

## World of Dreams

The bedroom was cold and dark, matching the winter night outside, the only light being the small television that sat in the corner of the room. Everything was quiet except for the unintelligible sounds that came from the TV. Laurie sat on her queen- sized bed, peering over her blankets. Her eyes frantically searched the room looking for nothing, just trying to stay awake. She wasn't afraid of just the dark, but sleep. Her dreams haunted her every night. They were all different, and seemed so real to her. On more than one occasion, her dream had actually come true. She woke up screaming and crying most nights. It had become a habit for her to stay awake as long as possible. No matter how hard she tried, the night terrors never went away. This night was no different. She dreaded slipping out of consciousness and into the dark void of sleep, where she would be at the complete mercy of her terrifying dreams.

Laurie was shaken awake by her mother and she was blinded by the light that peaked through her open blinds. She had forgotten to set her alarm clock again. Jumping up, she rushed to take a shower and got dressed. She pulled up her blonde hair, which was still wet, and didn't bother to put on much makeup. She got ready in record time and made it to the bus stop right before the bus arrived. She followed behind a line of other kids to get on the bus. Her eyes wandered across the seats as she searched for one person in particular, her best friend, Kala. She finally found her sitting in a seat by herself in the very back. She slid in beside her. Kala pulled out her headphones and looked up, greeting Laurie with a sad smile. Laurie noticed the dark circles under Kala's eyes and her pale, bruised face, half obscured by the hood of her oversized jacket. "Another bad night?" Laurie's question hung in between them for a while, but she knew better than to push the subject.

“Yeah. The worst one yet, actually,” Kala finally replied, her voice a mere whisper.

“You want to talk about it?”

“It was all the same; yelling, insults and such, but I told them I was going to move out last night. I actually decided to come out of my room for once.” Kala’s voice dropped so low that Laurie had to bend closer to her to hear her. “Well, anyway, they didn’t like that too well.” Kala lowered her head, and Laurie knew that she was trying hard not to cry. Laurie put her arm around her, just as she had many times before.

“You can come stay with me, you know. My parents don’t care. Either way, it’ll get better, I promise.”

“You know that would never work. It would be twice as bad when I go back home. And you’ve said that a million times, Laurie. It hasn’t gotten any better. Then I have to come to school and deal with everyone else who thinks I’m a freak.” A single tear rolled down Kala’s face, but she quickly wiped it away, turning her head away from Laurie.

“I don’t think you’re a freak. I’m still here, Kala. I’m not going anywhere. But you have to stay strong. You’ll be 18 next year and you won’t have to worry about your parents anymore. Just hang on until then.”

“I’m trying,” Kala’s words were barely audible as the bus rolled to a stop and all the high school students rose from their seats erupting into clamorous chatter. Kala and Laurie were the last to exit the bus. They walked slowly into the school together, parting ways as they each went to their first classes.

The first half of the day went by quickly and Laurie was relieved when the bell rang for lunch. She joined Kala, who was already sitting at their lunch table, picking at her food. Kala had pushed back her hood, revealing her straight, dark brown hair, which stood in bright contrast to her face. Kala had put on extra makeup since Laurie had last seen her, as the bruises that had decorated her eyes and jaw line before were now barely visible. "Is the food worth getting?" Laurie asked as she took her seat in front of Kala.

"Not at all. I only got this because I can't eat anywhere else," Kala replied grimly. Laurie gave her a gloomy look before pushing her blonde hair away from her face and pulling out her phone.

"Are you walking home today?" Laurie and Kala always walked home together after school. They usually took a short cut, crossing over a tall railroad trestle.

"Yeah, probably. You?"

"I'm not sure. I think I have to stay after school. I have to be 'tutored' in math."

"Wow. That's awful," Kala laughed. Laurie nodded in agreement. Kala grabbed her food tray and rose from the table. "I'll be back. Time to go throw this nasty excuse for food away."

Laurie rolled her eyes as she watched Kala go, eventually turning her focus back to her phone. Her focus was short lived, however. A loud bang erupted in the lunch room. Everyone's heads snapped toward the source of the sound. Kala stood in the middle of the cafeteria, all her remaining food covering all down the front of her body. Her tray had fallen to the floor. A group of teenagers stood in front of her, wearing smirks and laughing.

“Hey, why don’t you watch where you’re going next time?” A girl stood at the head of the group, looking down at Kala as she slowly bent down to pick up her tray. Laurie stood up from her table, watching cautiously, waiting to run to her best friend at any moment. Kala stared at the girl, and simply turned away, saying nothing.

“I was talking to you!” The girl ran forward, grabbing Kala and spinning her around. “How about I give you another bruise on your ugly little face?” She pulled her fist back, but by then Laurie was already there, pushing the girl away.

“Leave her alone!” Laurie shouted, before taking the tray from Kala and ushering her out of the lunch room. They stood alone in the hallway. “Don’t worry about her, Kala. She has serious issues.”

“I know,” Kala said, her voice shaking. Her fists were clenched tightly but hung straight by her sides. “Just let it go. I’m fine. I’m used to it, anyway.” The bell rang, and Kala began walking away, trying to brush off as much food from her clothes and face as she could. Laurie wanted to go after her, but a crowd of students flooded the hallway, blocking her path. She took Kala’s tray back into the cafeteria and went to day’s remaining classes.

When the day was finally over, Laurie met up with Kala at the front steps of the school. “Well, I won’t be long, so do you want to wait on me and we can go home together?”

“No, that’s ok. I’ll take my time and I might stay on the trestle and read for a while. It’s quite peaceful there, plus I really don’t want to go home, so you might be able to catch up,” Kala said, pulling her hood over her head like she had that morning.

“You sure you’re ok to go alone?”

“I’m not a child, Laurie. I told you I’m fine. I’ll talk to you later.” Laurie watched Kala turn and walk away, an odd feeling of dread filling her. After Kala turned down a small worn path into the woods beside the school, Laurie went back into the school for her tutoring session. The session doesn’t last very long, barely an hour. On her way out of the school, Laurie’s phone buzzed. It was a text message from Kala.

*Laurie, I can’t do this anymore. I want you to know that I’m sorry.*

Laurie’s stomach dropped in horror. She didn’t have time to think, she just ran. She weaved through the trees, trying not to let her thoughts over power her. She arrived at the old railroad bridge that crossed the roaring river. Kala stood near the middle of the bridge, looking down. Laurie walked forward, calling out, “Kala, stop!” Right as the words passed through her lips, Kala jumped. Laurie screamed, dropping to her knees.

Laurie jerked awake, sitting straight up in bed, her mother by the side of her bed. “Another nightmare?” Her mother’s voice was filled with concern. Laurie simply nodded. “I figured. You were screaming and woke up right as I rushed down here. I really need to take you somewhere to get those nightmares of yours under control. Anyway, you’re going to be late for school if you don’t hurry. You didn’t set your clock again.” Her mother said, before walking out of her room.

Laurie was covered in a cold sweat and her heart was beating fast. She was overcome by grief and guilt from her dream. She was afraid for Kala. Laurie managed to get ready and make it to the bus stop just in time but the remnants of her night terror stuck with her. She saw Kala in the main back seat of the bus, wearing a jacket with the hood pulled up, just as she had been in her dream. Laurie sat down beside of her, causing her to look up. Kala’s face was covered in

bruises. Laurie had seen all this before and she hesitated briefly before asking, “Another bad night?”

“Yeah. The worst one yet, actually,” Kala finally replied, her voice a mere whisper.

“You want to talk about it?”

“It was all the same; yelling, insults and such, but I told them I was going to move out last night. I actually decided to come out of my room for once. Well, anyway, they didn’t like that too well.” Laurie had already known the answer to her questions, and she knew what the consequences of today would be.

“Kala, you want to go to the park?” Laurie knew that it was a wild question and a crazy idea, but it was the only way she could get Kala away from school long enough to brighten her mood.

“But we have school,” Kala said solemnly.

“We’ll skip today. Come on, it’ll be fun!” Laurie could practically hear the desperation in her voice.

“Well, ok. Only because you’re my best friend, and I love the park.” Kala smiled at Laurie, and it never left her face as the pair got off the bus and turned toward the way to the park, walking away from the school and even farther away from the bridge that could’ve been Kala’s last sight. Laurie and Kala spent the day together and Kala grew happier as the day flew by. They stayed at the park most of the day, only leaving to go get lunch at the closest restaurant. They talked about everything except the things that haunted them both; Laurie’s dreams and Kala’s family. Laurie felt their friendship growing stronger and her terrible feelings disappeared

throughout the day, leaving her relieved and in high spirits. She knew that tomorrow would be a completely different story but she pushed those thoughts from her mind and focused on being with Kala. Laurie figured her nightmares were worth enduring if it meant saving a life.