REVERENCE

Edan

Prologue

Entry 1

Current Date: March 15th, 2023.

Date of memory: Idk. Sometime in 2008.

Some say that the quiet, quaint, suburbs on the edges of town are where your average American Family fantasize living in one day. The American Dream consists of your stereotypical heterosexual white family with an older son and a younger daughter, maybe a dog too. No cats, for some reason. The wife would stay at home to take care of the kids while the husband, just having been discharged from the military, would become a prosecutor to put the "bad people" away for the rest of their lives. Every day, he successfully makes the town a safer place for his kids to grow up in.

Others say it's a perfect place to start a horror story.

So, here it goes. The following conversation is one I'm not sure happened. I've been talking to my mother and uncle about the past whenever I feel up to it. They said they can remember what the general conversation was about during this time, but no exact quotes.

Just for fun, I'll be filling those holes in myself.

"Eliza, why are you whispering?" My uncle would begin.

And my mother, terrified within the walls of her white painted, picket fenced in mansion, would probably have responded like: "Oh, am I? Don't worry about it, I'm just trying to make sure my husband doesn't wake up."

"Okay…. Can you pass the phone to Luna now?"

My mother would have paused.

"Sis?"

She would have glanced over to me, her battered and bruised seven-year-old son. I was unconscious on the 10,000-dollar sofa while surrounded by fake and uncomfortable seating. The entire room always smelled like expensive leather— and vomit, which stained the carpets.

"Sis? You still there?"

My mother blinked. "Sorry, yeah. He's asleep too."

"Well, can you wake him up? I haven't heard his voice in so long."

My mother always held the phone with her right hand. So, I imagine that hand would have been trembling. She would have tried to keep her breathing slow and steady. Her left-hand would have most likely been fiddling with the landline cord. Her poor second finger would have turned blue as that cord wrapped around it. "No. He hasn't slept in days. I'm not waking him up."

My uncle on the other end of the call went quiet. Together, the two listened to each other's breaths. To my mother, this was probably comforting. To my uncle, it was nauseating.

"Eliza. Put Luna on the phone."

From down the hall, a bedframe squeaked.

My mother gasped quietly. She looked away from me to the doorway in front of her. This then led to a long hall. My parents' bedroom was at the end of the hall.

Her voice lowered even further. It was quieter than a whisper. "I can't."

"Is there something going on you're not telling me about? As a matter of fact, this is the first time you've called since last month! What's going on, you're getting more and more distant."

"Jeremy I—"

She could hear footsteps coming closer.

My mother panicked. She looked at the landline cord. She looked at me. She looked at the doorway. She repeated those three things multiple times.

“Eliza?”

“Jeremy, we need help—”

There was the sound of static, before my uncle heard the long low tone of the line going dead.

“Eliza? Hello?”

The one time my mother finally had the courage to tell someone she and I needed help, would be the last words my uncle would hear from her for the next four years.

End of entry.

Seriously, Doc. Adams. This is stupid.

-Luna

Chapter 1

Entry 2

Current Date: March 16, 2023

Date of Memory: Winter of 2011.

In the suburbs I lived in, all the houses were built to look the same. They reminded me of the Barbie dollhouses my friends in the second grade would play with. Those dolls always scared me. Their plastic hair felt weird in my hands, and their painted-on smiles gave me the creeps. They reminded me of the smiles of my neighbors. They always grinned too hard, and whenever I was around, they never stopped.

On this particular day, my mother and I were seated on the windowsill. It was right next to the front doors. The same front doors my father had just left from.

We were peeking through the blinds, watching as the blue 2011 Lamborghini Aventador slowly backed out of the driveway. As it drove down the street, I remember it passing many other cars that looked just like it. It was a neighborhood of wealth and secrets. It stuck out like a sore thumb in the rest of the city.

Even long after that Lamborghini was gone, my mother and I stared at the empty driveway for five extra minutes. The anxiety was building up in my chest. The bruises on my arms that were healing, suddenly felt torn open.

"Go, Luna. Now!" my mother yelled, hopping away from the windows. She rushed through the kitchen, passing the landline phone with its cut cord to grab her bags.

I scrambled up the stairs into my bedroom, kneeling beside my bed. I dragged my hidden pink suitcase out from underneath with my trembling hands. My eyesight was so clouded with tears it was hard to find anything I needed. I grabbed my backpack, which also just happened to

be pink, and stuffed all my anti-nausea pill bottles inside it. I ignored my phone and laptop, leaving those on the bed.

"Luna!" my mother called from downstairs, panicked.

"I'm going as fast as I can!"

"Move faster!"

I yanked my backpack onto my shoulders, trying to heave the suitcase onto its wheels. As I rolled it over to the stairs, I understood I would not be able to pick it up. My strength was sapped.

My mother noticed this immediately. While she was just as exhausted as I was, she still had enough adrenaline to sprint up the stairs. She took two at a time, pulling my suitcase into her hands just as a red, 2011 Hyundai Sonata Hybrid screeched to a stop on the driveway.

My uncle had stumbled out of the car by the time my mother shoved the front doors open. Her face was pale with exhaustion, but her eyes were bright with confidence. She believed we could get away. It was a different side of her. I had only seen it couple of times in my life.

"Jeremy, take his suitcase, go!" My mother set down my suitcase in front of him, hurrying back inside the house to grab her own.

My uncle paused, looking down at the pink suitcase with a frown. "Wait, this isn't Eliza's?" He looked up at me, his frown softening. But it still scared me.

Men scared me. It didn't matter what type of man it was, whether I knew them or not. Whether or not they ever put their hands on me didn't matter either. They were still men. Adult men. They could easily pick me up and place me over their shoulders as if I was a duffel bag. I couldn't believe I would day turn into one. I had just turned twelve and I hadn't eaten in a while, so I was small and scrawny. I was always aware of the fact that I was weak. So, as I stood in

front of the uncle I hadn't seen since I was in the second grade, I was ashamed. I was scared of him. I couldn't believe I was. He didn't deserve that.

"Luna…" he said, his voice choked. He took a step towards me, and I quickly backed up. I lowered my head, my body trembling. My uncle hesitated before walking up to me. He helped take my backpack off my shoulders, not saying another word.

As soon as my mother was out the door, it was back to rushing. We started to load everything into the car as quick as possible.

"Does your husband know about this? Even just a little?" My uncle asked as I raced to open the back seat door with my mother following.

"Eliza…?" My mother and I looked up, turning to our next-door neighbor's house. Tracy stood on her porch, her eyes wide with shock. "Where's Dawn? Who is that man—"

"Get back in the house," my mother snapped. "I've got your husband on speed dial."

Tracy, always the wuss, hurried back inside.

I was in awe of my mother at this moment. I remember she stood right beside my uncle's Hyundai with her chest out, back straight. I could see her hands trembling, her eyes moving from neighbor to neighbor. They were all obviously watching from inside their doll houses. They weren't smiling now.

There was one man that I recognized watching from his upstairs window. This man came by the house to speak to my father and I multiple times for years. He lived in the house across the street. Till this day, he still haunts my dreams. He always had a frown on his face, and the large scar running across his eye looked redder on this day than any other day I've seen it.

The three of us watched as he grabbed his cellphone, turned away, and shut the curtains behind him.

My mother huffed at him, holding up her middle finger. “My husband will know about this soon enough.” She turned to help me get buckled in as I began to feel dizzy.

I rested my head on the window, shutting my eyes as my mother and uncle talked, the Hyundai screeching as it backed out of the driveway. “God, he’s not looking good at all, Liza,” my uncle said.

My mother blinked away her tears as we drove down the street. “I know. Just take us as far away as possible, we need a hospital that's not—”

“I know. We’ll get him there.”

I had opened my eyes to look around, curious. I hadn’t left my house in six years. As we passed by all the white picket fences, it felt like we were driving in a circle.

My uncle looked at me through his review mirror. “Geez, how much does he weigh now?”

My mother swallowed. She rubbed her forehead stressfully. “Sixty-five pounds.”

My uncle paled, only pushing harder on the gas as we raced towards the highway. “And he still can't eat?”

“He can stomach a little bit, but everything else either comes back up or just sits in his stomach and causes him pain.”

“And the doctors don’t know what's wrong with him?”

“I bet they do.”

Silence had spread throughout the car.

When I look back, I still don’t know what my family members were thinking. I can’t remember what I was thinking either. But I do remember feeling the sun’s light, uninterrupted by the clouds, heating my cheek like a warm kiss.

End of Entry.

Yeah, Doc. Pink suitcases.

Yeah, laugh it up. So funny.

-Luna

Chapter 2

Entry 3

Current Date: March 17, 2023

Date of Memory: Same day as the last entry.

I remember the motel we stayed in that night. Why? I don't know. I like to think that this was the night that changed my life for the "better." My mother and I left our demons behind, and we went to sleep with fading bruises instead of new ones. Those same bruises that itched and burned the entire car ride spent in silence had finally calmed when we entered the lobby.

With our hoods up, my uncle paid for the room in cash. With my head down, I stared at the ugly carpet patterned with blue and red squares. I remember thinking how oddly comforting it was. It was a pattern I had never seen before, and it was nothing like the *off white* my house was painted with. My father always said "pure white" hurt his eyes and burned his nonexistent soul.

It was when we entered the room and were safely locked inside, when my mother finally broke down. She sobbed, pulling me into her arms. Her hug hurt, but it didn't scare me. It had been weeks since I last hugged her.

I flinched when my uncle joined the hug, but slowly relaxed as I watched mom do the same. "I'll take good care of you, baby. I promise," she had told me into my hair. "You won't need your father. All we need is each other. You'll be smiling again in no time." She didn't wait for me to respond, knowing I wouldn't. She turned to her brother. "Thank you, Jeremy."

The two let me go to hug each other.

"Of course, I'm glad you found a way to contact me. I'll tell Mom and Dad that you guys are safe."

“For now.” Mom stepped away, picking up the bags of groceries. She set them on the table, sifting through them. “We'll probably have to move a lot to keep Dawn from catching us. Because he will try.”

Uncle Jeremy sat down on the bed. “With his connections, you're probably right.”

“Which means, soon, you'll need to leave us.”

Uncle Jeremy’s eyes went wide. He stood, shaking his head. “No, I’m not leaving until Luna gets better. Plus, what's going to happen when you need a job? Luna can't take care of himself.”

Mom stopped what she was doing to stare at her brother. “He can take care of himself just fine.”

There was a moment of silence, my uncle taking the time to understand what that meant. Mom didn’t tell him everything that went on in that house, but he could grasp what generally happened.

And mom was right. Back in our doll house, she was usually unconscious. I had to take care of myself when my father wasn’t around to make sure she got rest. I cooked by myself, bathed by myself, dressed by myself, and figured out what medicines to take when I got the flu or other colds. I had to learn to do all of these things on my own. There was no other option.

Once she couldn’t take the silence any longer, mom sighed and continued to look through the groceries. “I can't let Dawn target you, Jeremy. Once he knows you know where we are, he'll start gunning for you. It's better if you don't tag along with us. I don’t want you to get into any more trouble than you already are.”

Uncle Jeremy paused, but gave in. “Alright, fine. But when you guys get new phones, I want weekly updates. I'll be worrying until you give me one. At least once a week.”

She nodded. “That's fine.”

“When should I leave?”

She grabbed a can of chicken soup out from the grocery bags, setting it on the table. “Once we get our own car. But that will be difficult.”

“I'll take care of that. Let's just jump from hotel to hotel for a while until we know Dawn’s no longer on our tail.”

She nodded again, opening the can. She plopped the contents into a bowl we purchased, before setting it in the microwave. “Let's just eat and sleep. Luna needs as much energy as he can get. Come sit down, son.”

I took a seat at the table as my uncle unpacked the sandwiches.

While the adults ate, I waited for my food to heat up. I sat there, eyes on the microwave with laser focus. I watched as that bowl turned slowly, around and around, the haze of steam rising and covering the glass with condensation. When the fog covered the glass, I snapped out of it.

“Luna? Luna!” I flinched, looking at mom. She had her hand placed on my wrist, her grip tight. “Stay here, with us. Okay?”

I wasn’t sure what she meant.

The microwave beeped.

She turned away, getting up to grab my food. I watched her for a moment, before turning my eyes to the table. My skin burned as I felt my uncle staring at me, so I made sure to not look up.

I heard him get up from the table, digging through his backpack. My mother was looking around the cabinets for utensils as my uncle made his way back to the table. I stiffened when I heard him sit down next to me.

Then, he set a small lion plushie on the table.

I stared at it, watching as my uncle moved one of the lion's legs in wave. "I got this for you earlier at the store. Have you ever had a stuffed animal before?"

My mother noticeably slowed down her search.

Uncle Jeremy raised his voice, sounding like he was talking to a toddler as he gave the stuffed animal a voice. "Hiya, Luna! My name is Simba!"

I looked at him, meeting his eyes for the first time. "Simba?"

He was shocked by my sudden response, and so was mom. She froze for a moment, before grabbing a spoon and stirring my soup.

Uncle Jeremy cleared his throat, scooting closer as he continued to move the lion around as if it was alive. "Yeah! I'm Simba, the King of the Jungle! Do you know what that means?" I entertained the show, shaking my head. "I have the power to protect my pride. To protect my family!"

I looked back down at the stuffed animal, Uncle Jeremy making it wave at me again. Mom chuckled as she finally set the bowl down in front of me. "Jeremy, he's not a toddler."

He grinned. "I know." He turned to me. "I just wanted to give you something to hold on to. He can keep you safe, so you no longer have to be scared of me."

I stared at the lion for a little while longer, my mouth twitching in a small smile. What a stupid story, I thought.

My mother kneeled, her eyes wide. "Luna…. Did you just smile?"

The twitch slid into a full smirk as I grabbed the lion to hold it close to me. “It’s a stupid story.” I turned to Uncle Jeremy, whose cheeks were red with embarrassment, but his eyes wide with hope. “Thanks uncle…. I love him.”

Tears sprung into his eyes, but he blinked them away and cleared his throat again. “No worries.” He slowly set a hand on my head, ruffling my dark hair.

I didn’t flinch.

Once we finished eating, the adults worked to get the room ready to sleep in. I stayed at the table, the food I just ate sitting uncomfortably in my stomach. I could feel every morsel of it. I swallowed as my mouth filled with saliva, my forehead growing hot. I gripped Simba tightly in my hands, his soft body distracting me from my incoming nausea. Even if it was just a little.

Uncle Jeremy pulled the bed out from the couch, grabbing the comforter from the closet. “You and your mother can take the real bed. I’ll take the pull out.”

After changing into my pajamas, I laid down next to her in bed. I held Simba close to me, which made mom smile. It was a bright smile, one filled with happiness. My shock from such an expression distracted me from my nausea even more.

She hugged me to her chest, her voice whispered. “I know the situation we're in right now. But even so, you’ve made so much progress already. I’m proud of you.” My mouth twitched. “I’m excited to share new memories with you. Maybe you'll be able to go to a real school now.”

I didn’t respond to that, but my smirk faded away.

It was three in the morning, and I was up to head to the bathroom a second time.

My uncle was starting to understand what was happening at this point. He was wide awake and had been since the first time I got up. He wanted to help out, but my mother told him to stay put. She then moved to console me in the bathroom.

He watched as I lethargically crawled back into bed. My mother set a cold towel on my forehead, and I passed out. What happened next is, again, recounted generally with the holes filled in by yours truly.

I'll pay for the hospital bills he would have probably said.

Mom would have looked at him with alarm. *What?! No, I can't let you do that—*

Eliza, I haven't been able to help him for years. I've been blissfully ignorant over his pain, and now I want to fix that. I have a stable job; I will be able to pay for his medical things. Uncle Jeremy would have smiled. *You won't be able to take care of all of his needs for a long time, not until you get a job. But Luna needs help* now. *He can't wait for you. So, pass all the bills and checks to me. I'll pay for it all.*

End of Entry.

I'm done signing this crap.

Eh? Why?

Cause it's dumb. Now stop writing in my journal, Doc.

Your hand writing's ugly.