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The Spider in the Corner of the Room

Written by Nikki Owen

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THE SPIDER IN
THE CORNER OF
THE ROOM

Nikki Owen

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Chapter 1

The man sitting opposite me does not move. He keeps his head straight and stifles a cough. The sun bakes the room, but even when I pull at my blouse, the heat still sticks. I watch him. I don't like it: him, me, here, this room, this... this cage. I feel like pulling out my hair, screaming at him, at them, at the whole world. And yet I do nothing but sit. The clock on the wall ticks.

The man places his Dictaphone on the table, and, without warning, delivers me a wide smile.

'Remember,' he says, 'I am here to help you.'

I open my mouth to speak, but there is a sudden spark in me, a voice in my head that whispers, *Go!* I try to ignore it, instead focus on something, anything, to steady the rising surge inside me. His height. He is too tall for the chair. His back arcs, his stomach dips and his legs cross. At 187.9 centimetres and weight at 74.3 kilograms, he could sprint one kilometre without running out of breath.

The man clears his throat, his eyes on mine. I swallow hard.

‘Maria,’ he starts. ‘Can I . . .’ He falters, then leaning in a little: ‘Can I call you Maria?’

I answer instinctively in Spanish.

‘In English, please.’

I cough. ‘Yes. My name is Maria.’ There is a tremor in my voice. Did he hear it? I need to slow down. Think: facts. His fingernails. They are clean, scrubbed. The shirt he wears is white, open at the collar. His suit is black. Expensive fabric. Wool? Beyond that, he wears silk socks and leather loafers. There are no scuffs. As if he stepped fresh out of a magazine.

He picks up a pen and I risk reaching forward to take a sip of water. I grip the glass tight, but still tiny droplets betray me, sloshing over the edges. I stop. My hands are shaking.

‘Are you okay?’ the man asks, but I do not reply. Something is not right.

I blink. My sight—it has become milky, a white film over my eyes, a cloak, a mask. My eyelids start to flutter, heart pounds, adrenaline courses through me. Maybe it is being here with him, maybe it is the thought of speaking to a stranger about my feelings, but it ignites something, something deep inside, something frightening.

Something that has happened to me many times before. A memory.

It sways at first, takes its time. Then, in seconds, it rushes, picking up speed until it is fully formed: the image. It is there in front of me like a stage play. The curtains rise and I am in a medical room. White walls, steel, starched bedlinen. Strip lights line the ceiling, glaring, exposing me. And then, ahead, like a magician through smoke, the

doctor with black eyes enters by the far door. He is wearing a mask, holding a needle.

‘Hello, Maria.’

Panic thrusts up within me, lava-like, volcanic, so fast that I fear I could explode. He steps closer and I begin to shake, try to escape, but there are straps, leather on my limbs. Black Eyes’ lips are upturned, he is in the room now, bearing down on me, his breath—tobacco, garlic, mint—it is in my face, my nostrils, and I begin to hear myself scream when there is something else. A whisper: ‘He is not real. He is not real.’ The whisper, it hovers in my brain, flaps, lingers, then like a breeze it passes, leaving a trace of goose bumps on my skin. Was it right? I glance round: medicine vials, needles, charts. I look at my hands: young, no lines. I touch my face: teenage spots. It is not me, not me now. Which means none of this exists.

Like a candle extinguishing, the image blows away, the curtains close. My eyes dart down. Each knuckle is white from where they have gripped the glass. When I look up, the man opposite is staring.

‘What happened?’ he says.

I inhale, check my location. The scent of Black Eyes is still in my nose, my mouth as if he had really been here. I try to push the fear to one side and, slowly, set down the glass and wring my hands together once then twice. ‘I remembered something,’ I say after a moment.

‘Something real?’

‘I do not know.’

‘Is this a frequent occurrence?’

I hesitate. Does he already know? I decide to tell him the truth. ‘Yes.’

The man looks at my hands then turns his head and opens some photocopied files.

My eyes scan the pages on his lap. Data. Information. Facts, real facts, all black and white, clear, no grey, no in-betweens or hidden meanings. The thought of it must centre me, because, before I know it, the information in my head is coming out of my mouth.

‘Photocopying machines originated in 1440,’ I say, my eyes on the pages in his hands.

He glances up. ‘Pardon?’

‘Photocopiers—they emerged after Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1440.’ I exhale. My brain simply contains too much information. Sometimes it spills over.

‘Gutenberg’s Bible,’ I continue, ‘was the first to be published in volume.’ I stop, wait, but the man does not respond. He is staring again, his eyes narrowed, two blue slits. My leg begins to jig as a familiar tightness in my chest spreads. To stop it, I count. One, two, three, four... At five, I look to the window. The muslin curtains billow. The iron bars guard the panes. Below, three buses pass, wheezing, coughing out noise, fumes. I turn and touch the back of my neck where my hairline skims my skull. Sweat trickles past my collar.

‘It is warm in here,’ I say. ‘Is there a fan we can use?’

The man lowers the page. ‘I’m told your ability to retain information is second to none.’ His eyes narrow. ‘Your IQ—it is high.’ He consults his papers and looks back to me. ‘One hundred and eighty-one.’

I do not move. None of this information is available.

‘It’s my job to research patients,’ he continues, as if read-

ing my mind. He leans forward. 'I know a lot about you.' He pauses. 'For example, you like to religiously record data in your notebook.'

My eyes dart to a cloth bag slung over my chair.

'How do you know about my notebook?'

He stays there, blinking, only sitting back when I shift in my seat. My pulse accelerates.

'It's in your file, of course,' he says finally. He flashes a smile and returns his gaze to his paperwork.

I keep very still, clock ticking, curtains drifting. Is he telling me the truth? His scent, the sweat of his skin, smells of mint, like toothpaste. A hard knot forming in my stomach, I realise the man reminds me of Black Eyes. The thought causes the silent spark in me to ignite again, flashing at me to run far away from here, but if I left now, if I refused to talk, to co-operate, who would that help? Me? Him? I know nothing about this man. Nothing. No details, no facts. I am beginning to wonder if I have made a mistake.

The man sets down his pen and, as he slips his notes under a file to his left, a photograph floats out. I peer down and watch it fall; my breathing almost stops.

It is the head of the priest.

Before he was murdered.

The man crouches and picks up the photograph, the image of the head hanging from his fingers. We watch it, the two of us, bystanders. A breeze picks up from the window and the head swings back and forth. We say nothing. Outside, traffic hums, buses hack up smog. And still the photo sways. The skull, the bones, the flesh. The priest, alive. Not dead. Not splattered in blood and entrails. Not

with eyes frozen wide, cold. But living, breathing, warm. I shiver; the man does not flinch.

After a moment, he slips the photograph back into the file, and I let out a long breath. Smoothing down my hair, I watch the man's fingers as they stack paperwork. Long, tanned fingers. And it makes me think: where is he from? Why is he here, in this country? When this meeting was arranged, I did not know what would happen. I am still unsure.

'How does it make you feel, seeing his face?'

The sound of his voice makes me jump a little. 'What do you mean?'

'I mean seeing Father O'Donnell.'

I sit back, press my palms into my lap. 'He is the priest.'

The man tilts his head. 'Did you think otherwise?'

'No.' I tuck a stray hair behind my ear. He is still looking at me. Stop looking at me.

I touch the back of my neck. Damp, clammy.

'Now, I would like to start the interview, formally,' he says, reaching for his Dictaphone. No time for me to object. 'I need you to begin with telling me, out loud, please—in English—your full name, profession, age and place of birth. I also require you to state your original conviction.'

The red record light flashes. The colour causes me to blink, makes me want to squeeze my eyes shut and never open them again. I glance around the room, try to steady my brain with details. There are four Edwardian brick walls, two sash windows, one French-style, one door. I pause. One exit. Only one. The window does not count—we are three floors up. Central London. If I jump, at the speed and trajectory, the probability is that I will break

one leg, both shoulder blades and an ankle. I look back to the man. I am tall, athletic. I can run. But, whoever he is, whoever this man claims to be, he may have answers. And I need answers. Because so much has happened to me. And it all needs to end.

I catch sight of my reflection in the window: short dark hair, long neck, brown eyes. A different person looks back at me, suddenly older, more lined, battered by her past. The curtain floats over the glass and the image, like a mirage in a desert, vanishes. I close my eyes for a moment, then open them, a random shaft of sunlight from the window making me feel strangely lucid, ready. It is time to talk.

‘My name is Dr Maria Martinez Villanueva and I am—was—a Consultant Plastic Surgeon. I am thirty-three years old. Place of birth: Salamanca, Spain.’ I pause, gulp a little. ‘And I was convicted of the murder of a Catholic priest.’

A woman next to me tugs at my sleeve.

‘Oi,’ she says. ‘Did you hear me?’

I cannot reply. My head is whirling with shouts and smells and bright blue lights and rails upon rails of iron bars, and no matter how hard I try, no matter how much I tell myself to breathe, to count, focus, I cannot calm down, cannot shake off the seeping nightmare of confusion.

I arrived in a police van. Ten seats, two guards, three passengers. The entire journey I did not move, speak or barely breathe. Now I am here, I tell myself to calm down. My eyes scan the area, land on the tiles, each of them black like the doors, the walls a dirt grey. When I sniff, the air smells of urine and toilet cleaner. A guard stands one metre

away from me and behind her lies the main quarter of Goldmouth Prison. My new home.

There is a renewed tugging at my sleeve. I look down. The woman now has hold of me, her fingers still pinching my jacket like a crab's claw. Her nails are bitten, her skin is cracked like tree bark, and dirt lines track her thin veins.

'Oi. You. I said, what's your name?' She eyes me. 'You foreign or something?'

'I am Spanish. My name is Dr Maria Martinez.' She still pinches me. I don't know what to do. Is she supposed to have hold of my jacket? In desperation, I search for the guard.

The woman lets out a laugh. 'A doctor? Ha!' She releases my sleeve and blows me a kiss. I wince; her breath smells of excrement. I pull back my arm and brush out the creases, brush her off me. Away from me. And just when I think she may have given up, she speaks again.

'What the hell has a doctor done to get herself in this place then?'

I open my mouth to ask who she is—that is what I have heard people do—but a guard says move, so we do. There are so many questions in my head, but the new noises, shapes, colours, people—they are too much. For me, they are all too much.

'My name's Michaela,' the woman says as we walk. She tries to look me in the eye. I turn away. 'Michaela Croft,' she continues, 'Mickie to my mates.' She hitches up her t-shirt.

'The name Michaela is Hebrew, meaning *who is like the Lord*. Michael is an archangel of Jewish and Christian

scripture,' I say, unable to stop myself, the words shooting out of me.

I expect her to laugh at me, as people do, but when she does not, I steal a glance. She is smiling at her stomach where a tattoo of a snake circles her belly button. She catches me staring, drops her shirt and opens her mouth. Her tongue hangs out, revealing three silver studs. She pokes her tongue out some more. I look away.

After walking to the next area, we are instructed to halt. There are still no windows, no visible way out. No escape. The strip lights on the ceiling illuminate the corridor and I count the number of lights, losing myself in the pointless calculations.

'I think you need to move on.'

I jump. There is a middle-aged man standing two metres away. His head is tilted, his lips parted. Who is he? He holds my gaze for a moment then, raking a hand through his hair, strides away. I am about to turn, embarrassed to look at him, when he halts and stares at me again. Yet, this time I do not move, frozen, under a spell. His eyes. They are so golden, so deep that I cannot look away.

'Martinez?' the guard says. 'We're off again. Shift it.'

I crane my head to see if the man is still there, but he is suddenly gone. As though he never existed.

The internal prison building is loud. I fold my arms tight across my chest and keep my head lowered, hoping it will block out my bewilderment. We follow the guard and keep quiet. I try to remain calm, try to speak to myself, reason with myself that I can handle this, that I can cope with this new environment just as much as anyone else, but it is all so unfamiliar, the prison. The constant stench of body odour,

the shouting, the sporadic screams. I have to take time to process it, to compute it. None of this is routine.

Michaela taps me on the shoulder. Instinctively, I flinch.

‘You’ve seen him then?’ she says.

‘Who?’

‘The Governor of Goldmouth. That fella just now with the nice eyes and the pricey tan.’ She grins. ‘Be careful, yeah?’ She places her palm on my right bottom cheek. ‘I’ve done time here before, gorgeous. Our Governor, well, he has... a reputation.’

She is still touching me, and I want her to get off me, to leave me alone. I am about slap her arm away when the guard shouts for her to release me.

Michaela licks her teeth then removes her hand. My body slackens. Without speaking, Michaela sniffs, wipes her nose with her palm and walks off.

Lowering my head once more, I make sure I stay well behind her.

Chapter 2

We are taken through to something named The Booking-In Area.

The walls are white. Brown marks are smeared in the crevices between the brickwork and, when I squint, plastic splash panels glisten under the lights. Michaela remains at my side. I do not want her to touch me again.

The guards halt, turn and thrust something to us. It's a forty-page booklet outlining the rules of Goldmouth Prison. It takes me less than a minute to read the whole thing—the TV privileges, the shower procedures, the full body searches, the library book lending guidelines. Timetables, regimes, endless regulations—a ticker tape of instructions. I remember every word, every comma, every picture on the page. Done, I close the file and look to my right. Michaela is stroking the studs on her tongue, pinching each one, wincing then smiling. Sweat pricks my neck. I want to go home.

'You read fast, sweetheart,' she says, leaning into me.

‘You remember all that? Shit, I can’t remember my own fucking name half the time.’

She pinches her studs again. They could cause problems, get infected. I should tell her. That’s what people do, isn’t it? Help each other?

‘Piercing can cause nerve damage to the tongue, leading to weakness, paralysis and loss of sensation,’ I say.

‘What the—’ The letter ‘f’ forms on her mouth, but before she can finish, a guard tears the booklet from my hand.

‘Hey!’

‘Strip,’ the guard says.

‘Strip what?’

She rolls her eyes. ‘Oh, you’re a funny one, Martinez. We need you to strip. It’s quite simple. We search all inmates on arrival.’

Michaela lets out a snort. The guard turns. ‘Enough out of you, Croft, you’re next.’

I tap the guard’s shoulder. Perhaps I have misunderstood. ‘You mean remove my clothes?’

The guard stares at me. ‘No, I mean keep them all on.’

‘Oh.’ I relax a little. ‘Okay.’

She shakes her head. ‘Of course I mean remove your clothes.’

‘But you said . . .’ I stop, rub my forehead, look back at her. ‘But it is not routine. Stripping, now—it’s not part of my routine.’ My stomach starts to churn.

The guard sighs. ‘Okay, Martinez. Time for you to move. The last thing I need is you getting clever on me.’ She grabs my arm and I go rigid. ‘For crying out fucking loud.’

‘Please, get off me,’ I say.

But she doesn’t reply, instead she pushes me to move

and I want to speak, shout, scream, but something tells me I shouldn't, that if I did, that if I punched this guard hard, now, in the face, I may be in trouble.

We walk through two sets of double doors. These ones are metal. Heavy. My pulse quickens, my stomach squirms. All the while the guard stays close. There are two cleaners with buckets and mops up ahead, and when they see us they stop, their mops dripping on the tiles, water and cleaning suds trickling along the cracks, the bubbles wobbling first then popping, one by one, water melting into the grouting, gone forever.

One corner and two more doors, and we arrive at a new room. It is four metres by four metres and very warm. My jacket clings to my skin and my legs shake. I close my eyes. I have to. I need to think, to calm myself. I envision home, Spain. Orange groves, sunshine, mountains. Anything I can think of, anything that will take my mind away from where I am. From what I am.

A cough sounds and my eyes flicker open. There, ahead, is another guard sitting at a table. She coughs again, glances from under her spectacles and frowns. My leg itches from the sweat and heat. I bend down, hitch up my trousers and scratch.

'Stand up.'

She snaps like my mother at the hired help. I stand.

'You're the priest killer,' she says. 'I recognise your face from the paper. Be needing the chapel, will you?' She chuckles. The standing guard behind me joins in.

'I do not go to church,' I say, confused.

She stops laughing. 'No, bet you don't.' She cocks her head. 'You could do with a bit more weight on you. Skinny,

pretty thing like you in here?’ She whistles and shakes her head. ‘Still, nice tan.’

She makes me nervous—her laughs, jeers. I know how those people can be. I pull at the end of my jacket, fingers slippery, my teeth clenched just enough so I can keep quiet, so my thoughts remain in my head. I want to flap my hands so much, but something about this place—this guard—tells me I should not.

The sitting guard opens a file. ‘Says here you’re Spanish.’

I reply in Castellano.

‘English, love. We speak English here.’

‘Yes,’ I say. ‘I am Spanish. Castilian. Can you not hear my accent?’

‘This one thinks she’s clever.’ I turn. The other guard.

‘Well, that’s all we fucking need,’ says sitting guard, ‘a bloody know-it-all.’ She spoons some sugar into a mug on the table. I suddenly realise I have had nothing to drink for hours.

‘I would like some water.’

But she ignores me. ‘Martinez, you need to do as we tell you,’ she says, stirring the mug.

She has heaped in four mounds of sugar. I look at her stomach. Rounded. This is not healthy. Before I can prevent it, a diagnosis drops out of my mouth, babbling like a torrent of water through a brook.

‘You have too much weight on your middle,’ I say, the words flowing, urgent. ‘This puts you at a higher than average risk of cardiac disease. If you continue to take sugar in your . . .’ I pause. ‘I assume that is tea? Then you will

increase your risk of heart disease, as well as that of type two diabetes.’ I pause, catch my breath.

The guard holds her spoon mid-air.

‘Told you,’ says standing guard.

‘Strip,’ says sitting guard after a moment. ‘We need you to strip, smart arse.’

But I cannot. I cannot strip. Not here. Not now. My heart picks up speed, my eyes dart around the room, frenzied, a primitive voice inside me swelling, urging me to curl up into a ball, protect myself.

‘You have to remove your clothes,’ sitting guard says nonchalantly. She blows on her tea. ‘It’s a requirement for all new arrivals at Goldmouth.’ She sips. ‘We need to search you. Now.’

Panic—I can feel it. My heartbeat. My pulse. Quickly, I search for a focus and settle on sitting guard’s face. Acne scars puncture her chin, there are dark circles under her eyes, and on her cheeks, eight thread lines criss-cross a ruddy complexion. ‘Do you consume alcoholic beverages?’ I blurt.

‘What?’

Perhaps she did not hear. Many people appear deaf to me when they are not. ‘Do you consume alcoholic beverages?’ I repeat.

She smiles at standing guard. ‘Is she for real?’

‘Of course I am real. See?’ I point to myself. ‘I am standing right here.’

Sitting guard shakes her head. ‘For fuck’s sake.’ She exhales. ‘Strip.’ Then she sips her drink again.

My chest tightens and my palms pool with sweat. ‘I cannot strip,’ I say after a moment, my voice quiet, the sound

of it teetering on the edge of sanity. 'It is not bedtime, not shower time or time for sex.'

Sitting guard spurts out a mouthful of tea. 'Fuck.' Taking a tissue from her pocket, she wipes her face. 'Jesus. Look,' she says, scrunching up the tissue, 'I am going to tell you one more time, Martinez. You need to take your clothes off now so we can search you.' She pauses. 'After that, I will have no choice but to carry out the strip myself. Then you'll be placed in the segregation unit as a penalty.'

She folds her arms and waits.

I wipe my cheek. 'But...but it is not time to strip.' I swivel to the other guard, begging. 'Please, tell her. It is not time.'

But the guard simply rolls her eyes, presses a blue button by an intercom and waits. No one speaks, no one moves. A few more tears break out, trespassing across my face, down past my chin, stinging my skin, alien to me, unknown. I do not cry, not often. Not me, not with my brain wired as it is; I am strong, hardened, weathered. So why now, why here? Is it this place, this prison? One hour in and already it is changing me. I touch my scalp, feel my hair, fingertips absorbing the heat from my head. I am real, I exist, but I do not feel it. Do not feel anything of myself.

Shouts from somewhere drift in then out, their sound vibrating like a buzzer in my ears. I try to stay steady, to think of home, of my father, his open arms. The way he would pick me up if I was hurt. I inhale, try to recollect his scent: cigars, cologne, fountain pen ink. His chest, his wide chest where I would lay my head as his arms encircled me, the heat of his torso keeping me safe, safe from everything out there, from the world, from the merry-go-round

of confusion, of social games, interactions, dos and don'ts. And then he was gone. My papa, my haven, he was gone—

Bang. The door slams open. We all look up. A third guard enters and nods to the other two. The three of them walk to my side.

'No!' I scream, shocked at my voice: wild and erratic.

They stop. My chest heaves, my mouth gulps in air. Sitting guard's eyes are narrowed and she is tapping her foot.

She turns to her colleague. 'We're going to have to hold this one down.'

Time has passed, but I cannot be sure how much.

The room is dark, a single light flashing. I look down: I am sitting on a plastic chair. I gulp in air, touch my chest. The material, my clothes: they are different. Someone has put me in a grey polyester jumpsuit. I look around me, frantic. Where are my clothes? My blouse? My Armani trousers? I draw in a sharp breath and suddenly remember. The strip search. My stomach flips, churns, the vomit flying up so fast that I have to slap my palm to my mouth to keep it in. Their hands. Their hands were all over me. Cold, rubbery, damp. They touched me, the guards, probed me, invaded me. I said they could not do it, that it was not allowed, to cut my clothes off like that, but they did it anyway. Like I didn't have a voice, like I didn't matter. They told me to squat, naked, to cough. They crouched under me and watched for anything to come out... They . . .

A screech rips from my mouth. I stand, stumble back against the wall, the bricks damp and wet beneath my fingertips. This must be the segregation cell. They put me in segregation. But they can't do this! Not to me. Do they not

know? Do they not understand? I turn to the wall, smacking my forehead on it, once, twice, the impact of the pain jolting me into reality, calming me. Slowly, I start to steady myself when I feel something, something etched into the masonry. Turning, I peer down, squint in the blinking lights, feel with my fingers. There, scratched deep into the brickwork, is a cross.

A shout roars from outside. I jump. There is another shout followed by banging, ripping from the right, loud, like a constant thudding. Maybe someone is coming. I run to the door and try to see something, anything. The banging reaches a crescendo then dies.

I press my lips to the slit. ‘Hello?’ I wait. Nothing. ‘Hello?’

‘Go away!’ a voice screams. ‘Go away! Go away!’

The yelling smashes against my head like a hammer—slam, slam, slam. I want it to stop but it won’t, it simply carries on and on until I can’t take it any more. My hands rake through my hair, pull at it, claw it. I cannot do this, cannot be here. I need my routine. I want to go home, see my bare feet running through the grass along the hills back to my villa, the sun fat and low. I want to sprint the last leg to the courtyard where the paella stove is fired. Garlic, saffron, clams and mussels, the hot flesh melting in my mouth, bubbling, evaporating. That is what I want. Not this. Not here. Think. What would Papa tell me to do?

Numbers. That is it. Think of numbers. I shut my eyes, attempt to let digits, calculations, dates, mathematical theories—anything—run through my head. After a moment, it begins to work. My breathing slows, muscles soften, my brain resting a little, enough for something to walk into my

head: an algorithm. I hesitate at first, keep my eyes shut. It seems familiar, the formula, yet strange all at once. I scan the algorithm, track it, try to understand why I should even think of it, but nothing. No clue. No sign. Which means it's happened again. Unknown data. Data has come to me, data I do not recall ever learning, yet still it appears, like a familiar face in the window, a footprint in the snow. I have always written the calculations down when they emerge, these numbers, these codes and unusual patterns, have always recorded them obsessively, compulsively. But now what? I have no notepad, have no pen, and without inscribing them, without seeing the data in black and white, will it exist? Will it be real?

More shouting erupts and my eyes fly open. There are so many voices. So loud. Too loud for me, for *someone like me*. I clamp my hands to my ears. My head throbs. Images swirl around my mind. My mother, father, priests, churches, strangers. They all blur into one. And then, suddenly an illusion, just one, on its own, walks into my mind: my father in the attic. And then I see Papa getting into his Jaguar, waving to me as he accelerates off, my brother, Ramon, by my side, a wrench in his hand. There is no sound, just pictures, images. My breathing becomes quick, shallow. Am I remembering something or is it simply a fleeting dream? I close my eyes, try to will the image back into my brain, but it won't come, stubborn, callous.

There is more banging—harder and louder this time. I tap my finger against my thigh over and over. Papa, where are you? What happened to you? If only I had stayed in Spain, then none of this would have happened. No murders. No blood.

I clutch my skull. The noise is drowning me, consuming me. The banging. Make the banging stop. Please, someone, make it stop. Papa? I am sorry. I am so, so sorry.

My breathing now is so fast that I cannot get enough oxygen. So I try cupping my hands around my mouth to steady the flow, yet the shouting outside rises, a tipping point, making me panic even more. I force myself to stand, to be still, but it does not work. I can hear guards. They are near. Footsteps. They are yelling for calm, but it makes no difference. The shouts still sound. My body still shakes.

And that is when I hear a voice say, 'Help me,' and I am shocked to realise it is mine. I scramble back, shoving myself into the wall, but it does no good.

The cell turns black.