

Cheryl Doe, Episode Six
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A note to readers

This work portrays a number of themes and concepts, some which may cause discomfort in one way or another. As such, this page contains warnings for content which include, but are not limited to:

Mental Illness

Racism

Streetlights extinguished themselves as daylight replaced twilight; fog roamed the city in rolling clouds. The streets were sparse on this lazy Sunday morning, and Jamie was at a nearby park garbed in a fresh set of clothes not much unlike the outfit she wore at the LAN party – only now there was the addition of an oversized hooded sweatshirt. The hood was pulled over her head as she sipped on a cup of coffee she bought from her usual doughnut shop in a plaza not too far from where she was. The lid had smudges – kissed with lip gloss of a deep amethyst.

Jamie liked being outside: the air was sweeter, the colors of nature fed her soul, and the rays of a midday sun warmed her skin perfectly under her fur. However it wasn't worth the incessant leering, running commentary, and the (not so) occasional violation of her personal space. The quiet of such a solitary morning left her to rummage about her thoughts, which almost always were dragged back to her teenage years that haunted her in the shadows of her mind. Being alone like this most certainly made her lonely, but she considered it a step above being in a space where she did not belong. It was borrowed space, it felt to her – borrowed space on borrowed time.

Jamie checked her phone: "06:45" it read. There were also two unread text messages, but those didn't concern the doe for the time. She rose from the wooden bench, swatting precipitated fog from her dampened tail, and finished her coffee with a hearty belch afterward. The coffee cup was tossed to a nearby waste bin, missing the rim, to which she walked over to dispose of it properly.

On the way back to her apartment, she locked eyes with a morning jogger. Jamie felt a glare behind the sunglasses and looked down, pulling some hair in front of her eyes, hiding her rust irises. She got inside just as the sky became cloudy – raining shortly before she got in the door. The doe pulled off her hoodie, depositing it in a laundry bin when she got into her room. She finally got around to checking her phone, and opened her unread messages, responding promptly.

Nat: JAMIE.

Nat: IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD.

Jamie: Lol, wat

Nat: Thought I would reverse the
situation

Jamie: Hehe, okay, What's up?

Nat: Not much. Schools been a bitch.

Jamie: Aww... :(How so?

Nat: Homecoming. Friends want me to
go. Told them that I wasnt
interested. Didnt go since
freshman year, why start now?

Jamie: He'll if I ever went. Never was a fan of those. Storm and I would go to some fast food place and order the fries 'n' nuggets combo. I got all the fries. :p

Jamie: Hell*

Nat: Who's storm.

Jamie: An ex of mine. We were looser together in high school.

Jamie: Loozers*

Jamie: Godfuckingdammit, autocorrect.

Nat: Sounds fun.

Jamie: It certainly was.

Jamie lingered on the thought of Storm after putting her phone to sleep. It's actually been years since she's mentioned them by name. With a heavy heart, she sighed, pushing them from her mind. Jamie unlocked her phone again; she looked at the sent text message set by Fran, debating whether or not to call. It was a weekend, but it was only two days since the party, and Jim harped on about the three-day rule all of yesterday. His mother disagreed, saying today will have allowed enough time to pass, and that she would love a date to text her two days after. The doe texted Jim for reassurance, asking if she should call today or tomorrow, or leave it as a text message instead. There was no response until half past noon – leaving Jamie playing video games to avoid thinking about contacting Fran whilst worrying about not having tried to contact her yet. Gray clouds were blanketing the afternoon sun as Jamie's phone began to ring: it was Jim.

"Hey, sorry, I was at church," started Jim, as soon as Jamie answered the call, "Did you call her?"

"No, I–"

"Good. Three days, Jamie."

"But–"

"Three days!" Jim cried. "Sure fire way to not come off as clingy – *and* the ladies love it."

"The ladies love it?" Jamie repeated back to him, dubious of the statement's validity.

"Of course they do! That's how I got my girlfriend!" Jamie was silent. "I do," he insisted, "I do! I met her at the party!"

"You were drunk and fooling around with Kenny," the doe asserted.

"*While* courting the venue, being my charming self and all; the ladies like the big, hairy types. And being suave is a plus."

Jamie held silent – she wanted Jim to know she was judging him before she said, "I don't know how women even talk to you, Jim."

"You're talking to me," the bear retorted smoothly. Jamie couldn't think of a response.

"Pretty suave, right?"

"Yeah, that... that was good."

"Exactly."

The conversation continued for an hour; Jim ended the call after advising (again) to wait until tomorrow. Jamie put down her phone, looking outside her window: children were playing tag on some freshly cut lawn making her sigh, wishing she could reference any nostalgic memories – feeling that she should – but not one sprang to mind. She resigned the rest of the day to writing music, not making any headway; the intrusive thoughts and memories throughout the day finally flooded Jamie's consciousness, and she was left to play with rhythms in self-inflicted isolation, crawling into bed afterward, before she went to sleep, clutching the baggy folds of her teal hoodie.

Sketches of last night's sudden despair followed her into the morning; Jamie was at her bathroom mirror, picking at the crafted horns between her ears. Beside the sink was her morning medicine. "Two tablets, each day. Take with water and food." She reminded herself despite doubting the medication's effectiveness on this day.

Her breakfast was a bowl of apple-cinnamon oatmeal, which she picked at for the longest time – far after it had went cold. It was ten minutes after eight she noticed, looking up at the kitchen clock. She took her messenger bag and lanyards, adjusting the bangs of her wig to cover her eyes. The doe's reluctance to leave weighed her down, taking even her casual saunter down to an agonizing trudge.

Jamie was especially quiet at work – she didn't even have her handheld, only writing in her notebook: frequently crossing out words and phrases in some poetry of hers. Jim rapped his fingers upon Jamie's cubicle; the doe didn't respond, still scratching out words. The bear nudged her on the shoulder; she snapped round wearing a reproachful scowl.

"Guess it's a bad time to ask if you called her?" Jim's lips were pulled into an awkward smile, wearily making a phoning gesture with his hand. Jamie's frown ran deeper. "I'm gonna take that as a 'no'... but, what is up, my doe friend?"

"I don't feel like talking right now."

Jim frowned, worried. "Text me? If you need to, that is – or want to."

"Okay." Jamie nodded, shrinking into her chair.

The doe was able to feign being personable as she took calls, withdrawing into herself again as her first break came about. Another knock came at her cubicle; the busybody from weeks back peeped his head inside.

"Hey, um... Jackie!"

"It's Jamie," the doe replied plainly, blunting her affect.

"Right, right..." He continued, "Say, the wife and I are thinking of getting some house plants. What do you say?"

"I'm sorry, I don't understand."

"We were thinking decadent trees."

"You mean deciduous trees," Jamie corrected him, straining to keep her tone even.

"Right, right... that's why I came to you. This is something you just... *get*."

Jamie acknowledged his statement with a nod. The man nodded in turn, smile plastered to his face still. "Well," he spoke again, "Thanks a bunch, Jackie!"

"Yes, have a good shift." Jamie's lack of enthusiasm was present in saying that.

The instances of such comments appeared to be the theme today: several customers were furious their electronics hadn't shipped yet, which somehow brought about remarks concerning "those forest dwellers." Jamie usually derailed any such sort of conversation before the customer got too carried away. After half an hour of calls, Jamie's phone vibrated; it was Jim.

Jim: My sup keeps pissing me off

Jamie: Why? What happened?

Jim: THAT FUCKSTACK SAID I SHOULD
JOIN A CIRCUS

Jamie: What the fuck.

Jim: Ikr

Jim: Like this asshole has been on it
since day one. First thing he
says walking in here is "oh
graham crackers? Must b
nostalgic huh? And I let it go
like oh o(1/3)

Jim: k thats nothing new graham
crackers honey theyre fcuking
great. Im used to that. But this
fuckhead runs this shit into the
ground. Im so goddamn tired of
h(2/3)

Jim: is shit and im like one hair
away from beating him
senseless(3/3)

Jamie: I'm sorry, Jim. :(

Jim: Dont be sorry. Not your fault.

Jamie: But still... *hugs*

Jim: Thanks. I might just quite.

Jamie: :\ I don't blame you.

Jim: Yeah...

Jim: Hey my foods getting cold. Ttyl.

Jamie: Xoxo

Their conversation ate at Jamie on her way back home. She tossed her bag thoughtlessly as she passed into her bedroom, peeling off her wig and cap, letting her curls

decompress, and kicking her flats to her bedside. The doe flopped on her bed and worried about Jim. She worried herself over whether he had anything planned after he quit, hoping that earlier was only a vent. Reaching over the bedside's edge for her messenger bag, she took her phone, intending to follow up with Jim, but saw the sent message to Fran – she sent a message hastily.

Jamie: Hi! Sorry, I was at work! ;w;

Fran: For three days? XD

Jamie: Um, no, not three days

Fran: Then what took you so long?
Making me wait AND not following
directions? Tsk tsk.

Jamie: I'm sorry! I waited the weekend
so I didn't look clingy, and
then I texted you because it was
already so late and just, omg
this was a bad idea. ;~;

Jamie waited ten minutes staring at her phone to no response. She started to curse herself for forgetting to call Fran. Twenty more minutes went by; Jamie was now wallowing in self-pity. Her phone rang. The caller ID read “Fran :3”.

“H-hello?” the doe answered, her voice shaking.

“Hi, cutie,” Fran answered back, her sweet voice taking hold of Jamie; the doe's cheeks burned from those two words.

“Uh,” Jamie stammered, “I'm sorry! I know I should've called you, but I got freaked out and–”

“It's okay!” The cat stopped her mid-sentence. Jamie sighed in relief to herself. “I was in class, so that's why it took a while to call.”

“Yes! Cool! Cool!” Jamie sputtered awkwardly.

They continued to talk; Jamie went on for about an hour weaving together vignettes from her life while explaining – in excess – her various hobbies and interests.

“Oh wow, that seems like a lot!” Francine gasped, finally able to get in a word.

“You'd think so, but homemade capacitors aren't as impressive as I probably described them, in fact...”

“Jamie,” Fran tried to interrupt.

“...but actually, it wouldn't work like that, and...”

“Jamie,” Fran repeated.

“...however, one would have to consider...” Jamie continued, caught in her own thoughts.

“Jamie,” Fran interjected firmly. The doe stopped in speech and thought. “How about you tell me more about your hardware obsession later? I have to go – my battery's dying.”

“Oh, sure,” Jamie chirped, “When do you want me to call back?”

“I was thinking you could tell me more in person.”

"I don't understand." Jamie started on in her room. There was a pause.

"Well," Fran added, "I was thinking we could meet up somewhere."

"Um..." Jamie mumbled pensively, despite drawing a complete blank. There was another silence, with Jamie now becoming anxious.

"How about lunch? Saturday?" Fran proposed. Jamie nodded furiously. "Jamie?" Fran asked after several seconds of silence.

"Y-yes!" confirmed Jamie, still nodding. "I'd love that!"

"How does two sound?"

"Good! It's good!" Jamie was clutching her phone.

"I'll see you then," Fran said, and added, giggling, "It's a date!"

"Okay! Bye!" Jamie shouted, ending the call. She took a moment to make sense of what had happened, then became utterly sick as she realized she had hung up on her.

"Noooooooo..." Jamie squeaked in a hushed whisper. She took her phone up and prepared to call Fran back, but against her better judgment, didn't call – feeling her mistake was fatal, and started to pace. "Guess I'll need almond milk for Saturday," she began her soliloquy, "At least I won't hang up on almond milk!" she scathingly berated herself. And it continued: "...and then she'll find someone else, and where will that leave me?" She paused for effect. "Fucking taking care of flowers because I'm going to die alone!" Her pacing became fervent. "Oh, *and* I'm gonna die a virgin!"

She spent her night sulking under her bed covers. Her phone rang. Her heart jumped thinking it was Fran – she could finally apologize! "I'm sorry!" she cried, answering the phone.

"What?" inquired Jim.

"Oh," Jamie resigned, deflated.

"What's up?" Jim pressed. A faint click ended the call.

The back of the doe's eyes burned. Her frustration over hanging up on Fran crept on her, and she struck her mattress with a clenched fist. It was less the content of her mistake, but instead having wound up herself to the point of not allowing herself to correct it. It could be all fixed with a phone call or a text message – she thought to herself – saying, "I'm sorry. I was nervous." But instead, she was impeded by a deep sense of shame of her actions. She deserved this, she thought. She deserved the dread and sinking feeling in her chest because that's her reward for overreacting to minor gaffs. If she was going to let herself become miserable over a trivial mistake, then so be it. The misery then ignited into a fit of rage – an anger that immobilized her to nothing more than trembles. This anger reminded her of everyone that she felt wronged her – anger at Storm for their relationship, and anger at herself for letting them in. It then suddenly exploded into fury: questioning why she would remember something that she sought to forget. She was furious for annoying Jacqueline, and hanging up on Fran, and being moody around Jim for as long as she could remember. And then it vanished in an instant. She went into her text messages.

Jamie: Jim, I'm sad...

Jim: Whats wrong

Jamie: I don't know.

Jim: Its okay

Jamie: I'm sorry.

Jim: Its okay

Jim: *hugs*

Jamie: *hugs back*

Jamie's phone rang. She answered, but didn't speak.

"Jamie?" Jim probed gently.

"I'm sorry," the doe mewled.

"It's okay," Jim affirmed her.

"I'm sorry..." her voice was caught between a sob and a squeak, bass tones escaping into her voice.

"Shh..." Jim consoled her, "It's okay."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

Jamie stayed on the call under her covers in comforting silence – her phone's battery dying after she was sound asleep.

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