

It was the day of the wedding. My stomach curdled as I saw Tom Slayton standing at the altar, waiting for my mother. Tom Slayton's eyes were like chilling pools of mercury, those reflective pools which catch your gaze for a beat too long. He caught me staring and gave me a smirk of a man who knows he's won the game in which he gambled. His face is cut handsomely, but the beauty of his smile doesn't reach his stark, lifeless eyes. His nostrils flare dangerously when he is angry, just like how I imagine a reared serpent waiting to strike upon its next victim would.

When Stephanie, my mother, first introduced Tom, his face folded into a crumpled grin that was as flimsy as the plastic table my mother and I ate dinner from. I thought Tom was just the newest of Stephanie's flings. To me, Tom was just a temporary, unwelcome intrusion in our broken home.

One night, before Tom had arrived to pick up Stephanie for their date, I stood beside Stephanie as she straightened her hair, applied a cakey layer of makeup, and drenched herself in the foul Heavenly Paradise perfume Tom had bought her. I stared into the cracked mirror. Stephanie's wispy blond hair was pale next to my dark, wavy, earthy locks. The freckles splashed across my face resembled nothing on her smooth, oval face.

"Stephanie," I hesitated, bracing myself for a hurricane of rage, then plowed on, "about Tom, doesn't something about him seem a bit... off?"

Stephanie's hands stiffened around the straightening iron. "Cadie, you are far too paranoid for your own good. Tom's a perfect gentleman, someone I'm willing to spend the rest of my life with, and I wish you could see that. Why can't you ever be happy for me?" She said the last part as she shot me an irritated glance.

And that's when I saw the ring resting on her nightstand. The box was velvety black with a red satin bow folded crisply on top. The ring was an arc of pearls, each one seemed to be cut from despair. And a note perched beside the box, only two words which I registered. *Love, Tom.*

*Love, Tom.* How was that monstrosity capable of love? When I was little I used to dream that someday I would have a father who loved Stephanie and me, one who would take me to our school's father-daughter dances, one who would help me when my dyslexia made words crawl across the page and the world blurred before me. As the years went on, I lost those dreams just like how a stranded man loses his sanity.

These thoughts soon trickled away. Dread began to seep like a poison into my heart when the organ music started. Stephanie had been disowned long ago by her parents. He walked the path to the altar alone as her sorority sisters watched with starry eyes from the wooden pews. Stephanie's blonde hair was curled, catching the slanted sunlight as she walked the aisle. Her eyes held the innocence of one who didn't know she was being swindled. Tom took her hand when she made her way to the altar, smiling his award-winning grin. Bile rose in my throat as I saw them standing beneath the stained glass windows, sprays of roses scattered across the church floor.

The portly priest cleared his throat, then droned, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered today..."

I pulled at my lacy, peach bridesmaid dress; the fabric suddenly seemed to tight for me to breathe. My scalp tingled; it was like the tight spiral my hair was wound stopped my thinking. My eyes became unfocused. This couldn't be happening. Tom couldn't, wouldn't be my stepfather. Beads of tears begin to string themselves across my face.

At that moment all I could think of nothing else but, "Someone come to save me, please..."

Just as my wish had melted away, I registered that the organ music's rhythm began to drag, the priest stifled a yawn, then continued a bit slower. Tom's eyes began dropping farther and farther down. Was I imagining things, or was that happening to everyone? Everyone except me that is. My heart continued to hammer in my chest just as quickly as it had before. Suddenly, there was an absence of giggles from the pews and everyone slumped to the ground. I screamed, thinking they had died. I strode toward my mother and pressed my fingers against her wrist. Her pulse was steady, her breath was slow and deep, almost as if she was sleeping...

The mahogany doors to the church creaked open and in stepped a man. My jaw dropped. He seemed to radiate a golden glow. He was dressed in soft, plush pajamas. His feet were concealed in a pair of raggedy, reindeer slippers. His hair was wavy brown, just like mine. His face was that of a man who did good deeds. I shivered when his eyes turned to mine. A slow smile illuminated his jade eyes. The oddest part was the two downy wings arching from each of his eyebrows.

I froze as he strode up the red aisle, coming up the steps towards where I was standing near the altar. My throat was so parched no words came out of my mouth.

He gestured towards the fallen figures and declared, "Quite simple actually when you're the god of sleep."

My body was in a state of such shock. I choked and began coughing and hacking.

"Cadie Prince," he chanted, "it's been so long. The last time I saw you, I was holding you in my arms."

"I know what you're thinking," he murmured. "I thought it was time we got to know each other, Cadie. After all, I am your father."

Should I scream? Should I call for the police? Who was this deranged man?

"Ah," the man cleared his throat, "Hypnos. Greek god of sleep" He reached a hand towards me, a tender smile stretched across his face. I hesitantly took it, thinking of how my first-grade teacher told us never to talk to strangers.

I had never heard of a Hypnos before, except maybe in Greek mythology. But when I looked up at that gentle face one more time, I only saw a reflection of myself. Someone who spent their days dreaming and wondering. My heart sang with a sense of belonging.

Hypnos seemed to become nervous for a second. He swallowed and said, "You take after me, don't you? You do have Stephanie's spirit, but you have my looks." I saw him glance at Stephanie who was keeled over beside Tom. His eyes seemed to harden. Then he looked back at me and said, "I'm guessing she's moved on by now, hasn't she? And that must be the groom." He kicked Tom's hand and proclaimed with disgust, "A blight upon my eyes." I choked back a laugh. Maybe he really was my father.

Hypnos's hands shook as he attempted to keep his wildly flapping brow-wings at bay. "I told Stephanie I needed to leave. I couldn't stay any longer, I didn't want to bring the terrors of the Greek world to my wife, my daughter." His voice cracked with emotion at the end.

He breathed a deep sigh, "I can only hope you'll forgive me."

I looked into his deep, forest green eyes and launched myself into his arms. I heard him exhale in shock, then he held me. He leaned back and said, "I think this calls for a little celebration."

"What?" I gulped, a little terrified at the mad glint in his eyes.

"Rule number one, Cadie," he replied while glaring at Tom, "never leave unfinished business."

"What do you mean?" I asked, but I already knew what he was going to say.

"I think there's a wedding that needs to be crashed."