

“Do you regret your kid?”

“No.” She sat there, child inside, hair pulled together haphazardly, vaping pen clutched with a death grip in her hand. Lucy took a longer moment to answer that question. She had given up her.. everything. The potential had been right there.

Now she seemed hollow.

Alex refused to meet her eyes, only looking for brief moments of fleeting gaze.

“Do you miss her?”

She turned and stared the intern down, face thick with exasperation and lingering traces of grief.

“Sorta. But not really because we were close, you know? She just... died. And I- I saw. We were young. I did lots of cruel things. But we were only kids.”

Lucy speaks in short sentences, words almost monotone.

Out of all the reports hanging around here, Alex was the only one Lucy would talk to. They were grateful for that. Also grateful the others had finally backed off and Ms McNeil, or Lucy, started talking.

It had been the 9th year anniversary of the *#WeAreNotOkay* movement when there had been a horrific mass suicide, 17 students in one night.

And for some reason, most of the press decided that the best course of action was to interrogate the three remaining instigators of the movement. Ulana, Lucy and Catrina, or “Trina”, as she was known as.

But all Alex had to do was to talk to Lucy. Their internship credit depended on them doing this interview. No matter how personal it felt.

“Do you have anything else to say about Sophia’s death?” Alex asked.

Lucy looked at them, veins visible through her skin. “Why not call her by her last name, show a bit of respect?” She said, and the aggression was definitely something that Alex could milk for the article.

“Oh, yes, of course, sorry. Anything else about *Sophia’s* death?” Alex repeated, putting tension into their voice. Threatening her with a bad article, with taking Lucy McNeil’s reputation from bad to unforgivable.

She had barely kept custody of her daughter after... everything.

Alex couldn't blame the lady, she had lost everything and was trying to rebuild a life while refusing her parents money, all hope she once had for a normal college degree and an easy life gone, now downgraded to a tiny flat in a dodgy spot in town.

"I think that all of it is fuc- screwed. High school and schooling is pointless and teach some of the most stupid stuff. And then you got a bunch of children made into drones and for some reason *that's* the ultimate state of being. They're brutal and no one tells them that one day the kid they called fat in the hallway will be the kid who jumps off a bridge. It's all worthless."

Alex sat there, recording, brain ticking away on how to twist this or make it more interesting. Most of that couldn't go into the article uncensored.

Let's be honest, Alex hated their job. This was corrupt and they could feel more and more of their soul slipping away with every moment. They had to finish this internship because that's all they needed for that scholarship. They graduated last year and it had almost been a year since then. And they *needed* that scholarship. They didn't want to stay with their cousin Aiden, who was never home and when he was he would stay in his room. They no longer had any reason to be around here.

Or around at all.

So a few more articles. A few more words that had been morphed to fit the political views of the paper. This wasn't a dystopia. It was just a specific newspaper.

Lucy gave them the once-over, before asking,

"Wait. You said your name was Alex?"

"Yes?"

"Alex Brighton, your brother was one of those kids, wasn't he? Walker Brighton? The only one who used a knife?"

Deep breaths.

"Yes." It was clipped and curt, informing her that they did not appreciate the question. They hadn't appreciated any of the questions.

Never will.

"I used to know Walker, he gave his apples to my little girl. And he knitted jumpers. Weird kid."

Alex didn't care. Alex had other things to think about. Not their dead brother.

"And you're the sister who tried to off yourself with pills?"

Yes.

Alex internally bristled at the question, but it was correct.

I'm sorry. The memory flashed, his body on the floor-

They nodded in confirmation. They tapped their feet against the pavement, rubber on concrete.

“Huh. Good you’re still here. Wouldn’t want anyone else sitting here, planning to ruin what’s left of my life with a few clicks of a keyboard.”

Alex froze.

Lucy laughed, a hoarse laugh that sounded so wrong from someone so young but sounded so right for her. “What, you think I’m oblivious? You’re gonna cherry-pick words from this interview, turn me into a monster-”

She stopped, fingers fumbling with the vaping pen and letting it drop into the gutter. She leant down and picked it back up in a clean swoop, clutching it tighter.

Alex knew. The consequences for her were steep.

“Lease ends next week.” It was quiet. A hint of hopelessness.

“What?”

“They don’t like me.”

Alex finally met her eyes, staring deep into the gaze. Trying to stay as still as possible.

“I think I’m done for the day. Enjoy your future, kid.” Lucy said, turning away and walking inside, without the swagger of someone sure about life.

Alex sat in the car.

Of course, *this* was the time when everything that had happened in the past few weeks hit them. They quivered with the weight of their grief.

It’s okay. I just have to write this report and skip town.

But...

What if I don’t?

They looked at the footage.

They took a deep breath.

It's not fair to do this.

It's never going to be fair unless I do something.

No one commented on the stray bag full of equipment and papers in the gutter.