

Hide and Seek

By Phillip Wenturine

The room had an odd smell. Clean, like a hospital. But rusty. Like aged, metal pipes coated with calcium buildup. And other buildup. It all was spotless, though. Orderly. I guess that's what I assumed it'd be like. Although it's definitely brighter than I expected. And quiet.

"Can I help you?" My surroundings left me standing there gawking, more than obvious I was an outsider.

"Yes, hi. I'm looking for Detective Shepherd. We spoke on the phone yesterday, about me coming—"

"Jordan, right? He mentioned you. Sure are ballsy, kid. Come on back."

I hesitated, knowing what he meant.

"You coming? Ain't got all day now."

Every inch I stepped made my heart kick up a notch. I struggled to keep my breath at a steady rhythm. Not sure if it was my nerves or my excitement reacting inside of me. That, or the fact that I had yet to see any windows.

A man in uniform with a rifle walked past me. Eyed me. I turned around as I walked, absorbing his sense of security. The barrel of the gun hanging over his shoulder returned my stare.

"Keep up the pace, kid."

Still surveying my surroundings, the man in front of me was leading me down some anonymous corridor and I failed to notice him stop. I stumbled right into him.

"Sorry, just, uh. Got a little distracted."

“Yeah, well this place is all about helping eliminate distractions. Watch yourself.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Detective Shepherd is right down that hallway. Second door to your right. You won’t want to wander. All right?”

I nodded in response.

Nothing. That’s what I found down that hallway. Except two doors on the right, the second of which I was headed for. And a third door on the left a little further down with two more armed security guards. They lowered their heads in a nod towards the distance, and I turned around to see the mystery man that I plowed into slowly walking off, watching me. I hurried down to the second door on the right.

Before my knuckles could make contact with the tops of the door, a rough, older voice said to come on in.

“Don’t worry, just saw you on the monitor.”

I’m sure he saw me on plenty of monitors as his office was filled with all sorts of them. Different shapes and sizes. Some black and white, some color.

“Hi, nice to meet you Detective Shepherd. I’m Jordan, from Louisiana State—”

“Yes, yes I remember you. I’ve heard some good things about you from your professor.”

“Well, she thinks I’m nuts for taking it this far. But I want to be thorough. Figured it’d be good testimonial experience.”

“I admire you for your aspirations and guts young man, but I’m not sure you’ll get what you want here.”

“I’m not exactly sure what I want, sir.”

“Well, you’ll be able to make observations, at the least. Not sure if that will entail much. She’s a wildcard. All of them are.”

“Can I talk to them?”

“We’ll see. Sophia looks more promising than April. Lucy, well. Let’s just say no one is getting much out of her lately. All depends on the state of mind. Might be a safety hazard.”

“I’m sure I’ll be fine. I’ll stay away from the bars. Plus, you have plenty of man power lining the building—”

“Not your safety, Jordan. Hers.”

He took me through the second door on the right and locked it behind him. He turned and faced the door further down on the left. The door lined with security guards. Guards with rifles. I followed behind him as he casually paced toward them. As we approached they stood their ground and nodded as Detective Shepherd pulled out a lanyard from around his neck. Attached was a white, rectangular ID card with his name, picture, and security clearance. Level 4. Whatever that meant. He inserted the card into a horizontal slit in the wall and then pressed his thumb onto a neighboring scanner. The doors instantly slid open as did a second set of doors behind them. He passed through them as if he did so every day. I took in the moment. My eyes looked upward at the camera above and around the opening and stopped on the curvature of the rifle’s barrel. I quickened my pace after him.

We walked down the hallway. It felt more like a doctor’s office than a high-security prison. But I guess people die in both. At least you have the option to leave the doctor. Here, you’re never walking out.

White walls. Wooden doors with alphabetical and numerical labels. We passed by P3. I wondered if that was for the psychotic ward. We rounded the corner and stopped at P17. Another set of doors with an identical key slit and scanning pad were in front of us. And matching guards. With rifles. They showed no emotion as we entered P17.

“Okay. This is a viewing room. Like you see in the movies. CSI, NCIS, all that shit.” I saw the large, one-way mirror between us and the inmates.

“I have a lot of other work to get to, but I’ll be back shortly and if she seems up to it I’ll take you around to ask her some questions. You can observe her for now.” I nodded and watched him exit the room. On a monitor to my right I saw him punch in 9602 on a keypad. Three solid *clicks* followed. The room gave me a cold, wet feeling. Like being trapped under moist cement walls.

I wasn’t sure what to do, what to note. So I just noted everything. She just sat in the corner. Mangled white dress full of wrinkles and holes. Crouched over, shoulders slumped. On her knees, almost like she was praying.

“Fire, fire, fire. Burn, yes. Burn. Yes! It crawls on the walls, it’s coming. It’s coming. There, you see. She’ll get you. I’ll get you.”

She pointed. Her eyes rolled to the left as she cocked her neck towards where her decrepit fingertip led, head unmoving. She appeared possessed.

“No, get away. Get away! I’ll slice you just the same—you stay away. Cut open your veins and watch them drip. Decorate my walls with flames of your rosy fluid...finger-paint, ha!”

She continued to growl commands followed by mumbled nothings and gurgles. Silence followed. Then she burped. I noted all of this on my pad.

I checked the monitors. Guards lined the corridors outside of this hall. They seemed to do a walkthrough every fifteen minutes. Another monitor flashed to Shepherd's office. He looked occupied under a pile of manila folders. I glanced back to Sophia. Or, perhaps that last episode was Lucy. I got up and walked over to the door. 9602. Three clicks. I rounded the corner.

"Sophia?" I guessed that was a good way to initiate conversation. Just shout her name. No response. "Sophia?" Perhaps a little louder. "I just want to get to know you. Ask you some questions." Nothing. I stepped a little closer to the cell.

She turned and stared at me. Her green eyes shot into mine. She scared me, but I couldn't look away. I felt cautious, almost as if the metal bars between us weren't so segregating. "Can I talk to you? Is that okay?" She cocked her neck to the left without breaking eye contact.

"Just a few questions. It's for a class; I'm a fan of yours. Well not exactly a fan, fan. But I'm very interested in you."

She stayed on her knees but leaned on to her forearms and palms. She drug herself forward, closer to me. Closer to the bars that felt anything but barring. "I study people like you. Well, I actually study you—the real deal," I mumbled under my breath. She stopped in the middle of the room and looked behind her, as if someone was there.

"I want your side of the story. I've read about you in newspapers and textbooks. But it's kind of one-sided." Her attention was elsewhere. I felt like I was speaking to thin air. I turned around, facing the opposite direction as I seemed to waste my breath.

"Not that I don't believe what they say. The evidence of Dissociative Identity Disorder does kind of speak for itself. The profilers just make you sound so crazy." I paused and changed directions as I paced the opposing wall. "I mean, you are crazy," I mumbled to myself again, "but

you're still a person. People tend to forget that." I spoke louder that time, hoping she'd hear. "I want to know why, I want to know you, the person—people within you. All of you." As the last word whistled out of my mouth I spun back around and jumped back.

Sophia stood there. Her face stuck out from the bars as far as it could, her cheeks stretching as she pushed forward. Thin, lanky fingers gripped the bars tightly.

"I can't help you know me. I hardly know me. It's them that think they know me. But they don't know me, no, not like I know them." One of her bony arms stretched out through the bars and pointed down the hallway towards the guards. I pushed back into the safety of the metal wall behind me. "You." Her arm redirected its point. "You I'd like to know about."

"Well, it's you that I'm interested in."

"It's impolite to talk about oneself, little boy. So let us learn about you."

"Ha. I'm far less interesting than you. Or should I say you three."

"You sound so sure of yourself. How do you know how many of me there are?"

"Well, ever since you were deemed mentally unstable you've developed personalities consistent with those of your sisters, April and Lucy."

"I'm April."

"Oh you are? Forgive me. Being so conversational I just assumed you were Sophia."

"Reading is bad you know. Fills your head with garbage."

She leaned back and fell to the floor. Her thumbs fiddled with a loose seam of her dress, fraying it. Her hands were so meticulous. The hands of a murderer. Those very hands tortured her mother, dismembered her father. Mangled her two younger sisters. And that was just the spark of her addiction.

“So why your family?”

“Practice.”

“Practice?”

“I always wanted to kill. As did my sisters. Just wasn’t sure how I’d handle it.”

“So you all wanted to kill? Yet, you killed them. Why your sisters? I don’t understand.”

“They wanted the spotlight. Besides, I didn’t need help. They would just drag me down. I’m sure they would have done the same if they had half the wits to do it first.”

She kept unraveling her dress. Ringlets of thread started to cover the ground next to her feet.

“But they had to know I was coming. It was more fun that way.”

“So you killed your parents first.”

“My mother was at her biweekly tanning appointment. Perfect opportunity. You can’t blame me, really. It was too easy. I offered to go with her. Mother-daughter bonding time. I went into the booth after her, but as soon as she was settled in I tied her bed shut with a bike lock and cranked up the temperature. Sizzling flesh wasn’t my perfume of choice, though. So I grabbed a latte and let the attendants find her.” Her composure remained the same.

“After that they knew I was coming. There was no proof, but they knew. I decapitated my father in his sleep with an axe. It wasn’t as fun as Mom, but it was efficient. I drugged my sisters that night at dinner so they were out cold. I sewed their mouths shut and cut off their hands so when they woke they couldn’t help themselves. Then I set the house on fire. Easiest way to destroy the evidence.”

“And then you fled the city.”

“Nope. I stayed three doors down at a friends. No one was smart enough to check there.”

“And you continued to kill. But only children. How come?”

“Entertainment value. Adults were too boring. They always tried to fight back. Scream or call 9-1-1. But kids listened. They would just sit there. Intent on your focus. They actually believed me when I told them I’d let them go. That I just wanted to play a game.”

“What games did you play?”

“Hide and seek mostly. I’d always hide. I’d tell them not to look for me, but that I would be back to seek them. If they told Mommy and Daddy they knew what would happen. It was fun peeking in little Timmy’s bed at night as he shook under the covers, and watching little Joanna hug her teddy bear tight as she checked under her bed.” The dress was a skirt now. Her hands worked faster and faster as she rambled. Her voice started to change. It got deeper, more raspy, as if something was stuck in her throat. Lucy was coming out.

“I kept my promises, though. I always came back.” She stopped unraveling her dress and picked up the tangled seems. “I’d come back and hide them. Never to be found.” She smiled.

“And then the fire started to blaze again. It haunted me. Chased me.” She started to choke on her words. She made a lanyard with the threads and started to wrap it around her neck. “I have to fight back, it won’t leave me alone. She’s coming. They’re coming.”

“Lucy, stop!”

She clawed against her throat.

“It’s April, she won’t let go. She made me do it, all of it!”

She—or was it Sophia—pulled tighter.

I ran for the guards.