

Cheryl Doe, Episode Ten (Part One)
Sybil Michel

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

Suicide (mention only)

A cold November gust blew through the town Sunday morning. Jamie Rockwell was perched on her apartment complex's roof with a long since emptied latte in hand, her chipping nails dug into the clear plastic cup. She brushed a few stray crumbs of her breakfast from her lips, observing her hands by flexing the digits: her knuckles weren't as defined as she last remembered. Another frigid wind blew from behind the doe, pushing her short, loose curls in front of her face. The setting she had placed herself in was nostalgic: her mind was as clear now as it was when she was in college, no worries – with the morning twilight on her watering eyes. The only real difference that could have been drawn was that she had no plans to jump from the roof on which she was currently standing. Her phone was off – not put to sleep, or set to silent, off. As much as she desired constant attention from her loved ones (often to her own chagrin), this moment, she felt, had to be in solitude. Where she was standing, there was no anxiety, no loneliness, no existential depression that drained the color of her view; there was only her, her body, and her hoodie with its faded print.

Jamie stepped down, much as she did those six years ago with a heart just as heavy, but no longer helpless. She sauntered down the stairwell with her face down and hands in pockets. As she entered her unit, she tossed the plastic cup into the garbage can and stripped the scarf from around her neck: a black-and-white plaid shawl with red highlights. She powered on her phone; there were two notifications: a text message from Nat, and a voicemail from Francine. She sighed, and disregarded the notifications, leaving her phone on the small dining room table in her kitchen, and resigned to her bedroom. In her room, her bed was neatly folded with her messenger bag and her messenger bag in the same manner as it was precisely leaned against the frame. Conversely, her desk was cluttered with snack cake wrappers in addition to ripped and torn sheets of loose leaf paper browned by tea and coffee stains – manuscripts of both prose and music having stray marks obscuring letters and noteheads alike. She sat down on her bed, and watched herself last night, as she was imagining herself with a hunched back and fervent scribbling sound from her pencil, a shaggy fur on her chin from long sessions of writing and the doctrine of regular personal hygiene out the window.

The doe laughed to herself re-imagining this. It was just like high school, but the memories she saw in now didn't leave her bitter – which she forgot about all too often. She was broken from her rosey nostalgia with a knock at her front door. She groomed most of her facial fur as much as she could on her way there as she answered it to find a skunk with the two tones of his fur well defined into their black and white sections.

“Nat, what are you doing here?” she inquired looking down at him with his height just reaching her neck.

“Uhh, I texted you?” he replied, and pulled at his beanie, then continuing, “My friend dropped me off – she's with her boyfriend and I was third-wheeling it the entire trip.”

“And why were you dragged along?”

“To help me find 'Mister Right'.”

Jamie's face contorted to emphatic horror and said, “She's trying to set you up?”

“Yup... I'm her 'project' now.”

"Oh no..."

"And she was cracking jokes about me 'stealing' her boyfriend the whole trip."

"Oh no..." Jamie was visibly cringing.

"Not like I would, I mean..." Nat pulled his phone from his pocket and tapped the screen a few times, then showed her a photo of the two people he was riding with: bright young faces with carefree smiles plastered on.

"But he's so tacky!" Jamie chided, noting the boy's thick framed glasses without lenses. Nat made a knowing facial expression in agreement. "She thinks you'll stab her in the back for – *for that?*"

"Yup."

"Get in here – lemme grab you a drink." Jamie stepped aside to allow the skunk entry.

Nat waited at the dining table, hands neatly folded in his lap. Jamie prepared him tea, complete with a platter of cookies, cream, and honey.

"What, no booze?" Nat snickered.

"Nope, no booze." Jamie poured Nat a cup of tea. He took a spoonful of sugar of his tea and added two splashes of cream. Jamie squeezed a generous amount of honey in her cup, blowing on the surface before taking a long sip. She wordlessly eyed the skunk from across the table, who was looking down into his cup, stirring contents that weren't there.

"So," said the doe, breaking the silence, "How'd you two meet?"

"Freshman year," Nat answered, eyes not off his cup, but folded his hands in his lap.

"You found her at lunch? A class? Something like that?"

"No, she found me."

"Oh, did she cling?"

"No: she declared me her responsibility, so – her project."

The doe's lips pulled uncomfortably. "I see. I'm pretty familiar with that – high school wasn't the best of times."

"You're telling me," –Nat tittered– "Middle school was hell, though."

"Middle school wasn't that bad." Jamie's eyes dimmed for a second as her lids fluttered. "Elementary school, however," –the fluttering stopped and her eyes glossed over– "I actively try to forget those years to be honest." Nat shrunk in his chair. "Nat, you're not a loner by choice – are you?" Although she asked without inflection, the concern of the tone allowed Nat to answer candidly.

"No, I'm not," the skunk admitted with all the timbre stripped from his voice.

The two went back to silence, but it was an understood one; neither met the other's gaze, but took comfort in the tacit attention they were paying one another. It was about ten minutes into it, with all the tea and cookies consumed, when Nat asked, "So, how's Francine?"

"Yeah, she's okay. What of her?" replied the doe.

"Nothing, just curious."

"Okay." Jamie got up to clear the table. "Sorry, I don't have much in the ways of entertainment; I have a keyboard piano you can play if you want."

"Um, okay. Sounds cool!" the skunk obliged. They made their way into the doe's bedroom, and Jamie invited to sit at her desk, her keyboard still plugged in. Nat collected the many papers on her workspace into a neat stack, setting them aside. He fiddled around, lazily playing the melody of *Brandenburg No. 5*, to which Jamie shot it down with, "No Baroque," powering off the keyboard immediately. She turned it back on for Nat to then key out the theme of Mozart's Symphony No. 29, albeit more poorly, but the doe didn't mind it one bit – in fact she seemed to enjoy it by humming a harmony in tune with it.

"What are you humming?" he asked.

"The second violin part – I played it in high school..." she trailed off, reminiscing, "I think I was the only one who liked it; but then again, I'm still a composer that hates Baroque-era music – almost as bad as saying you're an atheist in that community." She chuckled, then sighed.

"I was in my school orchestra, too," added Nat, laboring to create a dialogue.

"Really? What did you play?"

"Viola," he answered. Jamie cackled. "What?"

"Viola: that's all there is to say." Jamie paused, trying to steady her lax pose. "But a word to the wise: never date an instrumentalist – it'll be hell. Especially brass, just – just don't."

"Wow, that's a bit harsh?" he said, taken off-guard by the sudden tangent.

"Also string players – avoid them," she continued, disregarding him. "They're far too into themselves for their own good."

"Well, uh, that's a bit presumptuous, don't you–"

"Bitter." Jamie interrupted, "I'm bitter, there's a difference." her expression was almost distracted saying that.

"Okay."

"Yeah..." she mulled, "I'm sorry, it appears I made myself angry."

"I'm sor–"

"It's not your fault; don't apologize," she said brusquely. "I'm going to read; do what you want." Jamie took a book from her nightstand and resigned herself to the kitchen, leaving Nat to his own devices. The doe busied her mind with Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the book's cynical tone putting her at ease. Nat simply played on the keyboard for hours. It wasn't until about six that the doe looked up to see Nat leaving out the front door. She raised herself as if to speak, hands folded, but sat back down, and stared at the tiles of the kitchen floor.

"Thank you for inviting me," Nat said apologetically, "Sorry about making you man."

"I didn't invite you. And it's not your fault," she responded plainly.

"Yeah, my bad." Nat closed the door behind him with a slow click of the hinge. Jamie withdrew into herself, running the day's events five, six, seven times over. She groaned, regretting what she said – it was exposing, what she had told him. Her phone chimed from the bedroom, but she lacked the heart to check it. The rest of her night was spent at her computer, mindlessly keeping record of her social networks.

The next morning, Jamie was at her workstation, typing out notes she needed to remember while on calls. Jim approached her from behind, patting her on the shoulders. The doe jumped in her seat and turned round to see him.

"Hey, Jim. What's up?" she chirped.

"Nothing much – getting ready to leave this hellhole soon."

"It's gonna be lonely without you," she made a pout baiting for a hug, "You put in your two weeks?"

"Yeah," he said, looking off to the wide expanse of the production floor in its dreary gray and sterile white, "Yeah, I did. Thursday before last if I remember right, so, the end of October?" Jamie breathed sharply, biting down on her hand; it drew blood as the back of her eyes stung mercilessly. While looking around, Jim caught a glance to see her in excruciating distress. "J-Jamie," he stammered, "What's the matter?"

Jamie took another sharp inhale, crying "What the fuck," in a hushed whine. "Why did you wait to tell me this?"

"I forgot." The doe's eyes pierced him. "I forgot, really," he pleaded, "Sorry."

"Just go," Jamie resigned, blood dribbling from her palm. Jim slunk away.

The doe's productivity was at its lowest with most of her mental resources being exhausted to fight back tears. She fought until she was safely behind her bedroom door, locked. And then she cried. The streams trailed down her eyes into cupped palms; her bite mark burned as droplets rolled over it. Her breathing eventually became labored as her wailing became hoarse and staggered. Jim was almost gone, and he didn't even tell her, which only multiplied against the anguish of the feelings of abandonment Jim brought.

Her memories began to leak into her conscious mind, overriding her senses. Indiscernible words flowed through them, but was comprehending what she felt how she missed Storm, how she'd already forgotten what she had now, who was going to be lost. And her psyche ripped apart at the seams as past and present colluded in such a manner that one didn't even mirror the other, they were one and the same – as if nothing ever passed.

The doe's phone chimed repeatedly; her fingers trailed over its rounded edges, desperately trying to claw her way back to reality. The phone started ringing – it felt like it was on the other side of her apartment. Her fingers were tapping on the screen, piecing together what was happening outside her head. Then her thumb stopped – it seemed right being there. She mechanically slid it and a new voice was present.

"Jamie?" it called.

"Storm," she mouthed silently.

"Jamie? Jamie, are you there?"

"Francine," she said wordlessly, "This is Francine, right?"

"Jamie! Answer me! Are you okay?"

"Jim!" she squealed, her senses flushed themselves.

"Hey, I'm picking you up tomorrow. Six A.M. Be there."

"But, Jim, I–"

"I'm not getting my ass beat because you wanna be wishy-washy!" He stopped

himself. "You have to make sure you're getting what you need. See you there?"

"Yeah."

"Good deal," Jim said softly, then he hung up.

It poured Tuesday morning. Jamie had her work attire under a white translucent raincoat while wearing red-and-white polka dot rain boots. Jim rolled up in a vacant parking space and opened the passenger door from the inside. Jamie got in, fastening her seatbelt as the bear put the car into reverse.

It wasn't until five minutes into the drive before Jim spoke: "Your rain getup is cute – I like it."

Jamie smiled, "That's what I was going for."

"It works," Jim replied with a nod, "It's really nice." Jim stared down the road, preparing his articulation. "Jamie," he began, drumming his fingers around the steering wheel, "I'm... sorry. I'm sorry for not telling you earlier; I should've been better about it – but I wasn't." He cleared his throat. "If... something like this comes up again – which it won't – I'll be sure to give you a heads-up." He laid a hand on Jamie's shoulder. "A'ight?"

The doe's expression was vacant, eyes totally lost. Jim gave her a pat on the back; two threads of tears fell from her eyes, her face still vacant as if it weren't processing what was happening to her. Jim pulled over and pulled the doe into a deep embrace.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, life snapped into her eyes then.

"What happened?"

"I don't know."

"Shh... it's okay, it's okay."

Jim tried to keep a close watch over Jamie for as much as his schedule allowed. He waited for her when his shift was over, with his hands folded on a table in the break room.

"Hey, how was your shift?" he inquired, rising from his chair.

"Um, it was good," said Jamie, mulling it over.

"C'mon, let's go." And Jim loosened his necktie on their way to his car.

They arrived to Jim's mother coming around the corner in her slippers. Jim flinched at the sight of them. The old bear trotted to Jamie and gave her a firm hug.

"Dearie, what's the matter?" the old bear prodded, noting her limp hug.

"Oh, I'm fine, Miss Brummel – just a little torn up by Jim leaving – and in a couple days, too." Jamie sniffled.

"A couple days?" she asked, perplexed, "You mean you didn't know?"

"Yeah, he forgot to tell me, but I'm okay now."

"Jimmy!" Miss Brummel snapped, "*You didn't tell her?*" she took two steps towards him.

"I forgot!" he whined, gulping.

"I—" she looked at Jamie, then relaxed her demeanor, "We'll talk about this after she goes home. But,"—her voice switched to a lilt—"You need your hormones." Miss Brummel rubbed Jamie's back as she disappeared upstairs for supplies.

The doe got her injection, and was off to Jim's room with a slice of pumpkin pie. She

coughed as she went inside, Jim opening a window in turn. He looked to her with pleading eyes.

"You can't leave," he begged.

"Why?"

"I'm not gonna have my ass beat with a slipper again."

"I'm sure she won't—"

"Look at me, Jamie," he took hold of her shoulders, "Those slippers *hurt*. A lot." Jamie blushed a bit hearing this. Jim's face became dispirited. "Are you fucking kidding me?" he whined.

"Uhhhh,"

"It's not hot!"

"That's because she's your mom!" Jamie cried. Jim gasped in horror.

"We're going to your place tonight," the bear declared.

"What about your mom?"

"And that's why we're going to your place, call it a sleepover."

"I don't have much room at my place," Jamie confessed.

"I'll sleep on the sofa."

"Uhhhh..."

"No... you've gotta be screwing with me now."

"I never thought I'd need one!" Jamie remarked, tittering. Jim stared at her blankly.

"Let's go," he grumbled, taking his car keys.

The two made their way down the stairs.

"Going home so soon?" Miss Brummel inquired innocuously from the kitchen.

"Yeah, Jim's sleeping over!"

"Oh, okay!" Miss Brummel lilted.

As they got to the front door, Jim felt a powerful sting on the back of his head; he turned around to see a slipper lying on the hardwood floor.

Jamie flipped the switch at the entrance when they arrived. Jim entered closely behind, scanning the unit: an assortment of shoes neatly aligned by the door, the laces on her sneakers messy and a little gray.

"Sorry, I hadn't cleaned in a while – I hope it's not too much of a bother." The doe led him into the kitchen. "Can I get you something?" she asked, taking a clean plate and fork from the sink and hurriedly drying them.

"Sure, whatever you got," Jim obliged.

Jamie took soba noodles with shredded vegetables and served it on a plate to Jim. She made herself a plate, taking another one from the cupboard, ignoring the soft film of dust to save face, sitting across from the bear. It was silent as they both picked at their plates. The two walked into Jamie's room – everything except the desk was neat and tidy.

"You'll sleep here," she said.

"On the floor?" Jim was eying the twin size bed.

"No, silly! The bed." Jamie opened the closet, taking out a rolled up sleeping bag. She

also grabbed the pillow on the bed with her free hand. “The trade-off,” she declared, but returned it with a “Just kidding!” She exited for the living room, and Jim crawled into the bed, falling fast asleep.

Jim woke up hours later, hobbling to the bathroom in his work shirt and boxers. As he got to the toilet, he lifted the lid and the seat, then relieved himself. On his way back to bed, he got a good look at her living room: a bookcase and a rug – with Jamie bundled up in her sleeping bag – clenched fists near her face. Jim stared, not knowing what to make of the image. He massaged the back of his head as the phantom of his soreness crept upon him.

Like what you've read?

Find me here:

[Facebook](#) | [FurAffinity](#) | [Weasyl](#) | [Tumblr](#) | [e-Mail](#)

© 2015 Sybil Michel. All rights reserved.