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A Child's Dream

By: Nicole Carmona

Dreams? A truly pitiful thing, as they serve as nothing more than a bitter reminder. A cruel laugh leaves her pink chapped lips, the hot air is replaced by a cooler harsher one. After all, what has dreaming ever done? When you wake up, the dreams are gone, and that taste lingers forever on the tip of your tongue, but just as you get a chance, it dissolves, just as the others did. She never did like talking about dreams. It brought out a twisted nasty emotion she so desperately wanted to hide. *Everything around her was too much from the cars to the sun even the sound of the air was suffocating.*

Hours had passed. Her body still walked with only one goal in mind: a haven. The soft breeze eased the never-ending thoughts, but it did not eliminate them, it simply pushed them away. A temporary fix of sorts. Her shoes were far from comfortable as the tall heel only hurt her ankles and each step became more unbearable than the last. The more she walked the more the heel dug deeply into the back of her foot. Blood pouring from the wounds made the shoes slip deeper. Yet she pushed through the pain; in truth, the physical pain helped remind her she was real. The sun was setting slowly, but beautifully. The sight was breathtaking; the mixes of blues, yellows, oranges, pinks, and cloudy whites were something she could never quite hold on to or remember. Each day it was different and each day she experienced that warm one of a kind feeling all over again as if it was the first time. The image of the setting sun reflected onto the mild dark blue waves as the sand stood still even against the harsh cold wind. That salty ocean air smell flooded in. *It was everything. This was her haven.*

Once again, she took a step forward but this time her heel sank into the mushy dry sand. Gently, but at the same time impatiently, she slipped out of the tight black heels, her feet softly melting into the cold sand as a sigh of relief escaped. Her eyes closed. Her breathing was heavy, her suit sweaty, her body ached and cried for even the slightest relief. Still, she stood unmoving, ignoring the cries. She had let her long black hair, which was always neatly up, down, flowing in every which way with the wind. She was a mess, but here it didn't matter. Her eyes opened. Her rough hands picked the shoes off the ground, tucking the heels into the side of her bag. Like she had done before, she continued, the sand sticking to the blood. After hard days she liked to come here. The beach. There were other beaches around, but this one was different. This beach wasn't some special one-of-a-kind beach, in fact it was

run down. Even the sand wasn't all that good. It was too cold to swim or do anything else, the waves were too strong for many. The few people who came to the beach kept to themselves. Yet in her eyes, it was the most perfectly imperfect place to exist.

She chose a spot far from the shore, but close enough to get a good view. Her impeccably clean suit jacket came off, acting as a blanket under her. Her purse was still clutched tightly in her hands. The purse itself was nothing, but what was inside held the being she was together. With shaking hands, she pulled the silver zipper open. The metal was colder than the air around her. The black purse held a small matching wallet, along with an old picture tucked in a hidden pocket, a lighter, and a half empty pack of cigarettes. Her hands dived in snatching the pack of cigarettes and the red lighter. Her one true love. *Lucky Strike*. The brand she grew to love more than her own family. The brand that would bring her the early death she waited for. The box was white and smooth, the famous Lucky Strike logo in the middle with a big neon orange warning at the bottom of the box. *Smoking kills*. She always read the bottom warning even though each time it was the same. *It was killing her*. A bitter laugh escaped. "*What did it matter?*". She had no one left to care for.

Her fingers moved to open the box, pushing one up. It stood tall, the yellow filter tip much higher than the rest, her head leaned down to meet the tip to her mouth. The smell wasn't strong, but maybe that was just the years of smoking talking. It smelled faintly of tobacco along with a soft underlying scent. Her teeth carefully took the cigarette filter. Her right hand worked on putting the box back into the purse while the other brought the lighter to her cigarette. Her now free right hand blocked off the wind, her left pushed down on the wheel. She started to inhale, working with the lighter. After a few antagonizing long seconds, the smoke started to come in. The mix of tobacco and a minty menthol- like flavor filled her mouth, then her throat, her nose, it was everywhere. Still it was too little. A couple more seconds passed. Her pointer and middle finger took the cigarette in between the two. After a long inhale she held the smoke, easing the cigarette out of her mouth. A couple more seconds passed before she exhaled the smoke, moving her head to the side. The smoke moved with the wind, creating a wispy flow before being blown away completely. The shaking continued, *when did it ever stop?* Bringing the filter back to her lips she inhaled, *again*. *When did this all start?*

She held the air. The question was stupid; she knew exactly when it started. The day she was born, as it was her fault from that day on. Her father's favorite thing was a smooth black belt; her mother's was her own hand. They treasured both deeply. They never really needed much of a reason from just talking back to giving a defiant look; that was more than enough. Unlike her mother, her father never showed remorse. After all, she made him do it; it was her fault. Her mother, on the other hand, acted as if it never happened. As if she had made it all up, but her

mother's hand would meet her face again and again, so many times she lost count. Or maybe she just lost the part that cared. On the off chance she was acknowledged, Her mother's face would contort into a face of horror and fear. The tears followed soon after, and her mother's quivering lips would move to form excuses as she moved towards her wrapping cold shaking arms around her. The "I love you" and "you made me do it" would be repeated for hours followed by "I didn't do it" but never once did her mother apologize. Her almost doll-like 10 year old body would stay frozen unable to move. Maybe it was fear, or some messed up response to being overwhelmed. Whatever it may have always overtook her and she was too tired to fight. Even in that state she could feel it all from the itch and burn the slap left to her mother's wet warm tears on her shoulders. Her mother's wails were painfully unhuman. *They never stopped.* A monster, begging for forgiveness most called it but for her it was a broken mother desperately trying to fix what she had broken. Unlike her mother she wasn't allowed to cry out and running was never an option. If she ran, not only would she get it worse, but for each minute she ran, the more she had to take. *I was forced to be something I never wanted to be.* That was the sickening truth of her childhood. A childhood she never had, the good memories replaced with horrible ones. Even her own mind eventually shut down, unable to process the never-ending pit.

If only it stopped at that. It never did. It was a never-ending cycle of days with pain and heartbreak as the once innocent heart learned the cruel evil truth of the world she used to love so dearly. Her father's words and her mother's cries kept her awake every night. Her siblings, much younger, watched in horror; sometimes they would cry; They even tried to help her: other times they would stare blankly until one day they too had given up, completely turning into a distant shell of people trapped in their own world. *It was a world they created for their own sanity.* That world would crumble soon and they too would turn as violent as her parents, throwing, hitting, threatening and killing anything that hurt them. *Even themselves.* Not that she blamed them; she understood it all too well. The pain. The anger. The sadness. The hopelessness. The madness. She could never blame a child who never stood a chance against the world. *The world disgusted her along with the god who was supposed to save her.* Her father was never emotional, while her mother was too emotional. They took their anger out on others, like their children. It wasn't always physical; most of the time it was psychological. At times it was even both. Unknowingly, her parents played games; the same games they grew up with. The games their parents used on their young minds. It wasn't their fault they ended up the way they did. They were never taught to love. How could someone teach something they themselves had never been taught? *That's why I can't blame them.* The most depressing thing was the amount of times she would scream at the sky for anyone and anything to help her hold on for just a second longer, she would find her praying

to the god she despised. Begging, And when all else failed she would ask why, what could she have done to deserve this.

She exhaled, the smoke, once again, taking a new form. The horrible thing was that it never fully left. Even now her nights were filled with vivid nightmares of past memories; she couldn't even scream out or wake up. Even with all of that, the nights were the least of her worries. The days were worse. She could hear their words and screams; even their tormenting cries. *As if they were right there with me.* Their very footsteps followed her; her mother's begs, her father's eyes, her siblings' cries for a better life. *They never stopped.* Even now she could hear them around her. She inhaled again much longer. The warm smoke flowing in. This cigarette was the only thing holding her together, but it wouldn't help forever. Their voices were growing louder and closer. Her eyes had begun to blur and burn. *It hurt. It was too loud. they aren't real. Her mind reassured her but they felt so real.* At this point it was too late to be able to calm down and she understood what would come next. She tried suppressing the feeling telling herself they were gone, but it did nothing. An insufferable round of choked sobs poured out of her lips. Tears fell as her mother's voice engulfed her: "You made me do it." The first one came like a ghost around her left ear: "please stop making me do this." The next one followed: "I love you," she screamed in agony "you understand, don't you?" her mother's sweet voice begged. She threw the cigarette to the ground next to her in a desperate attempt to make it stop, placing both her shaky hands over her ears as more tears fell down into her lap. *Please stop it.* Her breathing became more and more uneven and shorter. Her hands went ice cold and numb, her feet followed and before she knew it, her face started to tingle. *Breathe. Please, just breathe.* She prayed to every God there could possibly be for another chance, a chance to breathe. *It's not real. None of this is real.* It seemed to be hours later when her breathing returned, and her loud cries were reduced to nothing but tears. The sunset was gone; everything around her was pitch black and only the distant lights of the pier could be seen now. The sound of the waves was clearer than ever.

She allowed herself to lay back; she couldn't move. Her legs were dead, and her body was drained. The noises were still around, but much quieter. Surprisingly, The tears had not stopped as her mouth smiled an empty soul-crushing smile. Everyone speaks of the horrors a child endures but no one ever talks about the effects and the years of torment that follow long after they escape, or for the unlucky some they never escape. Sure you can remove them from the home and put them into therapy but children who grow up in an environment as cruel as this one truly believe everything they were taught. Their view is tainted and years of constant brainwashing will not be erased with such simple methods. The child will continue to suffer its mind stuck trying to understand this "new" world just as hers did. It will take years to undo all that has been done, Many will not survive, unable to handle the

truth and awareness. Some will take the easier way out, falling into addictions and relationships that remind them of the small comfort they once had as children. They will spend their last moments searching for an unattainable feeling of euphoria or love. An uncontrollable wave of hollow laughter trickled out of her sore throat. Her stomach was twisting and tightening in excruciating ways . *Love, was a hideous joke sent from the heavens above. Euphoria on the other hand was a delicious fruit sent by the garden of the damned.*

With what little strength she had left, she lifted her arm, reaching over for her trusty lighter and pack. Bringing and lighting another cigarette. Her lips held the tip in place as she inhaled the toxic smoke. Holding. Exhaling. Repeating. Until her mind drifted far away. *Dreams? My only dream is that in the future, no child will ever have to face a childhood like my own or the effects such a life brings. Not in my school, not my community, not my state, not anywhere. But a dream is just a dream. Unless actions are taken, it will always be nothing more than a useless dream.*