

**Creative Writing Senior Project**

by

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**Table of Contents**

Introductory Essay.....3

“A Healer's Trauma”.....7

“Abduction?”.....23

“Holes”.....24

*Hell House*.....27

### Introductory Essay

I had struggled for a while trying to figure out what I wanted to do for my senior project, but now I'm realizing that I can showcase a lot of my talents through the senior project. What I have decided to do is include some pieces of short fiction that I have worked on in Professor Lewis' Fiction Writing II. I'm also adding a fantasy themed short story that I have previously workshopped in Fiction Writing I called "A Healer's Trauma". For a much bigger piece, I am including the first half of a novella that I am currently working on called *Hell House*. I wanted to showcase a few different genres, with different subject matter, to show how I have grown as a writer.

Since I have more of a concentration in fiction in the creative writing program, my specialty when it comes to writing is short stories. I have decided that I'm going to add one of my short stories to the project. "A Healer's Trauma" takes place in a world where people are separated into three classes, warrior, mage, and healer. The healers have a bad reputation amongst everyone for the horrible and painful experiences they must go through; they feel all of the physical or emotional pain that a person has been through up until healing. We follow Leone and his two friends, Thilo and Nimm, as they are going to the kingdom to get their classes from an old friend, Prince Demitri. Things don't go exactly as planned as Leone becomes a healer and must separate from the friends whom he trusts the most.

Of the numerous short pieces to choose from, the ones that I am including in my project are my three hundred word microfiction titled "Abduction?" about a person who was minding their own business walking home from work when they are abducted by aliens. This one takes on more of a humorous tone as the abductee realizes that the aliens are like regular people and she even decides to have a drink with them. I also wanted to add a slightly longer, but much shorter

story titled “Holes” that takes place in the point of view of an unnamed narrator as numerous holes start appearing in their town. Everyone seems to disregard the holes until people start going missing, including the narrator’s little sister. “Holes” was originally a short piece like “Abduction?” but I expanded it to three and a quarter pages; sort of a shorter short story though longer than your typical microfiction. I really enjoyed reading and writing short fiction pieces because it challenges you to take something much smaller than a short story and give it substance in a much shorter amount of time.

I have been focused more on short stories throughout my time at Purchase, so I had not intended on writing longer pieces until I took The Art of the Novella course, taught by Professor Lewis. With a novella being so much longer and having so much more content, I had to break away from the formula of writing short stories and start thinking about how much different longer pieces are. For the last part of the project, I am including the first half of the novella, *Hell House*. It tells the story of a young woman named Kara after her sister, Alex, has mysteriously died. She has to battle her own fears and thoughts while also fearing a terrible demonlike entity that seems to come directly from Kara and Alex’s childhood home. Having been tormented since her and Alex were children, Kara, along with her friend Sabrina, must figure out the exact cause of this supposed haunting while also trying to protect themselves from the evil entity that seemingly wants their souls.

I am dabbling in a genre that I have never written before, but I’m such a big fan of. I think horror is probably one of my favorite genres when it comes to books, movies, television, etc. and a lot of my favorite movies have ended up being horror movies. I have spent time looking into the work of Edgar Allan Poe and while a lot of people think about Stephen King when talking about authors of the horror genre, Poe always came to my mind for some reason. I

have a book of everything that Poe ever wrote and I would read it a lot in middle school and high school trying to get inspiration for writing. I feel like his stories give off such a lasting eerie feeling that makes people continue to think about it for a while. This is why I wanted to write something horror related. I want something that I have written to have a lasting impression and I feel like horror is a good way to get that, but it could also be tricky.

I have never really been an avid reader and always felt like reading was more of a chore than an excitable activity. I think I have done more reading in college than I have done in my entire life and I personally don't think I fall into the category of a reader. What really makes you a reader though? I don't think you have to read a new novel every week to be considered a reader. I more so like to give out the content rather than retain the content, but I am retaining content all of the time. All of the video games I play have extensive dialogue and I'm an avid anime watcher who primarily likes to watch it subbed; in that case, I love reading. There have been plenty of stories that I have read that I loved from cover to cover, and there are others that were not on par with what I had expected them to be.

I read a wonderful book called "Skinny" about a fifteen year old girl who was severely overweight and was going through the process of having gastric bypass. She dealt with a lot in the book, from having to eat less and being exposed to people who now considered her worthy of their attention. I was in middle school at the time and I really felt like I could place myself in that character's role. That's the beauty of reading, when you can actually place yourself within the character. There are plenty of times where I have found a character in a book, movie, or show that has totally reminded me of things that I do and even reminded me of those around me. While I will continue to say that I am not an avid reader, I can't deny that I actually do love reading and what it has to offer me.

I didn't always know that I was going to be a writer. In fact, if you had asked me about twelve years ago what I wanted to be when I grew up I would tell you I wanted to be a meteorologist. The study of meteorology involves knowing a lot about science and knowing some things about math, two subjects that were never my strong point in school. While I wasn't good at those subjects I realized that I did really well and excelled in my English classes. As much as I would hate to write essays I would write some pretty good ones and get mostly high grades when it came to writing. I had never considered myself a writer until one day I had written a story based off of the Twilight movies and showed it to my best friend at the lunch table. Other people wanted to read it and from then on it turned into me bringing in a new chapter every couple days for my class to read at lunch. At that point I started thinking about writing as a career.

Around the time that I had discovered that I loved writing I had been going through a rough time in my personal life. A broken home doesn't necessarily mean a broken life, but I still found myself trying to place myself in this world. It was hard to fit in. Around sixth grade I began showing signs of mental illness, specifically severe depression and I found that I was isolating myself and forcing everyone away from me. I was seeing a therapist at the time and she had told me to write my feelings down since I liked writing anyways. I was never too big of a fan of keeping a journal or a diary that held all of my deepest darkest feelings, but at the same time just writing down how you feel on a piece of paper can lift an entire weight off of your shoulders. I began using writing as an outlet to feeling happy again. Now, I would consider writing a passion of mine that I hold dearly to my heart.

### “A Healer’s Trauma”

Warriors, Mages, and Healers; three classes that make up the primary protectors of The Realm, heroes who give their lives for the good of all.

Warriors glow red with passion as they tear through their enemies. Mages exude purple aura, a sign that they are in touch with the Magic of The Great and hold extraordinary power. The Healers receive one of two powers, that of a Physical Healer who can heal wounds inflicted naturally, or that of an Emotional Healer who could heal wounds of the mind inflicted by spells, or potions. The Healers’ powers, however, come at a price and many end up regretting their pledge of loyalty.

Once you are assigned to a class you are there for life, or until you meet your end. These powers are deep within and will fully awaken when the user becomes aged twenty five. No matter how brave you might be, everyone seems to associate the Healers with one word: trauma.



In the early hours of the morning, a carriage from the Royal Court arrived in the small town of Ranko in order to retrieve the three brave trainees who will be the next to defend The Realm. These three friends have trained effortlessly, almost from the day that they could walk in order to prove themselves worthy of the title, Protector of The Realm. Today was the special day in which these three men became of age to wield their full powers, their true powers.

Excitement and nervousness ran through them as they entered the carriage and departed for the Kingdom.

“Hey! Which class are you hoping for? I’m sure they’re going to make me a Warrior! I mean, there isn’t a better class for me, right?” Thilo said as he peered out the window before looking back at his two friends, “I know for sure you’re going to be a Mage, Nimm. If not then

it'll mess with your family's trend!" The boy sitting in the middle, Nimm, scoffed slightly and shook his head.

"Your imagination is running wild, as usual. Just because my fathers are Mages doesn't mean that I have to follow suit. Who knows, maybe they'll make me a Warrior, too!" Nimm stated, glancing over at the quieter of the two boys, "Hey, Leone, you're awfully quiet. Are the nerves getting to you?"

Leone had never put much thought into what class he may be assigned to. He never wanted to focus on things like that because he saw how obsessed some of his peers had become with being assigned to the "perfect" class. If he was being honest, Leone started to have second thoughts about all of this. He had trained for so many years, yet now he was thinking of throwing all of that away. While it was never explicitly stated amongst the friends, each had the same opinion about the Healers.

"I don't want to be a Healer," Leone said, "I mean, sorry, I said what I was thinking. I know I shouldn't be worried. After all, we risk it all when we pledge loyalty to The Realm. Warrior and Mage, those classes are practically made for you guys, but I can't seem to find where I fit in," Leone said as he looked at his friends briefly, "I'm sorry for bringing the mood down."

Thilo leaned across Nimm and placed a hand on Leone's shoulder, "Hey, cheer up! You'll get to see your 'beloved' soon enough!" He said, causing him and Nimm to snicker. Leone felt his face heat up and shook his head, trying his hardest to hide his embarrassment.

"Stop that! Don't talk about the Prince like that." Leone scolded. Thilo laughed and looked back out the window, "That's funny, you love it when you're drunk."





It had been ten years since the friends had been to the Kingdom, but it was just as they remembered it. This would be the place where they would find out about their class thanks to an old friend of theirs. These friends had become acquainted with the Prince of The Realm as they were all the same age and were around each other for numerous occasions. After all, it is the royal blood that determines what class these heroes will fall into. A kiss upon the hand of the heir to the throne will reveal a person's true power.

The friends entered a room with the candidates from other villages and were told to wait there until they were given other orders.. Leone couldn't sit still as he felt his emotions running wild. Maybe no one would notice if he stepped out of the room for just a moment. Thilo and Nimm were already getting acquainted with the other candidates so they probably wouldn't notice.

He made sure that no one was looking and he slipped through the door, leaning against it gently as he sighed softly. He sighed softly and leaned against the wall, placing his hands over his face. At least he could be alone for a few seconds. His heart was almost beating out of his chest and his cheeks became flushed.

He suddenly heard footsteps approaching him and tensed up. He didn't want to explain why he was out of the room.

“Is excitement getting the better of you, or are they your nerves?” Leone heard a familiar voice ask him. He looked up to see his old friend, Prince Demitri of The Realm.

He was shocked and couldn't help but gasp as he looked the man up and down as he said, “Demitri, you've changed.” The Prince laughed and placed his hand on his cheek.

“Me? Look at you! I used to be taller than you! How dare you gain the gift of height!”

Demitri laughed, “You look great, though. I guess ten years really can change a person. Training looks like it's been kind to you. I'm glad.” His gaze fell to the floor. Leone stepped forward so that he was closer to Demitri and he took the Prince's hand; his skin felt so soft, not like his own calloused hands that had been built up from his time training.

“You know, there was never a time when I didn't think about you. Even during my training, just knowing that the outcome of my training meant protecting you and The Realm kept me going. No matter how tough it got, you helped me push through. Oh gods, that probably sounds so stupid, right?” Leone rubbed the back of his neck and his gaze was fixed to the ceiling. He did everything in his power not to look Demitri in the eyes.

The last time these feelings had been acknowledged was right before Leone left the court to go back to Ranko. They were younger back then and teenage hormones had been on the rise; Leone assumed it was just puppy love, but he never got over him. Nothing had ever been explicitly said due to Demitri's status.

Demitri squeezed Leone's hand and smiled, “I'm glad we were able to see each other before the ceremony,” the Prince said before turning his attention to the guards calling him from down the hall. “The ceremony is beginning shortly, you should go back with the others.” He said. Before he got the chance to leave, Leone leaned down and placed a small kiss on the Prince's hand. Demitri gasped and jolted his hand away, staring at Leone with widened eyes.

“Oh, I'm sorry.” He simply said before hurrying away. Leone felt like kicking himself for doing what he just did. It seems like Demitri doesn't reciprocate these feelings anymore. To avoid further problems, Leone returned back into the room and waited for further orders.

The ceremony began shortly after Leone returned into the room. The trainees were lined

up in a single file line and brought into the throne room where they would be given their class by Prince Demitri.

Once inside the throne room, the trainees were knelt down next to each other so that the Prince could easily make his way to each of them. The ceremony began as the first trainee kissed the Prince's hand; the first one was a Warrior. The Prince made his way down the line, announcing each class with each recruit.

The Prince named each recruit he encountered and finally made his way to the three friends whom he had known for so long. He started with Thilo who easily gained the Warrior class. He then moved to Nimm who, making his fathers proud, had the pleasure of becoming a Mage.

Then, he made his way to Leone and he paused in front of him, staring down at him. Something about the way that Demitri was looking at him made Leone feel uneasy, like something bad was about to happen. Leone took Demitri's hand and kissed it gently.

Calmness for a moment and then bright luminescent smoke clouded his eyes as the same color aura filled around Leone. He winced in pain and practically collapsed to the floor; everyone began to mumble about what was just seen. What was that?



Once the ceremony had concluded, those who were chosen as Healers were brought to their brief secondary ceremony. This part was known as the Healing Ritual in which each recruit would be placed into a certain category, Physical, or Emotional.

The Healer would drink a sacred fluid, a potion constructed by the highest of Mages and Healers in the Court. The color in which their eyes turn to is where they stand as Healers. Blue for Physical and dark green for Emotional, where would they end up? Once it came time for

Leone to drink the fluid, he took the chalice and brought it up to his lips. The fluid had no taste and it went down with ease. He felt a sharp pain in his head and hunched over from the pain.

The High Healer came over and picked up Leone's head, revealing his eyes. She gasped and backed away in shock, covering her mouth to stifle her surprise.

"What is this? This... makes no sense. Everyone, you must excuse us, we must request an audience with the King! Please, someone alert the royal family immediately!" She was ordering the other Healers around frantically and all of them kept staring at his eyes.

No matter how many times Leone asked, no one gave him a clear answer as to what was wrong, or what had happened. The High Healer simply shook her head and said nothing, she seemed like she was in shock.

When the King and Prince arrived, both gave the same shocked expression as the High Healer had previously.

"My gods, this is... bizarre. I almost didn't believe you." The King stated. Leone approached the royals and took Demitri's hand, "Please, tell me what's happening!" He began to panic. Demitri frowned, "Your eyes are golden."



Those in training are taught about two types of Healers. There are Physical Healers who can heal any wound inflicted on the body, such as a stab wound. Then, there are Emotional Healers who are capable of healing ailments to the mind, such as a confusion spell, or even other more intense mind ailments.

Being a Healer means you are very crucial to your teammates. If you are compromised then so is your team; Healers are the glue holding everyone together. Healers have the hardest jobs with the most excruciating drawback.

A Healer's magic differs from that of a Mage and, in turn, is more damaging to the person who uses this kind of magic. Mages receive their magic from The Great, a higher power of sentient magic that gives the Mages permission to share in its power. If the spirit channels become blocked by dark magic, then Mages are unable to use the true powers of The Great. For Healers, magic works differently.

A Healer's magic does not come from an outside source, it comes directly from within the user. The magic that they use comes directly from their life force, a technique that had been learned by the Ancients thousands of years ago. When a Healer saves someone, their life forces connect and for a brief moment they become one of the same. Becoming one means that the Healer begins to feel the agony and pain of the other person, their emotions become intertwined.

As the Healer heals their comrade, they begin to feel the torment of everything that this person has experienced all at once. This usually ends with the Healer losing consciousness as their body and spirit cannot handle such trauma all at once.

This is why all Healers hate the role they are given. They must give up part of themselves in the process.

As Leone stared at himself in the mirror, his eyes glowed with a golden hue. He had never seen this before, he didn't even know that this was possible for Healers. During training, they had all been taught that there were two specific Healers.

According to the High Healer and the King, there is one more niche group of Healers known as Spirit Healers. This special group has gained both the powers of the Physical Hero and that of the Emotional Hero. Using their spirit they are able to heal both kinds of injuries, but this means that the agony they feel is tenfold.

Spirit Healers are very rare as there is only one born every forty-five years. Since they are

so rare they are kept away from the battles and are instead kept at the Royal Court only to be used in cases of extreme urgency.

Leone paced around the room that would be his chamber for his time in the Royal Court and he couldn't help but wonder if he would ever see his friends again. While they are on the battlefield risking their lives, he would be here waiting to know if they've perished or not. Leone slammed his fist against the wall causing some of the wall decor to fall with a thud.

He cursed under his breath and clenched his fists. He then heard the door open and Prince Demitri entered without saying a word. Leone simply just sat down.

"Good morning, how did you sleep?" Demitri asked as he sat across from Leone. Leone scoffed, "What do you think? My night was restless, if you really want to know." His entire demeanor had changed from yesterday. The Prince sighed.

"I don't think I've ever seen you like this before; so angry and distraught. It's a little scary. If there's anything we can do to make you feel more comfortable then please just let me know."

"Nothing would make me happy right now. I prayed to the gods every day and every night, but I guess my prayers were skipped over! You don't get it, you've been handed everything your entire life. You'll never have to deal with this." Leone said as he clenched the arms of the chair.

He took a deep breath and looked over at Demitri who simply sat there quietly letting Leone vent. He had a troubled look on his face; maybe Leone went too far again.

Before anything else could be said, a guard frantically burst through the door. He brought news that the best knight in the court was severely injured and that they needed the new Spirit Healer to fix her injuries.

Leone was quickly brought to where a great commotion could be heard; Demitri followed behind at a distance.. The damage would have been utterly irreversible if not for their Healers. The knight, named Alba, convulsed on the ground from the intense pain that she was in. Her left arm was missing, the arm that she used to wield a sword, as it had been extracted by an enemy; luckily the Healers with them could stop the bleeding. Her eyes were red with fury and her pupils had dilated completely. She looked like a sick, deranged animal on the brink of death.

“What happened to her?” Demitri asked as he stayed behind Leone, peering down at the woman. One of the knights stepped forward.

“A hex was done by a powerful sorcerer. When we found her, she couldn’t remember who we were and she flew into a blind rage. She began thrashing and screaming. It took over six men alone just to restrain her. I knew she was strong, but this is inhuman,” he said as he watched his commander.

“It doesn’t help that she’s in seething pain from her arm. Can you help her, please?” One of the other knights who accompanied Alba pleaded. Everyone stepped aside to let Leone through.

Leone walked forward and knelt down in front of Alba, watching as she struggled on the ground. He had never seen somebody in such agony before and he would be lying if he said he wasn’t scared right now.

He took a deep breath and reached his hand out toward Alba, placing one where her arm should be and placing the other on her forehead. He concentrated and began to focus all of his energy into his hands and fingertips, a light green aura coming from him. He felt like his arm was on fire as the flames of pain traveled up his arm and to his head. He began to see Alba memories; each time she felt pain, each time she was wounded, each time she had almost died.

He could feel the weight of all her trauma coming down on him at once and he fell backwards once the healing process was complete.

Leone tried to catch his breath and he stared up at the sky, his head spinning in circles. Demitri knelt down next to him and gently gripped his arm, smiling at him.

“Take it easy. Everything’s alright,” he said as he helped Leone sit up slightly. “I’m sorry about before,” was all Leone could respond with. Demitri shook his head and pointed in the direction of Alba. Leone had succeeded, her arm looked as if nothing had happened and she stopped thrashing around.

As she opened her eyes, she mumbled something quietly and it was obvious that she was coherent at this point. Leone grinned as he watched Alba rise to her feet.

“Thank you, Healer. You saved my body and my mind, I’m truly grateful to you. Please, tell me your name so that I may spread the word of your powers.” Alba said as he knelt before Leone, practically bowing to him.

Leone stared for a moment before simply saying, “My name is Leone and I’m the new Spirit Healer of the Court.”



As the months passed, Leone had become increasingly closer to Prince Demitri; they were practically inseparable. Demitri spent a great deal of his time watching Leone train and Leone would spend his time sitting with Demitri as he entertained himself.

In the last few months, the Royals of this Court had been conversing with enemy territory in order to strike up some sort of deal that would benefit both parties. While the attempts had pretty much all failed, this was the last attempt at trying to have some sort of cordial relation



with them. The brave soldiers had set out on this mission, Thilo and Nimm were among those men and women.

Leone peered out the window as he waited for any sign of his friends' return. He had only spoken to them in passing recently as they were busy with their own classes; he remembered their last meeting.

"Don't miss us too much now!" Thilo joked, "We'll all reunite very soon and we'll drink like we used to!" Leone missed those days of sitting in the tavern. He missed being with his friends. Suddenly, Demitri spoke up.

"Leone, have you ever thought about marriage?" Demitri asked as he picked his head up from his book. That question was seemingly out of nowhere and it caught Leone off guard. He had never put that much thought into marriage.

"Marriage? I guess I focused so much on my training that I've never really thought about it. I don't want my bloodline to end, but I think I have to take some time and think about it for myself," Leone looked at Demitri who simply let his gaze fall back into his book, "Any particular reason you ask?"

Demitri giggled slightly and simply said, "Curiosity. Father mentioned marriage the other day during a meeting and asked if I was ready to choose a wife, or a husband. I haven't been able to stop thinking about it. To me, it's exciting!" Leone chuckled softly and watched as Demitri went back to reading.

He had never noticed it, but Demitri had freckles all over his face. He never had this much time to admire the small features; Demitri's nose curved into a point, his eyes always looked sleepy, the curve of his Cupid's bow made his lips so tempting. Leone shook his head slightly and turned his attention back to the window.

This had been the first time since arriving to the court those months ago that Leone and Demitri felt as they did ten years ago. Leone suddenly felt arms around him and he gasped in surprise.

“Sorry,” Demitri whispered, “I just couldn’t help myself any longer. I’ve wanted to do this since you got here, but the ceremony changed things up. We’ve never spent this much time together. If I could, I would want to marry someone like you, Leone,” he laughed, “or, maybe I could just marry you.”

The doors to the room suddenly flung open and a messenger ran inside. The man was covered in blood and his hands were shaking as he grabbed on to the Prince tightly. Leone quickly separated the two and the messenger fell to his knees, sobbing profusely. Demitri knelt down to figure out what was wrong.

“Good sir,” he began, “please, tell me what happened!” The messenger looked up to the Prince and took a shaky breath.

“Horror, massacre, blood. There was so much blood, Your Majesty. There was blood everywhere. We didn’t know what to do. We weren’t prepared for this. The enemy ambushed us and they killed half of our men. Most of the new recruits, the Warriors and Mages, they...”

The messenger began to fumble on his words and he began to speak incoherently. Demitri rose to his feet and turned to face Leone who was horrified to hear the news.

“Thilo, Nimm, my friends are dead?” Leone asked as he peered down at the messenger. Demitri placed his hand on Leone’s shoulders and looked up to him, whispering to him that everything would be okay. Leone pushed past Demitri and stood directly in front of the messenger.

Something to him started to feel off now, why didn’t he go right to the King? Leone

picked the messenger up by his shirt and pinned him to the wall, a shocked yelp erupting from Demitri.

“Wait! Leone, don’t hurt him! This wasn’t his fault!” Demitri said, trying to plead with Leone, but that wasn’t happening.

Leone shook his head, “This isn’t right. How did this messenger get past the guards covered head to toe in blood? No one noticed? He would’ve been intercepted at the gate. I have been looking out that window this entire time and not once did I see this man on the path to the front gate. Furthermore, how did this messenger know we were in this room specifically? Even if he somehow did know, why would he come right to the Prince before telling the King of such horrors? This isn’t sitting right with me. I have a very bad feeling about this.”

As soon as Leone finished talking, the messenger rose to his feet and clapped his hands together slowly. A deep, low chuckle came from him as he wiped the blood from his face.

“So, you’re sharp, aren’t you? Unfortunately, me getting into the Kingdom has already put all of you at a severe disadvantage. You should pay closer attention to the people you let through those gates. Let’s see how you all fare with the Royal Blood demolished.” The messenger stated before snapping his fingers.

At first, it seemed like nothing had happened, but then the ground began to shake and the structure around them started to cave in. As Leone and Demitri tried to keep their balance, they could feel the earth shift below them and pieces of the ceiling began to rain down over them.

“Demitri! Watch out!” Leone said, but before they could say or do anything else, all the two could see was black.



All Leone saw was black as he was covered with debris and dust from the tremor. He

didn't know if he was alive, it almost felt like he was dead, or dying. He heard people calling out his name, a familiar two voices. Thilo and Nimm, he must've been dead if he was hearing them.

The voices became louder and suddenly Leone could see the light except he was in the same room. He saw his friends, they were injured but alive and ready to fight; he couldn't believe his eyes and he began to cry. Leone lunged forward and hugged his friends tightly, sobbing loudly.

"That man said most of you had perished. I thought the worst," he said as his voice shook. Thilo and Nimm reciprocated the touch as the friends had become reunited again.

"We would never die that easily! We were all on the way back and suddenly this man appeared and started warping the space around us. No one knew we were even coming!" Thilo said as they all pulled away, "Where's the Prince?"

Leone shook his head, "I can't find him. I was with him when the Sorcerer appeared, now he's gone."

"We have to go find him and we have to do this fast. If he destroys the Royal bloodline then we'll lose everything. The Royals are what keep the Realm together, it will mean suffering." Nimm stated. The friend realized what they must do and began to look for the King and Prince.

They made their way into the throne room hoping that they would find anyone who was still alive. Once inside, they saw the King and Prince in a catatonic state.

"It's Chaos Magic, a terrible curse to break," the High Healer said as she stared at the unconscious Royals, "once the spell is cast, it's very hard for another magic user to break it. The Prince and King are fighting for their lives right now. The more they fight, the more they strain from the inside. Soon, their spirit will depart and they will only exist physically. We have lost

both Royals on this day. We must begin the necessary preparations..” Leone turned to face the High Healer and his eyes narrowed slightly.

“Why are you so quick to give up? Have you tried to break the spell, or is this just something you were told? I was told there could only be two types of Healers, yet here I am. Stop saying there isn’t another way. I never asked to be in this class, but I am who I am and I will not be told that I can’t save them. Maybe I can fix this.” Leone said as he knelt in between the two Royals, placing a hand on both of them.

His friends came to his side and they each placed a hand on his shoulder, signaling they believed in him and wanted to help. He knew that this was his job, no one else’s, and he began the process of healing. He felt the same agony creeping up, but his determination to save them shined past his suffering.

He saw the King’s memories seeing all of the people who had died at his hand. He saw when the King lost his wife and he saw the moment in which the King became hexed.

Leone then saw Demitri’s memories. He saw the times he fell and became injured as a child, the times he was injured in battle, the mental suffering he endured as Prince in order to please everyone. He then saw the exact moment when Demitri had been hexed; Leone felt sick. He saw his unconscious body and he watched as the Sorcerer approached him with malicious intent in his eyes.

As he lifted his hands in order to hex Leone, Demitri stepped in the way and took the full blast of it in order to protect Leone. As Leone finished the healing process, he felt himself jolt back from all the magical pressure that had built up around. He fell back on his friend, who tried their best to cushion his fall. Demitri’s eyes shot open and he looked around for Leone.

Once he saw him, he quickly rose to his feet despite not fully recovering yet and he

stumbled over to where Leone and the others were..

“You saved my father and me? You should’ve just saved him, it would’ve been less harmful to you. Look at you now!” Demitri said as he gripped Leone’s hand tightly, “Why did you save both of us?” Leone smiled weakly and reached his hand up, gently caressing Demitri’s cheek.

He chuckled softly, “I had to stop being so afraid of my destiny. My fate is to protect The Realm. I want to protect this world, my friends, and you. I would have given my life to you and your father if I had to. After all,” Leone said and he sat up slightly to look at Demitri better, “This is the duty of the Spirit Healer.” Demitri held Leone’s hands and he looked at Thilo and Nimm with a smile.

“Is there anything you both need?” he asked. Leone chuckled and looked at Thilo, “How about a drink?”

“Abduction?”

Something happened to me last night. I was walking home from work late last night, the cool evening air was calmer than usual. I suddenly got the feeling like I was being watched, or maybe followed. Then, before I knew it, I was levitating off the ground and I found myself aboard a metal aircraft; a spaceship.

There I was, being abducted by aliens..

I woke up in a bed, a really comfortable bed. Not some metal operating table with foreign beings surrounding me ready to dissect me with various instruments. I stood to my feet and examined the room that I was in.

The peculiar part was this room had a teenage feel to it. There were CDs strewn across the room and ripped up dirty posters depicting the hottest boy bands that were popular. Scattered across the floor were a bunch of playing cards and some magazines that contained some graphic material.

This reminded me of my bedroom when I was young.

I decided it was time to find the ones responsible for my kidnapping, so I began searching around the ship. It looked like a typical sci-fi spacecraft, the ones you see in movies. I suddenly heard speaking, a dialect I never heard before. I entered what seemed to be a lounge area and in the area were multiple lifeforms sitting around drinking liquor straight out of the bottle.

Once I was noticed, they all stopped and stared at me as if I was a parent who just caught their children underage drinking. I stared at them, they stared at me. I couldn't tell who was more shocked. They looked at each other as if trying to come up with some excuse to give me. Finally, one of them spoke.

“Take us to your leader?”

## “Holes”

Strange holes have been appearing around my town. Nobody knows where they came from, or how they even got here. Some holes stay a long time and others only for a short while.

You could drop a rock straight down and you would never hear it hit the bottom. If you stare deep down into one, you'll get lost in what cannot be seen. They're always the same pitch black, rounded holes with an eerie calmness about them.

The first noticeable hole appeared in the middle of the street I live on. It looked like a large sinkhole in the middle of our neighborhood. The strangest part was that there was no damage to the road, or surrounding homes. A perfectly clean cut circle now decorated our neighborhood.

After a while, everyone decided not to pay much attention to them anymore. Technically, they weren't bothering anyone. Everyone just assumed we didn't need to be concerned anymore.

I wasn't sure how I felt about them. More started to pop up in other locations; the schools, workplaces, downtown in the city. Nowhere was safe from them and now they were getting out of hand.

They started making it difficult to work. People's cars were being swallowed whole. Streets were littered with holes that couldn't be filled no matter how much material was poured into it. People resorted to walking around the holes rather than driving over them. We just decided to live with them. What else could we do?

Everyone seemed to just shrug it off. I felt like maybe I was the only one who still didn't trust them. Everyone just started to assume that the holes wouldn't harm people. But, then the children started disappearing.

The first one to be affected was Sarah Greene, a girl at my high school. She began telling



her friends that the holes were speaking to her, but they thought she was just joking. Her parents were notified, but they didn't seem all that concerned. One day, while she was waiting for the bus, she looked down into one of the holes despite being told to back away.

Before anyone got the chance to stop her, Sarah jumped into oblivion never to be seen again.

Then, there was Timothy Saunders, a local neighborhood kid who was skateboarding one afternoon and, according to his friends, "was sucked into the hole like a vacuum cleaner". He didn't utter a sound as he fell into the gap. I and those around me started to become more troubled than before.

We realized how serious this was getting but we didn't know what to do. No one from the outside world wanted to help us and the attempts to keep everyone else safe were futile. Everyone knew that the holes weren't going anywhere anytime soon. We didn't see anything on the news about other places having this problem. Did anyone even know that we were going through this?

I wasn't personally affected until those goddamn holes took my little sister, Ari. Her birthday had only been three days before, she had just turned six.

Ari was playing in the yard while my mother was watching her, a daily occurrence in the warmer months. It was a perfectly sunny day so my dad was in the process of setting up her kiddy pool in the front yard for her and some friends to play in.

Out of nowhere the ground opened up and swallowed my sister whole, leaving one of those things in her place. The sound of my mother's horrific screams as Ari was swallowed still haunts me.

Our lives have been disrupted with more people being consumed everyday. These holes

have caused nothing but pain. There is nothing to be done. They have no idea how to stop them. There is no one brave enough to try.

As I'm standing here staring into the depths of one of these hollow cavities, my mind is racing. I know I shouldn't stand so close, but I cannot help myself. I feel a strangely cool breeze coming from the abyss, like nothing I have ever felt before; it feels great.

I think I smell something metallic, almost like a rusty smell. It smells unnaturally good. It makes me feel calm. I can hear sounds coming from the hole. They sound like disembodied screams; are these the ones who have been taken away?

I know I should be scared. I know that I should flee. But, I don't want to. I feel at ease for the first time since these awful pits appeared. The agonizing sounds of those stolen don't discourage me as they would've in the past. Am I the only one who can hear it?

I stare down and stand on the edge of the bottomless drop. I can hear something, someone; a whisper-like voice beckoning for me. I like hearing it. Did Ari hear this before she was swallowed? Did Timothy? Did Sarah?

The air stands still for a moment as I step forward. There is nothing under me to stop my fall. What is this? What is this feeling?

I'm fading into nothingness.

*Hell House***Prologue**

Most people have never seen what the inside of a morgue looks like. Kara certainly has never stepped foot in one until now. As she stood in front of the glass separating her from the bodies, she stared at the metal table with a sheet over it; she knew a person had been there, a deceased person.

Kara knew that she was going to have to formally identify a body. She was going to have to identify the body of her younger sister, Alex.

Two detectives, a man and a woman, entered the room and motioned for Kara to sit at the table provided in the room. She felt her hands shake and her breathing was abnormally fast; she wondered if the officers in the room sensed her anxiety and dread.

Her eyes darted around the room frantically until her eyes fixated on the small garbage can in the corner of the room where she may have to throw up.

“Ms. Bennett, we are going to place a photo upside down on the table. Are you ready for us to do that?” The female detective asked as she looked at Kara with a straight face, her eyes glossy with a hint of tiredness to them.

Kara knew how she really felt just by looking into her eyes. This woman was unfazed by a job that she’s probably had for years, yet there was still compassion behind her gaze.

“I’m going to warn you. What you are going to see it’s going to upset you. It’s going to shock you, but take your time and look whenever you’re ready.” The male officer said as the photo was placed on the table. Kara reluctantly shook her head yes and reached for the photo.

She felt stiff in her movements, as if they weren’t her own; was this reality, or just a sick nightmare? She grabbed the photo and turned it over slowly.

Screams filled the room. Screams that a human being should never be able to make. Kara pushed the awful image forward, sliding it directly off the table. She stood up, but felt weighed down and she dropped to her knees. She covered her mouth barely muffling the sounds coming out of her.

In the image, Alex was sprawled out on a metal table. She didn't have any identifiable marks, so they had to show her face. Kara could just barely see the stitches on her neck where they had to basically reattach her head. Smaller cuts that almost looked like scratches ran down her face and bruising was prevalent all over the portion of her body that could be seen.

The police in this town had never seen something this brutal, not even the most senior officers who dealt with cases exactly like this.

“No!” Kara wailed, “God, fuck! Please! Please, please! Not my baby sister!” The officer grabbed the photo off of the floor and quickly hid it away in a folder in order to try and calm the woman on the floor. Kara struggled to get to her feet and she practically tripped on herself as she ran into the corner of the room, vomiting into the trash can that caught her eye earlier.



### **Section 1: Alone**

The first few months were probably the hardest for Kara. News headlines talked non stop about a brutal murder taking place in the small, quiet town of Farrahville, New York.

There were constant reminders everywhere, one headline reading, ‘Young Woman Killed in “Crime of Passion’ The article went on to talk about the murder of Alex Bennett at the hands of her ex-lover, Ricky Burne, who then proceeded to kill himself in his apartment later that night. A note was left by the killer, but it was most scribbled nonsense that made no sense to authorities.

Kara didn't know Ricky well. She met him a few times after she moved back into her childhood home, Alex's residence, but she didn't know much about him. She knew that Alex and Ricky fought a lot. She knew there were physical altercations. She knew they had broken up and weren't even in contact with one another.

Kara was on a trip at the time, but she immediately rushed home after hearing about Alex and was questioned at the police station about anyone who could have possibly done this; the only person she could think of was Ricky. It should all make sense, but it doesn't. Nothing about this makes sense. According to the police, this really was a crime of passion. They didn't have their main suspect anymore, they didn't have any other leads.

The case was closed as soon as it began. No justice, no closure, nothing.



It had taken Kara over three months before she was ready to hold any type of memorial service. There was no one left in the family who could help Kara with something like this, at least nobody who would be willing to do it. There weren't many people to invite, Alex never really had any friends. Kara loved her sister, but she also knew how difficult Alex could be.

She didn't have a lot of friends and there really weren't a lot of people who she got along with, except Kara.

Four people showed up to the service, including Kara who was there as the only one to represent her family. Her closest friend, Sabrina, accompanied her as she took on the responsibility of caring for her grieving friend.

Then, there was the elderly woman who lived next door, the one who called the police the

night that Alex was murdered. She stayed the entire time and kept quietly to herself. There was also Alex's boss, the owner of the local bar in town, The Grey Room, who simply went by T. He came for an hour but left as he had to tend to his bar.

Before she knew it, Kara was standing in front of the urn with the remains of what used to be her sister. It had taken so long before the police had surrendered the body over to Kara. After all, it was involved in a murder case; a case that still had many unanswered questions. She clasped her hands in front of her and glanced around at the few pictures of Alex that were put up, trying to remember where each of them were from.

Sabrina rested hand on Kara's shoulder and told her that it was time to leave. Kara sighed softly, but remained in the same spot.

"I just don't get it," Kara began softly, "how could she just be gone? Murder? This doesn't make any sense."

"K," Sabrina called Kara by her nickname, "we can't always understand why things happen. Especially something as awful as this." Sabrina didn't know what to say, she had never gone through something this serious before. Kara shook her head.

"No. No, this shouldn't have happened. It doesn't make any sense. No. This murder-suicide, or crime of passion, or whatever you want to call it just doesn't sit right with me. Something just isn't right." Kara felt like she was rambling and she was, but Sabrina just listened.

The grief was still strong within her friend, so Sabrina simply just gripped her shoulder gently to let her know that she was there. She would always be there.

Kara turned suddenly and walked out of the funeral home, Sabrina trailing close behind her. The memorial ended quicker than it began.



The car ride back to the house was uncomfortably silent. As she looked out the window gazing at all of the trees growing new leaves for the coming season, Kara knew that she was going to have to be in that house, the house where her sister died, by herself.

Why was she going back to this house? Why would she want to be in this house? The truth is, she didn't want to be there. If she wanted to leave that house behind she could, but that wasn't something she felt right doing.

This was her childhood house, the house she and Alex grew up in. It had been in her family for generations, dating all the way back to the 1800s.

It was weird, but Kara felt like she had to be in that house. She had to be there because there was something for her. She had been staying with Sabrina for the last few months, but now there was this nagging urge to go back. No matter how much Sabrina begged, Kara wouldn't stay longer.

So, she went back. They pulled up to the house and Kara clutched the urn sitting in her lap. *Welcome home*, she thought to herself.

"You know, I don't really don't have any problem staying with you for longer. I can just tell my boss that I need another week and I'll just use unpaid time. I really don't care," Sabrina said as she looked at her friend. Kara didn't want to look up, she didn't want to see the pitiful look on her friend's face.

She shook her head, "No. I can't ask you to do that. Sooner or later I'm going to have to stay in this house by myself. I might as well do it sooner rather than later. I don't have much money right now to move, the divorce is going to clear me out—" Kara stopped and sighed softly, "It's not like you live that far away. I promise that I'll call you if I need anything."

Sabrina didn't want to leave it like this, but she knew that it was no use arguing with Kara while she was in such a fragile state of mind.

Kara exited the car clutching the urn to her chest tightly as she began walking up the driveway path leading to the front door. Sabrina honked her car horn suddenly which caused Kara to turn around in surprise and she leaned out of the driver side window to say, "you better goddamn call me!" before she drove away. Kara grinned as her friend drove away. She was lucky that Sabrina was there for her.

She stared at the door and trembled as she went to retrieve her keys from her pocket. With shaking hands, she unlocked the door.

Once inside, Kara quickly closed the door and locked it; main lock and a bolt lock. She walked around the foyer and looked around at the different paintings and family pictures that she and Alex had decorated the house with.

Her eyes were drawn to one blurry painting of a woman sitting near a pond that they got at a farmers market they had seen; it was the spur of the moment when they decided to go. She scanned over the painting, looking at the figure that was supposed to be a woman with a large hat and umbrella.

*Let's get this one. It looks like you, look! You've both got the same hat on, Kara, Alex* had said gesturing to the large sun hat that Kara had been wearing. They bought the painting without a second thought.

Kara approached the doorway leading to the dining room, a sickening feeling washing over her and a knot forming in her stomach. The dining room, the place where it all happened. She shut her eyes tightly and took two steps forward before reluctantly opening her eyes.

The room was the same as ever with the obnoxiously large dining table too big for its



own good and an extravagant hutch full of expensive china and utensils that sat in the lonely back corner of the room. She stared at the floor and examined each individual piece of wood that made up the dining room floor.

Everything in there looked cleaner than normal, Kara wondered if there had been extensive cleaning done in this area. She felt nauseous thinking about it further.

Kara set the urn down on the table and glanced down at the papers before her that said, “Supreme Court of The State of New York” with the word “divorce” plastered on the top.

She quickly slumped to the floor in the area that they had said her sister was found. The floor boards felt rough beneath her fingertips and she couldn’t help but notice this awful scent that she couldn’t pinpoint the exact location of.

Exhaustion and extreme fatigue enveloped Kara and she felt as if she was going to fall asleep in this exact spot.

Suddenly, a loud crash was heard on the staircase leading to the upstairs rooms and Kara quickly made her way over to the source of the sound. A picture frame that held a picture of Kara and Alex at a party was on the bottom step, shattered.

If that wasn’t bad enough, the glass had punctured right where Alex’s face was to the point where it couldn’t be recovered.

She wanted to cry, but all of the tears she had cried over the last few months wouldn’t let her produce anything. Besides, there was no use getting upset when she had other pictures of her sister on her phone and computer.

She took care of the mess, throwing away the broken frame and torn picture before making her way upstairs. It didn’t take her long to get to her room, or for her to crawl into her bed so that she could curl up and sulk in peace and comfort.



## **Section 2 - A: Imagination**

Kara and Alex's house was very old. Old houses tend to make sounds when the house settles. Sometimes, you might mistake those sounds for something else. At least, that is what Kara had first assumed.

The first month back at home alone was strange for her. She was alone for the first time in so long. Kara's divorce began at the beginning of last year after she was married for about four years. She was twenty-one years old while her husband was twenty- nine going on thirty.

They say that love is blind, that age is just a number. This relationship, however, was doomed from the start. Kara was looking for an outlet out of the house and the first man she came across, Harry Steele, was the chosen one.

Eloping was probably their first mistake. They didn't have much money, so they married in a short, secret ceremony that only Alex and Harry's cousin attended to be witnesses to it. Then, constant fighting.

Screaming matches that would go on for hours. Name calling to the highest degree. The awful things they said to each other. This went on for four years before Kara said enough.

Now, here she was in an empty house that she used to share with her sister. A house that just felt different now. When she initially moved back, Kara felt nothing but happiness being with her sister again. The house now had such a strange atmosphere, but it almost felt calming, too.

First, it was just a feeling. Kara would walk throughout the house and feel this wave of

energy surround her. It was staticelectric in nature, but there was no shock. It almost felt like butterflies in her stomach.

Then, came the smell. Alex's perfume, the only one she would ever use. This is when Kara started to question things further. This is when she started to learn about the paranormal.



Six months after the death of Alex, Kara was in the kitchen washing dishes after the meal she had just prepared. Sabrina had been making biweekly trips to the grocery store to buy necessities for her friend. Although Kara said she didn't have to, she did appreciate all Sabrina was doing.

Kara stood at the sink, humming to herself, when suddenly she got the smell of the perfume again. She smiled, the smell comforting her.

"Hey, Alex," Kara said into the air, "I just had one of your favorite breakfasts. An omelet with mushrooms and peppers, and white cheddar cheese melted on top. It was delicious!" This has been a daily occurrence lately.

At first, Kara would only feel this presence occasionally; she thought she had been imagining things due to excessive grief. Then, it happened more frequently and the feeling became stronger. It was like she could feel Alex next to her, behind her, or standing right in front of her.

It made her start to think about things she never considered. Things having to do with spirits and the idea of the paranormal.

Kara was never a heavy believer in such things. Sure, she had watched movies and television shows depicting cases of haunting, but that's what she figured it all was. It was all just entertainment, or so she thought.

After buying numerous books and listening to different stories from people online, Kara had just begun to assume that Alex's spirit was still in the house. She had made herself believe that since she was taken so suddenly, her spirit remained because of its unfinished business. After all, that's what she was told.

Kara turned off the water and shook her hands in front of her, drying her hands lazily. A sound happened behind her, a whisper of some sort. Kara turned around to see what it was and although she found nothing clear, something behind her caught her eye.

A strange shape moving out of sight behind the door frame, almost like a dark blob. Kara assumed she was seeing things and she shook her head slightly. As she walked through the same doorway where her eyes played tricks on her, she again saw the same thing happen in the doorway of the dining room.

She was interested because she now knew that she wasn't seeing things. She followed the mass into the dining room and scanned the room as she looked for where it had gone next. However, she didn't see anything. It was gone as quickly as it appeared.

This went on for a while, leading into the new year. On New Year's Day, Kara invited Sabrina over for dinner and to spend the night. Since she had taken so much time off of work, Sabrina had been picking up night shifts at her job and while the overtime money was great, she couldn't see Kara as frequently.

Kara hadn't told Sabrina about what was happening in the house. She wanted to because that was her best friend, but she was afraid of what would be said.

The two friends sat next to each other at the table as they ate takeout Chinese food from the only place open in this small town. Alex's urn was present as well, a small container of white rice and sesame chicken in front of her.

Yes, they knew she wasn't going to eat it, but they wanted her to be part of it. They would just eat the food later on, or on another day after Alex enjoyed it.

“So, how are you? You actually seem a lot better recently. Your face is brighter, like there's more light in it. I'm happy to see you like this,” Sabrina said as she reached over to squeeze Kara's hand, “I was getting so worried.”

“You always worry about me. Ever since I met you you've been that one friend that tries to cheer everyone up when they're down. It doesn't even seem like your nature to be angry at anyone. You're just full of joy!” Kara said with a smile, “You have helped me so much over the last year. Thank you, Sabrina.”

Sabrina smiled and looked over toward the urn, “You hear that, Alex? Your sister is doing just fine.” As if on cue, a loud bang could be heard from somewhere in the house. Sabrina and Kara jumped slightly, causing Sabrina to rise to her feet.

“What was that?” She asked as she went to investigate, but was stopped by Kara grabbing her wrist. She looked at her friend with a questioning gaze.

“You're not going to find anything. If I tell you what it was you probably won't believe me,” Kara said as she motioned for Sabrina to sit back down.

Kara sighed softly and looked up, seeing that black mass at the edge of the doorway. Sabrina could see it too, and she clenched her fists slightly in what seemed to be fear. It was weird that she felt this, Kara thought, because she was having an entirely different feeling.

“You don't have to be scared,” Kara began, “it's just Alex. Her spirit, I mean. She's still here and she has been active ever since I came back. Under normal circumstances you wouldn't believe me, but you can see her, too! I know I'm not crazy if you can see her.”

“Kara, what are you talking about?” Sabrina asked, “Alex? I- I don't- Kara,” she was

having trouble finding the words to say. What Sabrina wanted to say was she felt unnerved by what she saw. She wanted to say how creepy it was that such a large, looming shadow was watching them from a distance.

She wanted to tell Kara how she felt, but she didn't know how to do it without hurting her feelings.

"Are you sure that's her?" Is all Sabrina asked as she tried to avert her gaze from the doorway. Kara almost seemed offended by that question.

"It *is* her. I can feel her. I can smell her, her perfume. That *is* her, Sabrina. I can feel it. I can," Kara's voice was cracking as if she were about to cry. There was always doubt in that back of Kara's mind, but she was blinded by what she wanted to believe.

She wanted to believe that it was Alex, so she did. She believed that it was her sister that she was seeing, but now someone was questioning it. It made her start to question things.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that," Sabrina said, "I was just frightened, I think. I didn't mean to get you so worked up like that. Calm down, okay?"

Kara sat there for a moment as she looked at Sabrina. She looked back to the doorway and then back to her friend as she nodded slowly. She decided it was probably best to cut the night short.



Kara didn't even realize she had fallen asleep until she was startled awake by the loud sound of something falling. When she awoke, she realized she had been sleeping on the couch; she didn't even remember feeling tired.

She slowly sat up and carefully peeked around the living room; the house was

overwhelmingly quiet. She hesitantly stood up and walked into the dining room, assuming that was where the noise came from.

She panicked when she saw the metallic urn that she had left on the table tipped over on the floor with the contents of her sister spilling out. Thankfully, the remains were being kept in a separate bag which had ripped a little. She quickly cleaned up what she had to and placed the urn back on the table, dusting it off gently.

Kara's heart almost stopped when she heard the sound of a door slowly creaking open behind her. She turned around and noticed a closet door had somehow opened up on its own; maybe it wasn't closed all the way.

She approached the closet and closed it, listening to it lock shut before she stepped away. As if on cue, another sound could be heard from somewhere else in the house but this time the sound was different. It almost sounded like they were footsteps in the house.

She felt uneasy now. Normally when things like this started happening, it was accompanied by the smell or perfume or a comforting feeling. Right now, all she felt was fear.

Kara was on edge at this point, but decided to try and just ignore it. She attempted to walk back into the foyer to go upstairs, but she was stopped dead in her tracks. The front door, the door that she specifically knew she locked every night was opening right in front of her with no one there.

Kara's heart pounded in her chest and she practically flew toward the door, slamming it shut and locking the main lock as well as the deadbolt. She panted heavily and quickly walked into the kitchen in search of something to protect herself.

She grabbed the first thing that she set her eyes on, a large kitchen knife, and she clutched it in her hands tightly.

Another sound could be heard, this time it was towards the back of the house and it sounded like someone talking, a female voice. It sounded familiar. It sounded like Alex. She wasn't sure why, but she made her way toward the sound as if it was drawing her in.

Kara stopped in her tracks as she made it to the source. It was coming from Alex's room, the only bedroom that was on the first floor. Something about the upstairs unnerved Alex so, when she was old enough, she decided to take the bedroom that was downstairs. It wasn't just Alex's room that made her stop, it was the dark and still figure in the doorway that halted Kara's actions.

Someone, or something was there with her. She thought about what happened to her sister, what she was told happened.

She was murdered with no sign of forced entry. All of the doors and windows that night had been locked meaning there was no way for anyone to get in or out of the house that night. It should've been the same for tonight.

Kara's mouth was dry and she felt droplets of sweat pooling down the back of her neck and from her temples. She remained as still as she could, fearing that she would meet the same fate as her sister.

This figure was different from the one that Kara had been seeing. This one had such a pronounced shape, as if it really was a person. It was this blob anymore, it had the characteristics of a solid being.

The figure in the doorway spoke to itself, but Kara could not hear anything coherent coming from it; she wasn't even sure if the figure was actually speaking English. It stood with its back turned and it had the shape of a woman, but something just didn't look right.

Its arms and legs were contorted and its body looked as if it had been twisted with the



spine protruding through the skin. Its long dark hair was matted and dirty and the being seemed to be twitching sporadically.

Whatever this was did not at all look human and the more Kara studied it the more she panicked. Her breathing quickened and she tried her hardest to stay absolutely quiet and still, but she couldn't have predicted that the slight shift in weight would make the floor beneath her creak.

The figure became eerily still and no more sound came from its direction. The room was silent and the air was still. Suddenly, the figure began to slowly turn toward Kara, its bones and joints snapping and popping as it moved.

From its side profile, Kara could see that its neck was broken in a way that didn't even seem possible. It looked like the neck was laying flat as the head was tilted down abnormally. When the figure finally turned to fully face Kara it became illuminated by the moonlight that shined through the window. She couldn't help but shriek at the mere sight of it.

The dark being was now shown to have extremely pale, deathly looking skin with hollow black holes where the eyes should've been. It was missing its nose and where it should've been a murky substance that looks like it was mixed with blood was oozing out of the orifice. The same liquid dripped from its mouth and its jaw was unhinged like a snake.

The worst part about all of this for Kara wasn't this horrific appearance, it was the fact that this figure looked scarily like Alex.

She felt like she was going to throw up, but her throat was so dry that it felt closed off. She didn't think anything would even come out if she tried. She pinched herself hard, but she already knew that she wasn't dreaming. This was real and whatever this thing was was staring back at her, almost like it was staring through to her soul.

The figure took a small step forward and began to hum in a singsong kind of tone. Kara couldn't hear it at first, but as the figure got closer she could hear it humming the tune of a nursery rhyme from her childhood, a song their mother had made up.

Something about how slow she sang the melody made this song sound much scarier than it was supposed to be.

"Kara," The figure spoke in a whisper, but Kara could hear it clearly in her ear, "Kara," the figure kept repeating her name, "you let me die. You let me die. You could've saved me. You left me. You went to fuck around and when it didn't suit you anymore, you abandoned it just like me. You changed you. You're a horrible person. You're a horrible sister. *You* let me die. *You* left me alone to die in this house."

Kara began sobbing, "No! You aren't real! I'm hallucinating, I know I am! You aren't real! This isn't real!" She tried to say these things as if they would make her feel better, but then all she felt was guilt.

"I'm sorry!" Kara wailed, "I should've stayed with you! You told me you didn't feel safe, you told me that you were scared! I convinced myself that you didn't need me! I'm so fucking stupid! Please, just stop! Please go away! Leave me alone!" Kara pleaded with the Alex lookalike.

There was nothing she could do to prevent what was about to happen. "*YOU KILLED ME.*" The figure shrieked and made an ungodly sound that could never be re-created as it charged toward Kara. With the way its body was contorted there was no way that it should've been able to go this fast.

Kara screamed loud enough that she probably woke up the entire neighborhood before

she fell back and hit her head on the hardwood floor, knocking herself unconscious. As she was fading from this world, she watched as the door to her sister's room closed by itself and made the locking sound.

The police were called due to a neighbor hearing a woman screaming in her home. When the police arrived at Kara's house, they went into the house and began to look for anyone who might be injured and in need of medical attention.

When they found Kara, she was fully conscious albeit dazed and confused about where she was and what had happened.

She was clutching the kitchen knife that she had grabbed earlier close to her chest, her knuckles went white from how tight she was holding onto the handle. The police tried to ask her questions, but all Kara kept mumbling was the same phrase over and over again.

“I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Alex.”



## **Section 2 - B: Realization**

The noise from the police station filled Kara's ears as she sat in front of an empty desk with a small metal nameplate that read “Detective Myers” on it. Officers working on other cases we're walking back-and-forth trying to deduce what happened by looking at their evidence.

There was talking, a lot of talking from all throughout the room, but the only thing that Kara was trying to focus on was the nameplate. She seemed confused by something, possibly by her encounter, but there was something else.

It almost seemed like when her eyes darted around the room she was looking for something, something she couldn't see. What was that sound?

“Okay, sorry to keep you waiting, Mrs. Steele,” Detective Myers said as he sat down at

his desk across from Kara.

“Actually,” she began, “I’m going by my maiden name now that I’m in the divorce process. It’s Bennett, if you don’t mind.” The detective nodded and wrote something down on a pad of paper in front of him, possibly making a note of what she just said.

“I’m going to ask you some questions about what happened tonight and I need you to answer them as truthfully as you can. We’d like to paint a picture of what happened here,” Detective Myers said as he leaned back in his chair, his gaze drifting to Kara.

Kara looked at him, but it seemed as if she had been looking past him before she fixed her eyes back on the man in front of her. She nodded her head.

“From the brief interaction that we had at your house before you were taken down here we know that you woke up to mysterious noises and found someone in your house who then proceeded to charge at you and attack you, although there was no evidence of an altercation. What did this person look like?”

Kara took a deep breath. Be truthful, huh?

“Well, I didn’t actually say it was a person. I mean, it looked like a person and spoke like a person, but something just fell off about it. I had assumed that I was seeing things. Hallucinations, or something like that.”

“Do you often have hallucinations? Is this the first time this has happened?”

“No, I don’t hallucinate on a regular basis. My sister and I used to be on medication, but I don’t remember what it was for,” Kara knew she was lying, but would the officer actually believe her? The officer wrote more on the paper.

“When did you stop taking the medication?” Detective Myers asked, “Was it recently?”

Kara sighed softly and shook her head, “I came off of my medication when I moved out. I

only took it because my parents forced me to. I didn't need it."

Kara knew that what she was saying probably didn't make sense, but she couldn't just up and tell him what was going on. She feared he might have her committed to an institution.

"When we found you you were in total distress. You were clutching a large kitchen knife and repeating the same phrase over and over again as you sat in the fetal position in the corner of your dining room," the detective leaned forward, "We found no evidence of a struggle and we found no evidence of a break in. Do you have any idea what could've happened to make you think that someone attacked you?"

Kara knew he didn't believe her, "When I heard the noises I realized that my front door was wide open even though I had locked it. I just had my friend over for dinner to celebrate the new year. We were drinking a little so, like I said, I must've just imagined this. I've been going through a lot lately dealing with my sister's murder."

The man sighed softly and nodded slowly. He pinched the bridge of his nose gently and closed his eyes.

"I want to help you, Kara. Dealing with the death of someone that close to you is horrible. Your sister was the victim of a heinous crime. I don't know why, but I feel like you're not telling me the truth. I believe you when you say you saw something, or someone in your house. I can't prove that you didn't anyways, but there's nothing I can do if you don't give me all of the facts. Please, help me so I can help you."

Kara listened to what Detective Myers said and she peered around the room, glancing at all corners of the wide room. He was right, she wasn't giving him all of the facts and she wasn't being totally truthful in her testimony.

The more she tried to think of what happened the more she heard that awful sound. That

scratching sound. It sounded familiar. Yes, Kara had heard this before, but where? Could it have been from that time? *That* time.

“Do you hear that scratching sound?” She asked under her breath.

“Kara!” She jumped as she heard her name being exclaimed from behind her. When she turned she was met by a very worried and distraught Sabrina who looks like she has been crying for hours. She didn’t even realize that someone had called her down to the station.

Sabrina hugged Kara tightly and sniffled as she pulled away. “God, what the fuck, Kara? I leave you for like three hours and this happens? I should’ve stayed with you. I should’ve just stayed with you. I’m such an idiot,” she whispered.

Kara felt bad that Sabrina felt so guilty. It wasn’t her fault, there was no way that anyone could have predicted this. Kara reached up and took Sabrina’s hand, squeezing it gently to let her know that it was going to be okay.

“I’m okay,” Kara said softly. She was lying and Sabrina knew it, but at this point it was useless to harp on how she was feeling. Sabrina turned her attention to the officer.

“Hi, sir. I’m her friend Sabrina and I’m here to make sure that she gets home safe. Is everything done? Is it alright if I take her now? She has had a lot of distress lately and she needs to rest. I don’t want to rush you, but I also want to make sure she’s alright,” Sabrina sounded so cool when spoke.

Kara always thought Sabrina was the best thing to ever come into her life and here she was, saving her yet again. The officer grinned and nodded his head.

“I was asking her a few questions, but for now I think it’ll be alright if we let her go.

Keep an eye on her, you hear?” Detective Myers said before waving the two women off. Kara knew that she hadn’t been helpful and since she wasn’t cooperating, he must’ve just decided to let her go.

“Okay,” she simply said before she was dismissed.

The two made their way to Sabrina's car and entered quickly. Before she turned the car on, Sabrina looked at Kara with a worried look.

“Kara, what’s going on? What happened after I left?” Sabrina asked. Kara felt tense as she was asked what happened. Sabrina waited for an answer from her friend, but instead of answering her Kara simply asked, “where is that sound coming from?”

“Sound? What sound?” Sabrina asked, “Kara, it’s just you and me talking.”

“You can’t hear the scratching?”

“No, no I can’t hear it. What do you mean scratching? Like, a cat?”

“It sounds like nails scraping on wooden floorboards. I’ve been hearing it all night. First it wakes me up, then I hear it when the police come, and it hasn’t stopped all night. I asked them about it and they said it was probably a result of hitting my head, but how can it be when I’ve been hearing it all fucking night? Fuck!” Kara exclaimed as she clenched her fist and smacked it against the window.

Sabrina grabbed her wrist tightly and begged her to please calm down and stop being so irrational.

“Kara, please stay with me tonight. I don’t want to take you back to that house. I won’t take you back. Please spend the night at my place. I would rather pay for a hotel than send you back into that place. You still have your emergency clothing in my room and I have plenty of space for you. Please, come with me,” Sabrina said as she finally started the car.

Kara knew it was pointless to fight with her. Even if she protested there was no way that Sabrina was going to bring her back to the house. It was better to just agree and deal with it later.

“I’ll come to your house and stay the night, okay?” Kara said, causing Sabrina’s demeanor to change drastically. She wanted to be far away from the house, but she still felt it calling out to her as if she were a lost child and it was her parents searching frantically for them.

She knew that being in the house would do her no good, yet something inside of her still yearned to be in that house. Some sick and twisted feeling that drew her to that house. A feeling that made her always want to stay. A feeling that she had to break out of when she went on her trip right before Alex died.

She knew it wasn’t normal, it was almost like she was obsessed with the house on the inside but her outward appearance would say otherwise. No matter how much Kara looked at the house with disgust, she still felt herself smiling on the inside.

She wondered if this feeling was the same one her relatives had when they purchased the house so long ago.



The ride to Sabrina’s house was primarily quiet except for the faint music that played on her car radio. Some catchy pop song that didn’t fit the vibe of what had happened tonight.

After a while, the scratching sound became fainter and fainter until she couldn't hear it anymore. Once they got to Sabrina’s house, Sabrina got to work on making the guest room comfortable for Kara. She said she didn’t mind sleeping on the couch but to Sabrina that was unacceptable.

“Sleeping on the couch my ass,” she grumbled at the thought. While Sabrina was still



working on the room, she suggested that Kara go relax and take a hot bath to try and forget about what had happened.

She wasn't going to forget, but she decided to entertain her friend's idea nonetheless. Who knows, maybe it would make her feel even just slightly better.

The sound of running water filled the small bathroom as Kara peered into the mirror above the sink. As she stared at her reflection, she began to get flashes of the corpse-like creature that had been in her house.

The way that its body was all contorted and the way it didn't seem to mind when its bones snapped in all directions made her feel ill. Worst of all, she couldn't stop hearing Alex's voice telling her that she was the reason for her dying. Her throat felt like a desert and she had an oasis below her.

She gripped the marble sink tightly with one hand and reached down to turn on the water with the other. She took one of those small cups you use to rinse your mouth and she filled it up before drinking it down quickly.

She rested the paper cup on the counter and turned the knob of the sink with a slight squeak. Suddenly, she heard a whisper from behind her. *It's your fault.*

Kara turned around quickly and unsurprisingly found no one in the room with her. Her breath became heavy and she could feel her heartbeat accelerating. She shook her head and closed her eyes, she even pinched herself just to make sure she wasn't dreaming; no luck.

"Stop it," she whispered back at nothing. Kara watched the knob of the bathtub out of the corner of her eye as it turned off on its own. "Please," she was pleading now, "I don't want this."

The familiar scratching sound was back and this time it sounded like it was right next to

her. She felt tears in the back of her eyes and she started trembling. A knock sounded from behind her causing Kara to yelp in fear. She turned around, the noise seemingly came from... the mirror?

When she looked into the mirror, something looked a little off. It was almost like Kara had another outline behind her, as if someone was hiding behind her but matching her moves almost perfectly.

Before she got the chance to think about anything else a pair of blackened dead hands propelled out of the mirror and started grabbing at Kara's clothing. Kara shrieked in fear and tried frantically to pull away.

"No! Get off of me!" She screamed and gripped on to one of the wrists attached to her. What she was touching didn't feel human with its cold, rough skin and its yellowish curved nails. She saw as another shape started to come through the mirror, it looked like someone's head.

The head that slowly began to come out of the mirror had pieces of its skull missing with bits of infected and dead brain tissue falling out.

Before the creature could fully reveal itself, The bathroom door swung open and Kara fell back onto the rug. The next thing she heard was Sabrina's voice trying to calm her down.

She knew now that she was going to have to be truthful with what happened to her here and back at the house. She was going to have to explain everything that had happened to her and Alex in their childhood. She was going to have to tell her the truth.

She thought back to the day that she was going away on her trip, the last day she saw Alex in person.



**Section 3 - A: Sisters**

Alex never liked the upstairs of her house. It looked like any normal upstairs in a house with a hallway that had doors leading to bedrooms and bathrooms and closets. From the day she moved back in, she never went upstairs unless she really had to. It reminded her too much of the time when she and Kara were kids.

It was a miracle that there was even a bed anywhere else but upstairs and Alex wasted no time taking the bedroom on the ground floor when the sisters stopped sharing a room. The upstairs gave Alex a sense of anxiety and there was this looming feeling in the air that something bad would happen if she were to stay up there.

Alex didn't have the money to move anywhere else. She had no friends that she could stay with and she didn't have a significant other to come and stay with her. She had been alone in this house for a long time before Kara moved in.

When Kara came back she never mentioned anything off or unnerving about the upstairs. Kara said it was all in Alex's head, but Alex knew that her feelings were relevant; had Kara simply forgotten about their childhood?

Although Kara was shaken up from her divorce, she seemed very dismissive any time Alex brought up anything weird happening in the house. Alex hated it, but there was a calming presence with Kara just being there.

As soon as she would leave, Alex would start dreading being in the house again. Now, Kara was leaving for two weeks on a trip by herself where she was going to be miles away from her sister.

Alex stood in front of the door that led into Kara's room. She put her hand up and made a

fist as she went to knock on the door, but she stopped herself for a moment. She stayed in this position for a moment, questioning whether or not she should go through with what she was about to do.

Her hand trembled and her palms felt sweaty as she felt like her knees were going to buckle forward. She felt like she was going to pass out before she could even knock on the door; the only knock that Kara would hear would be the thud of her head hitting against the door.

Inside the room, Kara walked around and grabbed different things from her shelves and drawers setting them on her bed. She folded her clothing and put them neatly in her suitcase, trying to make as much space as possible for everything she was going to bring there and possibly bring home.

This was the first time in a while that Kara was going away. The last time she remembered having a vacation was on her honeymoon. Just thinking of that time made Kara shudder, but she promised herself she wasn't going to think about anything to do with her ex-husband. The divorce process was long and hard, not to mention expensive.

Kara was lucky that she even had enough money to use for herself. She had been so lost in thought but she almost didn't notice the knock on her door.

"Come in," she called out.

Alex took a deep breath and knocked on the door very softly. Once she heard Kara respond, she opened the door and looked into her sister's room. She was greeted by the bright, smiling face of her sister.

This was the first time in the last four years that Alex had seen Kara this calm and happy.

"Hey, how was work?" Kara asked as she walked back and forth.

"Oh, you know, same shit different day. It wasn't all that busy when I was there, but

they'll be mobbed when the game starts," Alex replied.

She felt like her heart was going to explode and she leaned against the doorway for support. Something about Kara's room just didn't feel right; the hairs on her arms began to stand up as she felt goosebumps up and down her arms. Kara continued packing as Alex just rested her body on the doorway.

She was quiet, a little too quiet. The kind of quiet Alex does when she's too afraid to ask something. Kara looked at her sister and motioned for her to come in and sit down.

Alex sat in a chair by the door as Kara sat on the bed; she just really didn't want to be here anymore.

"So, what's on your mind? I can tell something's up, Alex," Kara said as she crossed her arms. Alex felt the fabric of the chair beneath her fingertips and she looked around the room, looking at some of the old, ripped up posters that were still on the wall when this room belonged to the sisters as children. She stared at the floor.

"Do you have to leave tomorrow?" She practically mumbled as Kara looked at her confused.

"For my trip? Yeah, I'm leaving early tomorrow morning, my flight is at 8 A.M."

"Oh, well, do you have to leave now? Is there any way you can postpone?"

Kara looked at her sister with a confused gaze. Where was this coming from all of a sudden?

"Alex, I already paid for the hotel and everything. I don't think they'll give me a full refund the night before I'm supposed to leave."

Alex gripped the arms of the chair, "I'll give you the money if you stay!" Kara was in disbelief at what she was hearing.

“Woah, woah! Where is this coming from? You were so happy for me to finally be doing something for myself.”

“I was- I mean, I am happy for you. I’m sorry..”

“What’s going on? Why do you want me to stay?” Kara asked as she leaned forward hoping her sister would give her a reasonable response.

Alex’s leg shook nervously and she looked around the room frantically. That damn scratching sound again. It started when Alex was young, but it was only at night. She told her parents, but they told her there may have been animals outside, or possibly the house settling.

Lately, however, the scratching sound was happening more frequently and she would even hear it outside of the house. The scratching and then the shadows, she thought it was her mind playing tricks on her. A trick of the eye, maybe she was even seeing her own shadow.

That was, until she started communicating with something that wasn’t there. An invisible friend. Imaginary, their parents used to say. Kara didn’t speak to it often, but she had definitely seen something. This entity was still considered “imaginary” by default.

While living in the house alone, Alex always thought that she was seeing things and then she started remembering her childhood. She started remembering how afraid she was all the time. She remembered the figure that would play with her and Kara. The figure that would stand in front of her bed and watch her sleep. Eventually, the being frightened them. It would later start to threaten them. Admon.

“Do you remember when we were younger and we used to play with Admon?” Alex asked. Kara stared blankly for a moment but she simply shook her head no.

Did she really not remember? Did she really block out all of those memories when she

left the house? Was Alex the only one still dealing with this? Alex thought about how it didn't seem like Kara noticed anything out of the ordinary when she came back.

It was almost like something, or someone wasn't letting her know.

"Hah, figures you don't remember," Alex said as she slowly stood up, "I remember a lot about our childhood. A lot happened to us."

Kara was confused, to say the least. She remembered her childhood, but she didn't remember anything bad like how Alex was making it seem.

"We both had the same imaginary friend. His name was Admon and we both used to play with him all the time; mom and dad thought we were just having active imaginations. They thought I had night terrors. I know I wasn't dreaming. I started to think that he wasn't imaginary, Kara"

"Alex," Kara interrupted, "What does this have to do with me leaving, or anything for that matter?" she listened as Alex began to frantically talk about her feelings in the house and she didn't even know what to say.

She explained how she felt like she wasn't alone in the house, even when she was definitely alone. She questioned why Kara couldn't remember what she said. Alex became hysterical as she poured out the emotions that were pent up from her recently ended relationship, saying how she never wanted to come back here and that's why she stayed with him for so long.

This was a lot, but Alex seemed genuine. Kara couldn't remember Admon, but she remembered the night terrors and the constant screaming that Alex would do in the middle of the night. She remembered how scared they both were, how Alex said there was something standing in front of her bed.

"Okay," Kara interrupted her sister's rambling, "if you're being serious, then I will cancel

my trip tonight.” Alex looked relieved as Kara said that, like a weight had been lifted. However, that weight became amplified when she could suddenly see something moving behind her sister.

She looked behind her and suddenly saw a deformed human-like creature slowly crawling from the floor onto the bed. It inched closer to Kara as it whispered something in an unknown language; a dead language not many knew about anymore.

Kara noticed her sister looking past her and turned around for a moment. She saw nothing behind her and felt nothing out of sorts, but she couldn’t help but wonder what Alex may have seen.

“What am I talking about?” Alex suddenly said, standing to her feet, “You know what, I haven’t been sleeping lately and I’ve been really stressed out with work and the bullshit with Ricky. I think I just had a little bit of a breakdown. Sorry about that, I’ll see you tomorrow.” Alex said quickly as if she was trying to disregard the conversation now.

“Hold on, wait a minute,” Kara said walking toward Alex, “What the hell, Alex? What are you doing?”

Alex felt tears in her eyes, “Nothing. Forget what I said,” she said as she walked out of the room, leaving the door open so the Admon would follow her.



### **Section 3 - B: Truth**

The house was quiet as the sun was slightly peaking over the horizon. The early morning hours were dwindling as Kara and Sabrina sat at both ends of the table in total silence. They hadn’t slept at all that night. This had already been going on for about an hour and it didn’t seem like Sabrina was going to give in.



After Sabrina came into the bathroom, she began asking Kara what was going on as she herself was trying to figure out what was wrong. She wasn't sure what she had seen that night at Kara's house; she was still mad at herself for leaving when Kara asked her to.

Kara wouldn't say anything. Maybe it would go away if she didn't acknowledge it further. Sabrina was scared, but she couldn't help Kara unless she knew what was going on. What was Kara supposed to tell her? She chose to ignore Alex thinking it would stop. She thought she would stop just like when they were kids.

Kara played stupid when Alex asked her about Admon and the more Alex spoke, the more Kara remembered and just wanted her to stop talking about it. She should have canceled her trip, but when Alex suddenly changed her mind, she chose her own happiness at the cost of her sister. Kara felt responsible for Alex's death, as if she was the actual killer.

"Sabrina, I don't think I can tell you what's going on," Kara said, finally breaking the silence, "I just can't do it." Sabrina leaned her chin onto her hand and looked across the table at her friend.

"That's okay, I can wait. Take your time." That wasn't the response Kara wanted. She leaned back in the chair and stared at the Christmas themed tablecloth that was still on from the holidays.

She looked at the reddish accents that decorated the cloth and she remembered when she and Alex used to play in the snow as kids.

There was no way of getting out of this. Sabrina was resilient, but that was something that Kara loved about her. Kara sat back up in the chair.

"I feel like you're going to think that I'm crazy. You aren't going to believe me, I promise

that,” Kara said as she looked at Sabrina who simply shrugged and then crossed her arms as if saying “try me”.

Kara took a deep breath and sighed softly as she began to gather up her thoughts. She didn’t know where to begin, she didn’t even know how to start this conversation. In a world of skeptics, she didn’t want to seem fanatical.

“I feel like I’ve been running my entire life. Running from my past, my marriage, and now I’m even trying to run away from you by not telling you the truth. What I’m about to tell you is going to sound like a made up story, but please just listen to the whole thing and then decide for yourself after if you want to believe me or not. Okay?”

The thought of losing Sabrina because of this was too much to think about. She needed to be honest now.

“I’m not here to judge you, Kara. I just want to help you, that’s all. Please, just tell me what’s going on,” Sabrina sounded sincere and Kara took another deep breath before she began to relay the story of her childhood. Since Kara had met Sabrina after she tried to forget about everything, these topics had never come up before.

“All I’ve done is try and run from the truth, but now that things are happening again. I’m starting to realize that I shouldn’t have ignored it. Alex and I only made things worse for ourselves when we tried to fix things. After a while, things just stopped and I thought that I could start living my life. I never talked about it again and I never asked Alex if she was still experiencing anything. I was only thinking about myself, I was selfish,” Kara could feel tears from behind her eyes and she knew she wouldn’t be able to hide them, “Alex is dead because of me. I killed her with my selfishness.”

“Woah! Wait a minute, slow down. What were you trying to forget? What do you mean

you and Alex made it worse? What do you mean your selfishness killed Alex? You can't keep blaming yourself for going on that trip," Sabrina interrupted.

Kara simply shook her head, "She asked me to stay and then suddenly changed her mind. She started bringing up our childhood. It was so weird, but I chose to ignore it. I left so early I didn't even say goodbye to her the next morning. I just wanted out. I wanted to be alone. I wanted to be away from it," she felt sick the more she spoke.

"What are you running from?" Sabrina asked. Kara looked Sabrina in the eye, the sense of fear washing over the entire room.

"Admon," she muttered.



Kara tried to forget a lot about her childhood when she moved out of the house. She tried to forget the sleepless nights, the constant fighting from her parents, the feeling of danger and the fear that she had when she and Alex realized that Admon wasn't really their friend.

It seemed so innocent at first, even a little comforting. An imaginary friend that both sisters could see and play with was perfect and when Admon inserted himself more into their lives they thought nothing of it. He started as a feeling, a sense that you weren't alone. Then, came the manifestation.

The first time the sisters actually saw Admon was one day in the summer when they were outside swimming. Alex was the first to see him as she cannonballed into the water. For a brief moment she opened her eyes and looked up to see a misshapen black blob standing over the pool. When she came back up, nothing was there but the faint feeling of being watched.

When the night terrors, or what their parents assume to be night terrors started Alex

would wake up to the silhouette of something standing at the foot of her bed. He would call out to her in a strange language, but she always understood when he would beckon her to follow him.

When Kara saw him for the first time, it had been during one of the many episodes that happened at night. Whenever Alex would scream and wake her sister up, Kara never knew what made her so afraid. Not until one night when Kara was the one screaming first.

She awoke to movement throughout the room and just figured that Alex probably got up to use the bathroom. She could've just gone back to sleep with that thought until she felt herself being tugged by the ankle out of her bed. Kara sat up in a panic and turned her attention to the corner of the room where someone, or something was rocking back and forth.

She tried to stay quiet, but then the creature began to turn its head with loud cracking sounds as it stared deep into her eyes. It then bared its long, sharp teeth in a conniving, evil grin. A face like that would be scary to anyone, not just a child.

The activity became stronger and the sisters began to think about how to talk with Admon; to tell him to leave. The fact that Kara was twelve and Alex was ten meant that they were going to have to do this on their own. No one would believe their case.

One day at school, Kara overheard some kids talking about how they made something called an ouija board and used it to "talk to real spirits". She didn't know it at the time, but creating and using that board was going to be the worst mistake of their lives.

What seems like a stupid game was actually the direct cause of what they were experiencing now.

They made the board out of old cardboard and wrote the letters of the alphabet across the

middle. Goodbye was written at the bottom while yes and no were written in the top corners of the board. They used more cardboard to make a vaguely triangle shaped planchette with a hole in the middle.

The rules were simple: never play alone, never play where someone died or where the dead reside, and always say goodbye. To start, all you have to do is circle the board three times and then you can begin asking questions to any presence that might be nearby.

The questions started out very simple. Is someone here? The board began to spell A-D-M-O-N. Are you always here? *Yes*. Can you leave? *No*. Please leave. *No*. They decided they wanted to know more. Where are you from? The board spelled out N-O-W-H-E-R-E. Why are you here? The board spelled out D-U-E-S.

They didn't know what this meant, so they decided to ask a different way. What do you want? The board spelled out S-O-U-L. Alex began to protest against playing anymore, but Kara convinced her to follow the rules. She asked, from who? The board spelled out A-L-E-X and then K-A-R-A.

Both girls suddenly removed their hands from the planchette with a gasp and they felt the air around them thicken. They quickly hid the board and left the room, forgetting to say goodbye.

Kara said nothing, she simply walked down the stairs and made her way to what had been the guest room at the time on the ground floor. She knelt down and felt around the floor before she found a hole. She stuck her finger in and slowly pulled it up, revealing a secret compartment in the floor.

She shoved the box into the floor and closed it up quickly, standing to her feet. At this point, they felt triumphant that they didn't have to see the board anymore but knew it was always there if they wanted to play again.

As the years went on, the activity began to get worse and eventually the sisters stopped sharing a room. Alex took the room on the ground floor and Kara stayed in the room that they shared.

Both of them had similar experiences at night, the same things they dealt with all the time. Things began to become more violent. Alex and Kara started waking up with scratches and bruises all over their body and they did their best to hide them from their parents.

It wasn't that easy and unfortunately their parents believed they might be self harming and got their daughters the help they thought they needed.

Kara and Alex were given antidepressants and other medication that Kara couldn't remember; she just remembered her mother forcing her to ingest it. They knew they couldn't protest and tell their parents what was really going on, so they didn't put up a fight and just did as they were told.

While taking these medications things seemed like they were starting to get better, until one night when Kara had been left alone. Alex had gone to a class sleepover which left Kara all by herself. It was late and she was trying to get to sleep, but then she started hearing a strange sound. It sounded like scratching.

Kara peered around the room but couldn't see anything; the scratching continued to get louder as it sounded like it was directly under her. The only thing under her was Alex's room. The scratching sounded like it came from Kara's floor, meaning it was probably coming from the ceiling of Alex's room.

Kara tried to forget about it and go to sleep, but there was this nagging feeling that she had that was telling her to go downstairs into her room.

She didn't know why, but her legs felt like they were moving on their own and she started

to make her way to Alex's room involuntarily.

As Kara reached the room, the scratching stopped and she stared at the closed door. She reached for the doorknob and it felt ice cold, almost like it would burn you if you held it too long. Kara slowly turned the knob and gave the door a gentle nudge as she let it open by itself.

In the middle of the floor sprawled out as if it was ready to be played with was the makeshift ouija board made about five years prior. She gasped softly as it started moving on its own and she watched as the planchette spelled the same thing over and over again, U-N-D-E-R F-L-O-O-R-B-O-A-R-D.

Suddenly, the scratching could be heard again as the floorboard with the secret compartment began to move violently. Kara began to slowly back out of the room, but not before she caught a glimpse of the board spelling out B-E-H-I-N-D. It almost felt like she backed into someone and without turning around she screamed bloody murder.

Her parents found Kara shaking and in the fetal position, talking about someone being there. Her parents did the same thing they had done for five years, giving her new medication to take; medication for hallucinations.

The next coming years felt like torture for the sisters. Alex was being tormented morning, noon, and night while Kara's abuse was done more toward the evening to late at night. When she turned twenty-one, Kara felt like she had to run away.

She even went as far as to marry a man much older than her that she barely knew just because he had a private residence that she could run away to. When she met Harry, her now ex husband, she felt like she had finally found an escape. She rushed into a relationship with a very unpredictable and toxic man.

He proposed after about two months and Kara wasted no time saying yes, much to the

dislike of her family. Alex felt like she was being betrayed. Like she had lost her sister.

The two had done everything together. They experienced all of this horrible stuff together and now it seemed like Alex would have to deal with it all by herself. She pleaded numerous times with Kara to stop and think about this, but her mind had already been made up.

She had an outlet to escape, Alex didn't. The next five years proved to be harder than anything Kara had experienced before. She thought that she would find peace with Harry, but after about a year the constant fighting started.

The house was cozy by design, the perfect spot if you wanted to grow your family; Kara found it to be more like a prison. All Harry and Kara did was fight about stupid things. He would get mad because she hadn't healed from her past traumas and she would get irritated that he wasn't more understanding.

It started with name calling then went to screaming curses until it finally boiled into a rotten mess of threats and holes in the wall.

Back in the present, the divorce was being finalized and Kara has finally reunited with Alex. She ignored any mention, or allusion to Admon's presence. She chose to forget about everything they did. She forgot about the wretched board. She forgot the sleepless nights.

No, she didn't actually forget. She chose to block them out but now she can't stop remembering.

Nothing that she forgets is truly forgotten because it's still eating away in the back of her mind. She came to the full realization that she couldn't run away when Alex died. She was selfish to still leave when Alex asked her not to.

If Kara had just stayed then maybe Alex would still be here. But, something bad could've



happened to her, too. She knows that she can't focus on the past now. She can remember, but she has to move on and realize that she can't change what has happened.



### **Section 3 - C: Hell House**

Sabrina sat there in silence as Kara went on and on about her childhood and everything that she and Alex have experienced. If the circumstances around this hadn't been so somber, Sabrina would've thought that she was lying and just playing a joke.

She had been friends with Kara long enough to know that she was being completely serious. By the time Kara had finished the story, the sun was in the sky and the birds had begun chirping for the morning.

Sabrina sighed softly, "I wasn't expecting any of that. You always got so defensive when someone asked about your childhood. I had just assumed that you didn't want to talk about something terrible so I never pushed you further. What you just said is so surreal! I mean, you and Alex were followed by a presence as children and it continues to bother you now? What happened last night?"

"I heard something near Alex's room and went to check it out. I should've called the police when I saw my front door wide open, but I thought I was imagining things. I saw this disgusting, deformed looking thing with its bones twisted in all different directions. I could hear the bones cracking and breaking as it turned around to look at me. It looked just like Alex. She told me this was all my fault. I wish we never made that board, we should've never played that stupid game! My little sister is dead because I'm so fucking stupid!" Kara banged her fists on the table as she cried, "Something attacked me in your bathroom. It came out of the mirror. It was Alex."

Sabrina suddenly stood up and rushed to her friend's side as she hugged her tightly. She held her head close and rubbed her back gently as Kara sobbed loudly into Sabrina's chest.

"It's okay," she whispered over and over, "I know you feel guilty for what happened, but you did not kill Alex. Do you understand? Whatever you're seeing isn't her. It has to be Admon making you think it's Alex when it's really him. He got her soul and now he wants yours. That's the only logical thing, right? I'm not very religious, but I can contact someone and see if maybe they can come and bless the house. There has to be some way to drive the evil out!" Kara pulled away and looked at her friend who was gazing down at her with hopeful intent.

As Sabrina said that last line, something flew in between the two girls. It went right past their faces and smacked against the wall with a loud bang. As they looked toward the wall, Sabrina covered her mouth and Kara stood to her feet with a scream.

A very large knife was sticking perfectly out of the wall after being thrown with excessive force.

"No! Not this! Leave Sabrina alone you fucking monster! You want me! Just take—" Sabrina grabbed Kara and covered her mouth tightly.

"Don't you dare finish that fucking sentence, Kara. Do not offer yourself up to this thing. I don't know how any of this works, but I do have enough common sense to know that you do not offer up your soul to something just like that. Something that could kill you like it's already done." Kara knew that Sabrina was right. Sabrina continued, "I am not going to let anything happen to you. I promise that I am going to help you now. You don't have to run anymore. You're not alone when I am with you." This was the first time Kara had heard Sabrina be so serious, but she knew that she was right.

Kara dropped to her knees and brought Sabrina down with her, leaning her head down a

bit ashamed.

“I’m sorry,” she said softly. Sabrina shook her head and brought Kara back up to her feet.

“You have to be strong. If you show it that you’re scared it’s only going to get worse. It must think it has some sort of hold over you. It’s been with you for a long time, but we’re going to try and change that,” Sabrina responded.

Kara finally started to come to her senses and she smiled as she hugged Sabrina again. She couldn’t ask for a better friend. It was like having a sister all over again.

“We have to go to my house. I think we’ll find answers there” Kara said as she wiped her eyes, standing to her feet with confidence, “Alex’s room is probably where all of the activity is spewing from now. I have to look at that cubby in the floor. Are you willing to come and help me even though it will be dangerous?”

Sabrina laughed softly and took Kara’s hand, “For you, I would do anything.”