

Window

By Sophie Westberg

The window has always been enticing.

The outside looks nice today. The lush trees on the horizon seem to pull him forward. It makes his mind wander toward the ever-present fantasy of escape. To slip away past the perfectly manicured grass and into the dark warmth of the woods.

He hasn't felt warm for almost seven years now.

He doesn't remember how long it's been since he arrived here. It feels like centuries have passed since he walked through that thick, iron gate. Since he entered the house and never left.

He presses his hand against the glass. It's cold against his fingertips, so cold that he jumps a little, taking a step back.

He studies his hands. They're covered in calluses and scars, turning his entire palm into a mural of red and white.

There's blood still stuck under his fingernails.

He looks back toward the endless field. The sky is intensely blue - bright and clear as summer's day.

It's interesting - he doesn't remember the last time it rained.

He turns away, studying the rest of the room. The walls are an odd beige color. There's a dull undertone that makes the entire room look sad. All the lights were off, leaving the window the one and only source of paradise. When he first arrived he was told it was an old family manor, passed down from every generation. It used to be loud and crowded, he was told. But now the house is quiet. And empty. And cold.

He begins counting the tiles again. Every room in the house looks the same. Dull beige walls and weathered white tiles. The floor used to be covered in designs of green and blue flowers, but time has made most of them faded and hardly visible.

He knows by heart that there are thirty-six in this room, forty-two in the hallway, twenty-seven in his bedroom, and just seventeen in the bathroom.

He does not know how many there are in the study.

The music is nice - better than it was two days ago. Celia always practices after training, and he tends to join her in the music room after his.

Her music always calms him down, especially after days like today, where training left him with shaky limbs and the taste of blood still lingering in his mouth.

He looks back to the field outside. The grass is overgrown in some places, weeds slithering through the perfect stillness. Once he finds a way out, he can remember what grass feels like against his skin. Would it be silky and smooth or sharp? Maybe he can bring some flowers inside. It might make the room look a bit better. It'll probably feel just like the music, beautiful and enticing and making him want to float away-

Hands slam against the piano, sending a disjointed noise that makes him blink in surprise.

“God, Celia,” He says. “You can’t just do something like that.”

She only sighs. “You’re getting distracted again.”

He moves to the small couch against the wall, lying across it. “Not like I have anything else to do.”

He imagines Celia’s annoyed expression. Eyes narrowed into slits, eyebrows furrowed and lips puckered - if he waited long enough, he would feel the pressure around him thicken and begin to crush him.

Celia tended to be a bit overdramatic when it came to her temper.

“Can you at least look at me?”

He studied the pale, bland ceiling. There were a few scuffs from when Celia got a bit too excited.

“Alex.” She snapped. He could hear the power on her tongue.

With a sigh, he looked over at her.

She looked like she always did. Long blonde hair hanging loose around her shoulders. Her clothes consisted of a thin sweater and skirt - today the colors were blue and white respectively - and scuffed brown boots.

“You can’t keep looking.” She says, gesturing toward the portal to paradise. “It’s not like we can leave.”

“But why though?” He shoots back. “Why can’t I be a normal person for once?”

“Because you’re not a normal person.” She says. “We’re dangerous. You know this already.”

He stood. “God, Celia, I get it. I’m a monster. I kill people because I can’t control myself. I’m gonna stay in the goddamn house until the day I die.” He feels his power begin to boil inside him. “Can’t you just let me dream for once in your life?”

She takes a step back. “Dreaming is dangerous, Alex. Dreaming gives you hope. And hope can’t exist in a place like this.”

He sighs. “When did you get so cynical?”

She shrugs. “Since my power got someone killed.”

“I’ve killed plenty and I’m not like you.” He shoots back. “What does that make me?”

“Insane.” She says sharply. “And stupid too.”

“I hate you.”

“If only I believed that.” Celia says with a smile.

His head suddenly pulsed with pain. He gritted his teeth and waited.

Come to the study.

He blinked, breathing sharply as the pain passed in an instant. Celia was at his side, a warm hand gripped on his shoulder.

“What did she want?” She asked quietly.

He pushed her hand away. “Going in for round two.” He turned to the door. “See you in an hour.”

“Be safe.” Celia whispered. “I’ll kill you if you get hurt.”

“I can literally kill people in an instant.” He said casually. “Since when do I get hurt?”

It’s funny how desperately both of them wanted to believe that.

He closed the door to the music room, walking past twenty-one tiles until he reached the door of the study. It looked exactly like every other door, but in his mind it looked darker and thicker, highlighting the white scratches across the front.

Pain spiked through him again.

Enter.

He pushed the door open and entered the study.

Mother was standing in the center of the room, as she always did. Her dress was long and thick, dyed a dark purple color. Her ink-black hair was tied into a tight, intricate updo, as it always is. Her lips were blood red, just like it always will be.

“Hello, Alex.” Mother said. Her voice is cold. Like the house. Like the glass. Like his body.

“Hello, Mother.” He says softly, watching the blood-stained tiles spread across the room.

“Look at me, Alex.” Mother said.

He looked up. Mother’s eyes are blue. Blue like the sea. Blue like the sky. Blue like the flowers spread across the tiles. The blood-stained tiles.

“There we are.” She says, an empty smile on her lips. “Now, are you ready to begin?”

He feels cold. “Yes.”

“Excellent.” Mother says. “Peter?”

Peter is short and old and has been outside. He tracks dirt into the house and Mother throws a fit. Peter refuses to take him outside. He wants to kill Peter sometimes.

He enters the room dragging a body. The body is a young girl. She is small and has brown hair and is already bleeding.

Peter drops her in the center of the room, where the blood stain is at its thickest.

Mother looks at him. “Are you ready?”

“Yes.” he says back.

“Good.”

The girl wakes, gasping for air as she takes in the room she is held in. She stares at him with deep brown eyes. Brown like her hair. Brown like the dirt Peter tracks in from the outside. He is going to kill Peter.

“Begin.” Mother says.

He does.

The girl shrieks, back arching at the pain. Her hands claw against the floor, coating her fingers the thick, red substance.

The girl is crying. She is young and tiny. She is from the outside. He wants to be set free.

Blood begins to boil out of the girl's mouth, spilling onto the floor. Her eyes are wide and bloodshot and are about to burst.

He feels warm.