

Cheryl Doe, Episode Eight
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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:

Sex (mention only)

The autumn air had grown dense recently as well as cool and dead leaves paved the city sidewalks. Morning twilight filtered through rolling rose clouds, and warm, sweet scents from a local bakery wafted through the walkways, only stirring barely with early church commuters and party animals hobbling back to their apartments.

Jamie's many work blouses tumbled in circles, dampened, as her variously colored t-shirts and hoodies were tossed round in an industrial dryer. The doe herself sat off to a wall, a stone's throw away from a soft drink vending machine; she was tucked away in a book she took from home: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. She never bothered to read more than a chapter when she was originally assigned the novel in high school, but now had made a habit to read it once each year – preferably in September. It was primarily entertaining to her for that she considered the conflict between Tom and Gatsby ludicrous, despite the themes it provided a backdrop. Admittedly, she was overcome by a sense of wonder at the world Nick had been invited in light of her own criticisms on the novel. This book, or any other she had lying around, was always to the doe's nose when she entered public spaces: it was the best way to avoid conversation, save for the badgering by the surprise literary scholar.

Two days, these words intruded her mind while she read; Jim suggested waiting a second day before trying to talk to Fran again. There wasn't any real logic to it, she figured, and he was demonstrably wrong on all counts of advice to date (except the warning about Perdu Place). She sent a text message to Francine with this in mind, bidding her “Good morning!”, her name updated to a more formal “Francine Lemaître” – in line with her other contacts: James Caruso and Nathan Keeler.

An alarm sounded from Jamie's phone to remind her that the dryer had finished its cycle. She hopped up to put her dark colors in her laundry bag, to then hover in front of the washers with her light colors, and the one with her whites. The whites were first to finish their spin cycle, with the light colors a couple minutes after. She tossed both into a dryer and swiped her laundromat card to get her final load dried.

Laundry day was somewhat infrequent for Jamie: once biweekly, on a weekend. The biweekly condition was the absolute minimum she had set for herself, and she had managed to adhere to the rule well for about three months to date. Also, she had eaten breakfast prior to coming to the laundromat, making her morning meal resolution an actual habit. It was days like this – lazy, but structured, that reminded Jamie just how far she's come; the little things could be tended to, and didn't cause her life to rip apart at the seams – paralyzed by what had gone wrong, and what worse there may have been to come. It was in these vignettes of her life which she considered to have handled with acumen, that she was in control of her life. And she was okay, most importantly – she was okay.

The paragraphs of her novel started to blur together, then sentences, words, and eventually letters – her focus was breaking. Her hands repeatedly opened and closed; her foot began tapping impatiently. Then, Jamie stood up and popped four quarters into the vending machine, selecting a root beer that tumbled into the reception bin with a metallic clang. She sat back down to reopen her book, popping open the top of the root beer and took a few sips.

The doe returned from her errand with the laundry bag on her back, and a paper sack

containing doughnuts in hand. She placed the sack in the refrigerator, and took the bag to her bedroom, emptying the contents on her bed to spend the rest of the morning folding and organizing.

Jim texted Jamie later in the afternoon.

Jim: Heyy just got out of church
Jamie: Hi hi! How be you?
Jim: Good u
Jamie: I'm well. How was church?
Jim: Boring lol
Jim: Yo can I ask u a favor
Jamie: What is it?
Jim: Help with my resume
Jamie: Sure. Getting a new job? Lol
Jim: Yea kenny told me about it its
wfh
Jamie: Wfh?
Jim: Work from home
Jamie: Oh. That's cool. Are you going
to leave soon?
Jim: Hopefully...
Jamie: Ah. Okay.

Jamie's brow furrowed while putting her phone to sleep; the idea that Jim may actually leave floored her. Most of her communication with him was exclusively through text, but the notion of being virtually alone at work shook her nerves. Any possible bridge with Jacqueline was nothing short of burned to her, and she lacked the social skills to befriend any other animal there. She knew Jim would find a way to keep communication, but there was still the feeling of loss.

Oh Jim, she thought to herself, *you're going to leave me all alone*. She sighed as her mind dragged her from her pit of worry and instead sat idly by her computer. The browser was opened to her social networks – the accounts in their second iteration. It felt to her a half-hearted attempt to forget the past: her number of friends among all sites were in the double digits, and contained a couple friends from school, their faces pulling back ugly archives of her past and her mind played the reels, having her live and relive them – watching her enact behavior she mostly repudiated now; the ideals she held before only shadows which she sought to vanquish at every opportunity. She was pulled from them a buzz of her phone – it was Nat.

Nat: Jamie, can I ask you a personal
question?
Jamie: Sure, what's up?

Nat: How did you pick your name?

Jamie: Umm... Jamie was a nice name. I liked it. It was gender neutral though, so that's what I picked it.

Jamie: Legally, my name is Jamie L Rockwell. As typed. When I started transitioning, I'd tell people the L was for Lance.

Jamie: Honestly, I wanted my name to be Lucienne. It's all vintage and old-fashioned. :3

Nat: Huh, never thought of it like that. That's really cool.

Jamie: Not really. Just safety.

Nat: This is all good info though. Thanks.

Jamie: No problem! Let me know if you need anything, dearie. <3

Nat: Thanks.

Jamie raised her eyebrows at the question, coming seemingly from nowhere. However, she couldn't bring herself to put him under a microscope for asking: she wanted him informed; if he was going to come out, he could do it on his own terms – when he was ready and safe. The clouds were thinning outside; faded yellow sunlight kissed the green lawns and some of the doe's bedroom. And with Nat's question she began to worry about Fran, and how she was going to tell her.

The day flashed by: before Jamie knew it, the waning moon was out and the time was half-past eight. The doe was curled up in bed, drooling. She awoke violently from a dream she couldn't make sense of – Fran was involved, her intuition told her. Her eyes were wide as the last bits of the dream flushed from her conscious mind, and then fell sullen. “Fuck,” she mumbled referring to a context no longer known to her. She slithered out of bed and rustled her exposed body fur to its full volume.

Standing up, she gazed at her bed with phone tucked under the pillow; she had notifications.

Nat: Hi Lucienne.

Jamie: Hey there! What's up?

Jamie: (btw, the name use was flattering)

Nat: You're welcome. Not much is going on with me. Was planning to play a game with Jim but he bailed.

Jamie: Aww. Wait, why would he blow you off??

Nat: Late night booty call probably.

Jamie: O_O

Nat: Same face over here.

Jamie: Is EVERYONE getting laid except me?

Nat: I'm not.

Jamie: You're 17 though/

Nat: Yeah. And I'm *not* getting laid.

Jamie: Holy shit we're going to die alone.

Jamie: Shit*

Jamie: ;w;

The two messaged one another of the current goings-on in their lives: Jamie about the doughnut shop she visits regularly, and Nat about homecoming fever at his school. The night had drawn later, and as her phone's time read 00:08, Jamie resigned it was time for her to go to bed. She'd get to call Fran tomorrow after work, sticky note reminding her on her nightstand, while she combated the thoughts of loneliness of Jim leaving.

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