent. She glanced over her shoulder at Allan, who was still snoring loudly. "Jim," she said in a voice a little above a whisper. "Yes, it's over. It was my mistake. I'm sorry you had to get hurt, but I was real stupid..."

"I understand," said Jim. There was something in his voice that I didn't like... not one bit.

Sandra obviously felt the same way. "You're a good man and I'm glad to have met you. But, I should have never cheated on Allan. There's a reason I married him and I forgot that. Now I remember."

Jim remained silent.

"I'm sorry. Really sorry," Sandra continued. "Look, you probably shouldn't be over tomorrow... or not ever. There's no more case for you to follow and I think Allan will be suspicious if you keep visiting. He never found out who wrote me that letter... Jim, are you still there?"

"Yeah..."

"You were my hero. Thank you. But you should move on, now."

"Bull—"

"I'm hanging up now. Goodbye, Jim."

She hung up the phone. As she covered herself back up with her blanket, something very unusual happened. The room seemed to dissolve and darken as if the spotlight was about to appear, but the light was nowhere to be seen. The room then flickered back to normal, then darkened again. This happened very quickly and a few times in a row.

I heard a scream of rage come from the walls, from outside the window, from inside my head... and I knew that something terrible was meant by it.

And then, I was back at the office, back to this very morning, in fact. I saw myself speak about checking the room again, understood now why Detective Hastings reluctantly agreed. He didn't want to return because Sandra had told him not to.

We showed up at the house and Allan greeted us at the door. When Sandra smiled at Detective Hastings and welcomed him to the house, I noticed that he just kept a blank expression.

Then, everything fast forwarded and light both from outside and inside the house flickered in and out. I was standing in the dining room looking down at myself,

Detective Hastings, Allan, Sandra, and the kids.

Detective Hastings stood up. "You have been through a terrible time," he said. "I'll go get the tea. No, no, I insist."

"Sure," Allan said, looking surprised. "It should be in the top shelf of the refrigerator."

The lights dimmed and spotlighted Detective Hastings and Kayla, who was watching him closely with those eyes of hers. I felt dread course through my veins. Something sinister was about to happen, I could feel it.

Detective Hastings walked into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. He took out the pitcher of tea and got out two glasses from the top shelf of the ceiling cabinet. He knew *exactly* where the cups were. I wondered just how many times he had been over to the house when Allan and Sandra had been separated.

He peered through the kitchen door suspiciously, as if checking if he were being watched, and he poured the tea into the two glasses.

He looked down at the glass to his left—the one he had handed to Allan if my memory was correct—and pulled out a small bottle from his coat pocket. I couldn't tell what it was. It was a clear liquid, it could have been water, but I knew that it wasn't. He tipped the bottle over so that the contents splashed neatly into the tea. He grabbed the glass with his left hand and his own tea glass with his right and re-entered the dining room.

Suddenly, everything Kayla had done made sense to me. She *knew*. Like Oscar had suggested, she was the only one of the kids who understood what was going on. The other kids, too, knew that it was significant, but not enough... not like Kayla, who demanded she get the drink from Allan and pretended she was thirsty. Detective Hastings argued, saying he would get Kayla her own glass, but Kayla didn't want tea. She wasn't even really thirsty. She wanted to stop her dad from drinking.

She spat out the tea and spilled the glass on purpose. Tea

fell over everything, all over her.

Just as everything began to darken again, I saw Allan and Detective Hastings disappearing into the kitchen to get a towel.

The next thing I saw was a flash of the knife and dark-red blood splattering the ground. I heard a scream. And then there was nothing.

A fear and urgency unlike any other filled me as I opened my eyes and saw I was standing neck deep in the ocean again. I rounded on Oscar, who was standing on the sand, watching me closely.

“What did I just see?” I demanded. “Did that really just happen?!”

“Most of it was in the past. But the last part, the part where Mister Hastings attempts to murder Allan King has not yet come to pass. I wanted to show Allan a similar vision of things to come, but alas, I captured his children instead.”

I ran through the water towards the sand. I was dripping wet and my clothes sagged and slowed me down. “I have to go warn him,” I said. “Before it's too late!”

“I agree. Come on, then. Put on your dry clothes. Let's head back.”

Oscar was very gentlemanly and turned around as I dressed. It didn't even take me a minute to finish. Somehow, he had duplicates of the clothes I had been wearing before I entered the water. It would be like I never left. “Let's go.” I sprinted ahead, Oscar huffing and puffing behind me. We left the beach and entered the strange, contrasting area with deep shadows.

How could I have not seen it all before? Jim Hastings and Sandra King having an affair? It was right under my nose, but I was too focused on unfogging the so-called mass delusion that the children were having. Still, I knew Detective Hastings. A murderer? I didn't think it was possible, but of course I knew that the typical human could

be moved to do all sorts of reprehensible things because of jealousy.

Hastings wasn't a cruel man, but at the moment he was a monster, thinking only of himself and of revenge. Interesting, since, if anyone had the right to seek revenge, it was Allan King, not Detective Hastings.

Before I knew it, I had jogged back to the house. By then I was exhausted, sweating so much that it was almost like I had never left the ocean water.

We entered the house in a hurry. "Into the room," said Oscar, pointing. "I'm afraid there is no time for goodbyes. When I send you back, you must run straight into the kitchen. Hastings will have his back to you."

I nodded and walked into the children's bedroom. Oscar winked at me and closed the door shut. Immediately, the room filled with sunlight from the opened curtains. I felt a rush of dizziness spread over my head suddenly and fell flat on my face.

Suddenly, Kayla's muffled sobbing could be heard through the closed door and for one horrified minute I thought I was too late. Then, I remembered that she'd been crying when I had left.

I stood up, clutching the wall for balance. I blinked a few times, wondering if the whole thing had been a dream after all. But then I noticed the kitchen knife in my hand, the one I had taken with me in case Oscar turned out to be dangerous. I hadn't even realized I was holding the thing until then.

My mind snapped into focus. I knew what I had to do.

I opened the door forcefully and ran through the hallway, entering the dining room at top speed. I saw Kenton glance up at me in surprise, Leon in curiosity. Even Lynda, who was prone to ignore me, looked my way.

But Kayla was the one who knew what I was after. I'm not even sure how she knew, but she did. She stopped crying immediately and yelled out, "Go, lady! GO!"

I entered the kitchen and everything froze. There was Allan standing by the pantry, evidently looking for towels to clean up the mess Kayla had made. He had his back turned to Detective Hastings, who had his back turned to me. I couldn't see Hastings's face, but I knew he was looking to his right, towards the dish rack and kitchen knives—one knife was missing, which made my mind do a somersault, since I was holding it in my hand from my visit with Oscar.

Hastings slowly reached over and grabbed a knife, holding it tightly in his hands.

I didn't know how to stop him. Who would believe me that someone from another world of pure night told me that Hastings planned to kill Allan King? If I stopped him now, though... if I made my presence known and kept my eye on him... would things turn out differently?

Before I could make my decision, Hastings began to march towards Allan with determination, raising the knife. Without thinking, I yelled, "Jim!"

Hastings halted, turning around in surprise, still holding the knife up. Allan turned around too and noticed that Hastings was closer to him. His eyes fell on the knife held in the detective's hand.

"What were you planning to do?" I asked, holding my own knife out of sight.

Hastings was at a loss for words. Slowly, he lowered the knife and walked over to the kitchen counter. He looked unsure of himself and a little regretful. He placed the knife in the sink and stepped towards the kitchen exit.

Allan stepped forward. "Jim?"

Hastings stopped in mid-stride. He looked up, but didn't turn to meet Allan's gaze. After a few seconds, he continued walking until he disappeared into the dining room.

I exchanged glances with Allan and at that moment I knew that he had connected the dots. He knew who Jim was and he was furious. I suddenly wondered if I was going

to have to prevent another murder in the same house on the same day. Allan stomped to the exit, but I stepped in front of him to block him. "Allan," I said. "You're better than that. I'll report him. Don't do anything stupid."

Allan blinked and looked at me, dazed. I walked back into the dining room. Detective Hastings was nowhere in sight. I looked at Sandra inquiringly, who pointed to the bathroom. I walked to it slowly, keeping an eye out for anything unusual.

"Detective Hastings?" I called out, reaching the hallway. There was no answer. I crept along the wall, wondering if I should call for backup or not. The bathroom door was open just a crack, not nearly enough for me to see if he was hiding just behind the door or was far into the bathroom.

Still leaning on the wall, I opened the door by tapping it with my foot. The door slowly swung open, revealing...

"Are you sure he went in here?" I asked, raising my voice so that Sandra and Allan could hear me.

Sandra called out an affirmative. I frowned and scanned the bathroom. It was empty, no trace of Hastings anywhere to be found.

Curiously enough, Jim Hastings's body was found three days later. Nobody knew what the significance of his soaking wet clothes and the note left next to him meant, but they ruled it a suicide, which was truthful enough. Sandra was moderately affected by his death. She didn't blame herself, but she did feel that she had some part in his decision to take his own life. Whether or not *that* is true there is no way for me to tell for certain.

The police took a special interest in me, since I was technically his partner in the case—also, because the suicide note was addressed to me personally. But my alibi was airtight. The time of death was oddly only one hour after he disappeared from the King residence.

For the next few months, I interviewed Kayla to find out

more about the world she had visited and the man named Oscar. She seemed more open to talk to me now that we both knew about that place. I, of course, kept Oscar a secret, except for this journal entry. There are some things I learned from Kayla that I dare not publish even here, however. Some things are best kept in the dark, though Oscar would disagree with that statement entirely, I would imagine.

I'll let him worry about that.

Oh, and what did the suicide note of Detective Hastings say? It was quite simple, really.

“Sam, I saw the truth.”

What truth he saw, I never found out. But it's for the best. Rest in peace, Jim.

Samantha Lynn