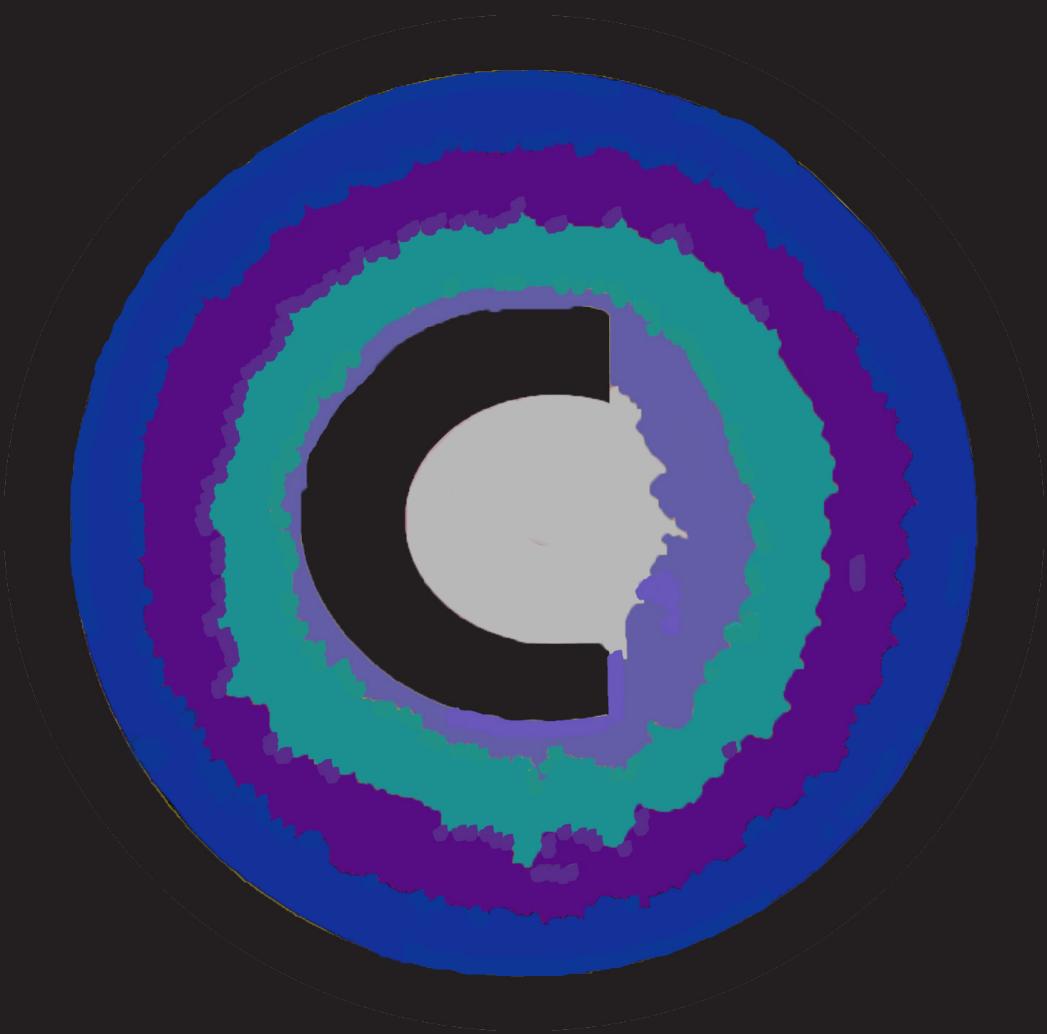




“Try to leave a light on when I’m gone, something I rely on to get home. One I can feel at night, a naked light, a fire to keep me warm. Try to leave a light on when I’m gone. Even in the daylight, shine on. And when it’s late at night, you can look inside. You won’t feel so alone.”

- Light On, David Cook





# Now You Know

Marissa Merriman

# SPLASH!

I squeezed my eyes shut and shivered in response to the cold water my cousin slowly poured onto the back of my head. I was on my knees, leaning over the edge of the bathtub.

The ice water transformed into a dark purple color as it soaked through my hair that hung upside down and dripped into the tub. I tried to keep my red t-shirt dry, even though it was already stained with permanent, black hair dye.

However, I looked down into the dirtiest tub I've ever seen and felt satisfied with my decision on washing my hair this way, instead of taking a shower.

"Jesus, Sam. You couldn't wait for the water to warm up?" I asked her. She pressed up against my back, reached around my right side, and placed a plastic cup underneath the shower faucet.

“We’re in a bit of a rush.” She reminded me, right before slowly pouring another cup of freezing water onto my head.

I gasped and shrieked while banging my hands against the edge of the tub.

“Fuck, that’s cold!” I exclaimed loudly, and then Sam elbowed me in the ribs.

“Keep it down, Liz. It’s two o’clock in the morning.” She said as she squirted shampoo onto her hands.

She rubbed it into my hair and I cringed as her long fake nails pulled at my black strands and scratched my scalp.

“I still don’t know why we’re doing this- OW!” I said as she yanked on my hair, rather hard. I could sense her brown eyes glaring at me.

She released my head, refilled the cup, and dumped all of it onto my head at once. The water had now been running for a while, so this time, it was boiling hot.

Sam was really shitty at being contrite.

“Why? You stole five hundred dollars from your mother’s purse and then ran to my house to avoid getting killed.” She reminded me harshly.

I wish she had been exaggerating, but she really wasn’t. My mother’s boyfriend threatened to shoot me in plain sight, and damned if I didn’t believe him.

“Yeah, but why do I need my hair dyed? I mean... I feel like I’m in *The Outsiders*.” I said as she started to lather my hair with conditioner.

This time, she applied it a little more tenderly and chuckled.

This had softened her.

“Well, sorry there Ponyboy, but your hair can’t stay gold. Don’t worry though, Johnnycakes is going to take real good care of you.” Sam sarcastically said with a fake southern accent.

We both laughed at the reference to one of my favorite novels and then she started rinsing the conditioner out of my hair.

Afterwards, she stood up and threw a towel at me. I wrapped the towel around my head and finally stood up straight.

I looked at my cousin, who was washing her hands in the sink. She was slightly taller than me, with dark, red hair falling over her shoulders and very tan skin.

She was a tough, big-boned woman, but practically my big sister. She faced me, leaned back against the counter, and dried her hands.

"If you want to disappear, this is the first step. We'll take you to a salon and tan your pale skin, then maybe get you some colored contact lenses. You can borrow the clothes that my little sister left here because you'll swim in mine. Then you'll stay here until we think of a better plan."

She explained this to me with a surprising calmness. I shook my head and folded my skinny arms over my small chest.

“You don’t have to do this.” I told her softly. Sam stared at me tiredly.

“I’m fully aware of what I’m doing.” She whispered. I stuffed my hands into the front pockets of my jeans, feeling five hundred dollars on my fingertips.

“Then why are you doing it?” I asked, because I could get Sam arrested for this. She was twenty years old and I was only sixteen.

Helping me hide would label her as a kidnapper. I knew my mother well enough to know that she was already in contact with the police, trying to track me down. She needed that money.

“Look, you’re practically my little sister and I love you, but you’re just making things harder for yourself.”

She said this with concern, taking a step towards me. I let out a laugh.

“I have five hundred dollars in my pocket, Sam. I think my situation just got better, but thanks for your concern.” I said sarcastically.

She ran her hands through her wavy hair with anger, consciously trying to control herself.

“Why did you steal it?” She asked me in a harsh whisper. Before I could answer, we were startled.

“OPEN UP, IT’S THE POLICE.” We heard someone yell from the outside. They were trying to open the door, but Sam had locked it. The towel fell off of my head and my black, damp hair clung to my face.

I gasped as Sam covered my mouth with her hand and turned off the bathroom light with her other hand. I got to message to keep quiet, but trembled as she let go of my face and grabbed my wrist, quickly leading me out of the bathroom.

Sam led me to a dark closet inside her mothers room, and she yanked on a string hanging from the ceiling. A door fell open to reveal a dark attic. I immediately knew what to do. She reached behind a bunch of coats and pulled out a ladder. I helped set it up and began to climb.

Once I was in the attic, I pulled the door closed. I heard Sam flick off the light, close the closet door, and walk away.

It was fairly empty from what I could tell, so I had enough space to sit down and wait.

The attic was pitch black and silent. There were no windows and it smelt musty.

The darkness and silence strangely made me feel safe. However, after about an hour of sitting there alone, I heard loud footsteps entering the room right beneath me. I started to sweat and my breathing got shallow.

“Where is she!? I know you’re hiding the little bitch!” I heard someone scream. I quickly crawled away

I heard him throw the closet door open and flick on the lights. I hugged my knees that were against my chest, and stopped breathing.

“She’s not in there. Look, I told you guys. I was getting ready for bed in the bathroom when you knocked on my door.” I heard Sam say.

I bit my lip and really hoped that they would believe the story and leave. Then I heard someone sigh.

“Look, Dave, either she’s telling the truth or Elizabeth is hiding from you, not being held captive. I wouldn’t be shocked, considering that your wife was just arrested for possession of heroin.” The police officer explained with obvious judgment.

My reaction to this was weird, though. I felt a strong sense of relief.

“If that little brat hadn’t stolen our money, brought home the drugs that you framed my girlfriend with, and ran away, then we never would have had to call the police.”  
Dave yelled and then yanked on the rope attached to the attic door out of anger.

The door fell open a few feet from me and I buried my head in my knees, shaking like a terrified puppy.

“Wait a minute, you’re seriously trying to frame that sixteen year old girl for bringing home heroin!?”  
I heard Sam scream.

“Okay, I’ve had enough. I highly doubt that she was kidnapped, but because she stole money, we’ll continue searching for her in the morning. We searched the entire house, and clearly, she’s not here. Ma’am, I’m sorry we disturbed you.”  
I heard the police officer apologize and then walk away.

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Sam was still silent, but Dave decided to speak again.

“I know you have her. Mark my words, you will go down for this.” Then I heard everyone leave. After a few painfully long minutes, I heard footsteps beneath me.

“It’s safe, come down!” Sam called. I let out a sigh of pure relief and felt tears roll down my cheeks as I slowly headed towards the opening and carefully climbed down the steps she set back up. As soon as I reached the floor, Sam engulfed me in a tight hug.

“Jesus Christ, that was scary,” She whispered. I nodded and then she let me go, “You set them up. You knew they’d stupidly call the cops and get busted.” She added.

“No... I wanted to make it as impossible for her to buy drugs as I could.” I answered weakly.

“Now I know.” She replied, but she didn’t sound completely satisfied.

“Yeah... now you know.”

“I'm running to escape the walls that trap this hurt inside. The door is open, please come save me. I never want to hide behind the disguise that I've become. ‘Cause you alone, you can take away the pain. Yeah, you have shown, you can find a way to change. Yeah, you alone, you can see right through this glass house of our souls. Make us whole again, make us whole again.”

-Glass House, Red

