

*When I say I'm fine, I really mean I'm dying inside. Dying as in save me from myself before I take my own life. Take my own life as in I'm trapped in my mind and there's a weight on my chest that's pulling me under, and I can't breathe, and I try to scream, and I beg for someone to save me. But if you ask me how I'm doing...I'll say I'm fine—*

“Cindelle?”

The smooth rolling of blood-inked pen against paper came to a halt as the seventeen-year-old looked up from her journal.

“Did you know that because everyone is inside that turtles all over the world are being saved?” asked a voice as gentle as a whispering meadow.

The dark-skinned beauty glared at her younger brother, Levi, who was looking back at her with virgin eyes. Despite the annoyance that was quite evident in her demeanor, the curly headed boy continued talking.

“And did you know that because there are no more cars on the street that it's helping the climate get better. And all the animals are getting to run around freely too. Imagine if we look out the window and there's.....”

Cindelle couldn't help but feel jealous of her little brother as he rambled on about the good that quarantine was doing for the environment. The real reason why everyone was staying isolated

was kept a secret from his five-year-old ears. The only thing he knew was to wear his mask when in public and to wash his hands so he wouldn't get sick. He didn't know that forty million people got laid off from work and now had no means of providing for their families. He didn't know that more than a million people have lost their lives from coronavirus. He didn't know about the overcrowded hospitals or the doctors or nurses that were putting themselves and their families at risk just to try and save someone else's life. Levi was lucky enough to be shielded from ugly truth that was 2020. He didn't even understand that their mother was no longer with them. To him, she had moved on to a new city in the sky and he was told he'd get to see her when he was older.

Unlike her happy go lucky brother, Cindelle walked around with a noose of sadness, anger around her neck. She knew about the deaths from covid-19, the homeless people on the streets, the struggle that the first responders faced, the effect that quarantine was having on the economy. She was aware of everything and it stressed her out. It made her feel powerless. It felt like the world was ending and all she could do was watch as society, as she knew it, unravel. To add that that, it was hard enough for the girl to deal with her mother's death when she was going to school. Now, she was stuck at home where the essence of her mother thrived. From the colour of paint on the walls to the pots and pans in the kitchen to the books on the bookshelf in the dining room. The biggest reminder of her mother, however, came whenever she saw herself in the mirror.

Unaware of time passing by, Cindelle stayed seated at the table, silently immured in her own mind. Her father, Ezekiel, had cleared the table and had gotten Levi ready for bed, and

Cindelle still hadn't moved a muscle. When he returned to the kitchen to make a cup of tea, he saw that she was there in the same position. Her dull eyes were focused on the grey wall across from where she sat, and the red pen was still tightly enclosed in her hand. Ezekiel noticed how she barely interacted with Levi over dinner. He had been picking up a lot of signs from her actually. Cindelle barely spoke to anyone in the house. Most of her time was spent in her room, and when she came down to eat, she was always writing in a book. Ezekiel had been having a hard time connecting to his daughter after the passing of his wife. She had battled with breast cancer for six years, before finally finding peace in the afterlife. Three months after his wife died, the coronavirus pandemic started, which led to quarantine, and that led the family's current situation.

"Hey, are you doing alright?" Ezekiel asked while taking a seat next to his daughter. He watched keenly as her wan eyes travel down to the book in front of her.

"I'm fine dad." Cindelle muttered slowly. "I just lost track of time. Thanks for dinner, and goodnight."

The sound of the chair being pushed against the floor as she stood up filled the quiet room. Ezekiel stood up too, no longer able to hide the concern on his face.

"Cindy, you haven't been eating. You haven't been talking. You don't watch tv. You don't go outside. All you do is write in that book and hide in your room. I know you're going through a tough time, but you're not the only one. Think of your brother. He doesn't understand"

He paused and waited for her to say something. Silence was the only response he received.

“You’re not the only one hurting sweetheart.” He continued while looking at her face. “Just please don’t shut us out. If you don’t even want to talk to me about it, don’t shut Levi out. You know I’ve got to go to work on a daily basis. If I were to get sick, or worse—”

The thought of losing her father brought tears to Cindelle’s eyes. She opened her mouth to say something, but the words were stuck in her throat. She did the next best thing instead and handed him her journal before rushing to her room. When Ezekiel read the words on the page, he was shocked and hurt.

“Angelina,” He mumbled while looking to the window. “I promise I’ll try to help our daughter. I don’t know how, but we’ll get better. Our family will become whole again. I won’t let her stay on this dark path.”