

## The Unseen Light – Camilla, Year 6, NSW

The howling of her baby cousin pulled her like gravity towards the bedroom, smooth, cold wooden floors shifting to rough, soft carpet. The fluffy blankets and cushions were peeled away and suddenly soft but firm pressure on her fingers and warm laughter brought a broad smile to her face. Thunderous footsteps echoed down the corridor and a lightning voice cracked through the air.

“What are you doing? You know you are not to go anywhere by yourself!”

A crushing grip on her upper arm pulled her away and suddenly there was a deep, abyssal rage straining to break free inside of her. She struggled, straining with all the power of her twelve-year-old frame, yelling, pummelling and slamming fists with tears staining her face.

“You are the worst thing in my life!”

“You treat me like I’m a sculpture and steal my life!”

“You won’t let me grow up, you want me to be in your care for the rest of my life!”

“I’m sick of being kept in this house like a bird in a cage and most of all, I am sick of being stuck here with you!”

The iron grip loosened from her arm like sand being washed away at a beach. Floorboards squeaked as her mother sank down with rustling clothes, and a sob shattered Theia’s world.

“Theia come down, you are going to be late for ballet practice!”

She felt like a coward as she walked downstairs with her hands glued to the rails, lighting her way.

Later on, Theia did everything in her power to lose herself in the routine, fighting down the crushing python of guilt and also the gnawing emptiness that came with the creeping familiarity between this repetitive dance routine and her daily life. She fell into a choreographed dance, as she moved in sync with her mother, or so she imagined.

“Mother knows best.” The haunting echo slithered through her mind like a deep dark nightmare intruding into the waking world. One step, two step, one arm tucked with her mother’s, the other extended out, brushing the wall, fifth position.

Once practice was over, she waited outside for her father to come back from the bathroom. Normally she would be waiting in the car with her mother.

*Ring Ring Ring*, Theia barely had time to react before an eight-year-old delinquent crashed into her on his bike. Sharp pain everywhere and a spinning in her head was all she was conscious of until she heard her dad yelling her name. Heard him also yelling at the person who crashed into her, heard the person, who sounded like a young boy yell back, “It’s not my fault your stupid daughter can’t see where she is going.”

The trip home was a blur. Her mother's soft voice asked, “How was practice sweetie?”

“When did you ever care!”

“I am your mother, you do not speak to me like that! I know what’s best for you!”

“Mother, why can’t I do anything by myself? I’m sick of this life, why can’t I be free?” she asked furiously.

There was a deafening silence, before her mother’s voice cut through her like a knife, “Because you are special. Because you are my only child. Because I won’t let the world hurt you, most of all because I am your mother.”

Claire’s voice was a striking snake snapping through the air, “If you know best, why can’t I do anything by myself? My little cousin was crying, he needed me!”

Her mother’s voice became strained and broken, barely choking out the words. “You could have hurt him!”

Softer than snow Theia whispered, “Is it because I can’t see?”

Her father sighed long and weary, while her mother was cloaked in silence.

A sound like a dripping tap echoed as though they were standing in a cave. Theia’s tears fell onto the wooden floor, one by one, each a lightning bolt charging the cold atmosphere the same way the air feels before a storm.

“Why didn’t you tell me!?” her shrill voice cut through the silence like thunder as she wiped her salty tears away.

She heard her father shuffle off and the fridge door opening not long after. When he came back he muttered, “we called you Theia after the Greek goddess of vision because we wanted to prove to the world that your lack of sight would not hold you back, we-” he choked back a sob and Theia heard him gulp down from his beer bottle. She searched for her dad, as he continued to drink and sob. She felt his shaking hands release the drink and pull her to a crushing hug. He could barely stutter the words through his tears. “You’ve grown up so fast, you might not see me but I see your warm heart through your voice and gestures.”

Suddenly, her mother’s voice cracked like a whip. “It’s not enough! you should be able to see my eyes, their colour, to see when I smile or--”

Theia interrupted her with a broad smile and leaned forward to kiss her mother’s face. “Don’t worry mummy, I can see the world around me, through the feelings that I inspire through ballet and the joy I experience in little moments like when I made my baby cousin laugh. I am not broken; I can see you clearly in my heart.” Theia brushed the wet tears from her mother’s hot face. “Life is a box of chocolates, you eat them!”

She could feel her mother shaking in laughter, “George! We promised no movies above PG until she was 15!”

Her father burst into rumbling laughter.

Theia's smile was as bright and warm as a campfire. "The point is that I will always be ready to take on the world so long as I have the stomach to keep on eating and even though we all prefer different types of chocolate, that doesn't mean some of us are right or wrong, just different."