







SPARROW

Sarah Moon



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White room. White walls. White ceiling. White sheets. White gown. Clear tube dripping who knows what into my arm. Whatever it is, it's making me stupid. I feel like I've been asleep for a week. Maybe I have been. In the hall, a white doctor in a white coat is talking to Mom in a hushed, cold voice.

“Do you have any idea what might have caused the attempt, Ms. Cooke?”

“It wasn't an attempt,” I croak. It barely comes out as a whisper. My mouth tastes like cotton and sandpaper. It's just as well. It's not like I could explain what I *was* attempting to do.

“No, Doctor, she's a very happy girl.” The only sign that my mother is in any distress at all are the sunglasses perched on top of her head. They should be in her purse, in their black carrying case with the special cloth.

“Have you considered therapy for her?”

“No.” Firm.

Ugh. I can see Mom going to the secret part of her brain where she's filed therapy, in a file she's supposed to be too

evolved to have: White Girl Stuff, right there with eating disorders, country music, and vegetarianism. The Cookes don't do therapy. The Cookes can handle it on their own.

"Well, I'm afraid that's the best option for Sparrow. She's past the obligatory stay for suicide watch, and she hasn't been responsive to our questions here."

Thanks for selling me out, Doc. I wasn't being unresponsive; it's just that everyone kept asking me why I'd tried to kill myself. Every time I explained that I didn't try to kill myself, the doctors, nurses, shrinks, they'd all say, "So, what were you doing on the edge of the roof?" And then I'd have nothing to say. They'd start talking about denial in their horrible, even voices like they knew they were right all along. Unresponsive.

"We can look into a longer-term facility for her, until she's cooperative, or we can recommend a therapist and release her to your care."

If it's possible, my mouth goes even drier. The Cookes don't do this. Don't need help. Don't end up in a hospital at fourteen. Please, Mom. Just take me home.

"I'll be taking her home, thank you."

"Very well. They'll set up an appointment for her at the desk with Dr. Katz. She's very good."



We take a taxi home, which seems very official. It's better than an ambulance, but clearly, Mom does not trust me near

subway tracks. The ride isn't more than fifteen minutes, but I wake up in front of our house, my head resting easy on her shoulder, my feet curled up underneath me. It's the most comfortable I've felt in days. I don't look at her face; if there's worry on it (of course there's worry on it), I don't want to see it right now. I want to be Mom & Me; we've ridden in taxis like this since I can remember, my head, her shoulder, her arm around me. Her arm is around me now, but when she feels me stir, she takes it off.

We live in the top two floors of a brownstone, and I check to see if George, our first-floor tenant, is home. His yellow bike is usually chained to the iron gate, but it's gone—he's at work. Where my mother should be. The guilt comes in with the waking up, and through the fog inside me, I feel terrible that I've made such a mess. When the taxi stops, I get out as Mom pays. It's a strange feeling coming home from the hospital; I haven't done it since I was a baby, of course. My mom tells that story all the time. My tininess, how Aunt Joan and Grandma and Grandpa came and stayed with us off and on for weeks. They said it was to help out; Mom says it was because they just couldn't get enough of my baby smell and my baby hands and my baby self. She says she named me Sparrow because I was so small and brown, almost breakable, but so strong. Tiny but mighty, she said, that's my Sparrow.

It was just me and Mom; it always has been. Don't look for some sad tale of the father figure I'm missing or how he left when blah, blah, blah. Mom didn't want a husband; she

wanted a baby. So she had one. You know. Sperm-bank style. She picked someone who was tall, skinny, and smart, like her. So, basically, I've got a double dose of my mom. I'm not one of those kids who spend a lot of time wondering about who Pop might be. Obviously, I have other things on my mind.

I look at the brownstone and it's like I'm seeing it for the first time, even though it was just the other day that I was here, that the sun was shining just like this, that I was bugging Mom for bagel money and trying to get out the door. She handed me five dollars and told me to have a good day, and she watched me walk down the stairs and go out through the gate like she has every single day since I was old enough to walk to school by myself. Now, standing here in the faint February sun, I can hear the same stupid things that we said to each other that morning, that we always say to each other. I'm standing here in a chorus of *have a good day you too love you you too do you have money for lunch yeah don't forget your homework I didn't I'm working late I know don't stay up late I won't love you you too*. It feels like years ago. It was Tuesday morning.

I could sink to the ground right here on the sidewalk. It seems easier to do that than it does to climb up these stairs that I have climbed every single day since I was a baby. I've run up these stairs crying, I've hopped up them because I was so excited to be home, I've jumped from the fourth to the first when my mom wasn't looking, I've sat out here and read for hours, spread out on the bottom two, my mom on the top two, only getting up for more tea.