

# SELF



## INTRODUCTION

Moscow, spring 2020.

In this uncertain context of the pandemic, we would like to present to you a collection of character studies.

While millions of individuals and dozens of governments put human lives above their personal interests and comfort, we focused our attention on the transformation of a self-centred character during self-isolation.

In contrast with the subject of these studies, the authors joined their efforts to create a co-writing project based on their discussions about self-image and the new perspective caused by the pandemic and lockdown.

Read the chapters one after the other or follow the references at the end of each story.

## SUMMARY

Chapter 1 John Doe	3
Chapter 2 The Reason Katheryn Changed	7
Chapter 3 Lola	16
Chapter 4 Charles. What Is Left Behind the Door	23
Chapter 5 Eglantine	30
Chapter 6 Alicia Parker's Story	32
Chapter 7 John Binger	36
Chapter 8 Kira Davis	38
Chapter 9 Elizabeth	40
Chapter 10 Honstall	42

## Chapter 1. John Doe

24/03/2020 :

John Doe is one of these people that are insanely self-centered, especially during this unilluminated period, where everybody is obligated to be self-isolated and breath cramped air.

John Doe wakes up today like he used to and does his daily ritual: he wakes up at 8 AM, he prepares himself with the help of his four butlers, during something which takes around one hour and a half, then, his three Michelin stars awarded chef cooks him a breakfast composed of black caviar with eggs. Having finished his ritual, John looks through windows and does not see his driver. Outraged by that sight, he feels an angry pain flush to his brain: it is the first time someone has dared to miss his daily routine. Annoyed, he dropped himself on his leather sofa and switch on his TV to set the BBC. He saw that because of the COVID-19 everyone was bound for safety reasons to be self-confined he changed the TV channel and heard that in Moscow there was an extraterrestrial spaceship that has crashed. By hearing that, thinking it was just a huge hoax he turned off his TV and grabbed his smartphone and called one of his high placed friends in the political hierarchy that told him that it was impossible to cancel the self-isolation program. Hearing that he took his head between his hands and questioned himself about what he was going to do to show his wealthiness and his perfection to the world, and what he was going to do during all this period in his house. Well, he thought, this will only last a week, and that's it.

27/03/2020:

It has now gone four days since John has been confined and all we can say is that he wants to go outside to show himself to the others, and that every time he tries, his reason tells him to stop. During these four days, John tried to watch the TV, to read some books, to surf on the web but none of these hobbies could kill his egocentric desires. As he did not know how to cook given the fact that his four butlers did all he needed, he never really touched his kitchen, and didn't even dare to hold a knife to cut some meat. As the time went by, the desire of showing how prosperous he, and the desire of eating something struck him, and he started using food delivering services. But hunger wasn't his only reason to do this: he soon found out that by having the food delivered right to his front door, he was able to show his beauty again. This discovery made him great again, as he had finally found a solution to his problem. He was so delighted that ordered 10 different meals at once without seeing what he ordered. The fact that someone would see him, and his beauty was so exciting for him, that while waiting for the delivers, John was preparing himself without his butlers (something which was extremely difficult). After only twenty minutes he heard the doorbell ring and he rushed towards the door like a dog running for his food to open the door and hoping that the delivery man would be sublimated by his beauty. Unfortunately for him, he saw only his food in front of him with a little piece of paper, on which was written: «Hello, sir here is your food please leave the money on the stairs, I will take it after you have leaved , thank you for your understanding, have a great day». John didn't understand the situation. Where was the man? , it was his only hope, he was pretty confused, and suddenly, after a few minutes of waiting he heard a voice «Excuse me, sir, is everything alright». It was the delivery man, John answered him “NO, where are you? , I need to see you”. “Sir, are you okay” , the carrier answered, “do you need an emergency car, or maybe is there something wrong with the food?” . John answered angrily “No, no everything is okay, but can you come a little bit closer?” . “No sir I can't, we need to stay at a safe distance” , the deliver answered, “come on, just a little a closer”, said John in a desperate voice. “No, I won't”, said the carrier again, and he left. John ate and went to his bed sad of his defeat.

30/03/2020:

The next three days he tried to order more food to be able to see people but each time it was a failure, they refused to approach him. Bypassing so much time in his house he was starting to see things he had never noticed before. He discovered where the cellar, and the cupboard with the plates were located for example. He was starting to feel more and more lonely, he was progressively losing his mind, as he was even starting to miss the butlers he despised in the past, and each day was longer and longer than the previous one. The urge to go out grew stronger and stronger each day and each hour, and for this reason he decided to go out despite the law. This decision raised adrenaline in him, like a paratrooper who was getting ready to jump from a plane. He opened his door so violently that it almost broke. The fresh breeze that hit him in the face, which he had ignored before made him happy as he stepped over the doorstep like a man going out of prison after ten years. He took a large shutter of fresh air and walked through the city, he was never been this cheerful to see trees, flowers, birds! To see nature. Suddenly the sound of the birds was interrupted by the noise of high-pitched sirens, and he saw a police car approaching at full speed. For a second he thought that it was for a burglary or something else, but unfortunately for John, the police car stopped a few feet by him, a man opened the window and asked “Sir please may we see your certificate to go outside. If you don't have one, please go back to your home immediately”. John didn't understand what was happening to him, he wasn't a criminal, he was paying his taxes, he was a good citizen. So why on earth did the policemen want him. The policeman kindly replied “Sir, please go back to your home, we are in a quarantine period, no one has to go outside without an authorization” John was shocked: it was the first time that someone dared to give him orders, and he didn't know what to answer. He went back quietly at home and he was traumatized by this event, he didn't have success to sleep out the whole night.

02/04/2020:

During the days that followed he couldn't find the sleep, and when he succeeded, he had nightmares, John was having anxiety attacks and panic strikes the day, and nightmares the night. The madness was slowly by slowly reaching him, his state was slowly deteriorating, and each new day was worsen than the previous one. Insanity began to reach him, as each day and each night he was imagining people that would admire him. It was an obsession, depression and dementia were raising inside his body.

05/04/2020:

Now mad, John was having more than ever headaches, anxiety attacks and panic strikes. He had nightmares every night and to often he didn't even sleep, but more often than not, he was starting to have coughs, due by some sort of virus that John didn't know about because he never watched the news to see what were the symptoms of the virus that was ravaging all the countries on earth: the COVID-19. John was no longer John; he was another person. His habits, and his view of the world changed. The sense of some society had disappeared. Everything was different. If the John Doe of before the lockdown would meet the new John, devastated by madness and illness, the old one would push him away like rubbish.

08/04/2020:

During the following days, John has more and more coughs until he finally dies due to the virus. He died alone, mad, and ironically ugly because he couldn't take care of himself. The reason of his death is the following one: during his last food order, John wanted, as usual, to show his beauty to the delivery man, but unusually, this carrier didn't respect all the security rules. He talked with John in exchange of a few coins, but what John didn't know, is the fact that this man was infected, he was always talking with his clients, and by this way, he caught the virus. He transmitted the disease to

John by the same way. The morning after the small speech, John was feeling strange, his eyes were red and he had a lot of difficulties to speak, so he decided to go to the hospital, the worst place to be at that time. He called his driver so that he could bring him to the hospital, but the latter refused. John had more and more difficulties to breath and his vision was becoming lower and lower, so he decided to go to the hospital alone with the car of his driver (it was in the garage, that he had unfortunately discovered during one of these boring days) For him and his pride, calling an ambulance was unacceptable. Even if he didn't know how to drive, (it was the first time for him like it was the first time to cook), he was feeling so bad that he needed to go immediately to the hospital. 10 minutes later, John's neighbours called the police, they had heard a crash. It was a car, and it was John's. John was feeling so bad that his eyes could not see anything. He tried desperately to control his car, to drive properly through his alleyway. Once in the main street, he pushed the accelerator even further down, in order to get straight to the hospital, within the smallest laps of time. As he was trying to hold his eyes open with one hand, and driving with the other, he suddenly saw a kind of shadow, a man, crossing the road right in front of him. The man managed to turn his face against the car, in order to have it's position to avoid it, but it was too late: John heard a noisy bump, and he saw the shadow in question fly at least 10 meters up in the air. He was so surprised and astonished, that he didn't brake in the steep slope in the end of the street. Two seconds later, he had crashed his car in a cliff, with himself inside. Later, after the policeman had come to do an analysis of John Doe body, they learned that he was infected by the virus. This is how the story of John Doe ends, he was an egocentric and selfish man, he was always thinking that he was the most intelligent and the most beautiful man on earth, he wasn't nice with his driver, butlers and cook. The simple fact of staying at home killed him. John Doe wasn't able to live without the people he was always criticizing so the fact that he could not see them changed his thoughts and killed him.

To find out about the man who caused the accident, read chapter 4.  
Want to know what was on TV? Read chapter 9.

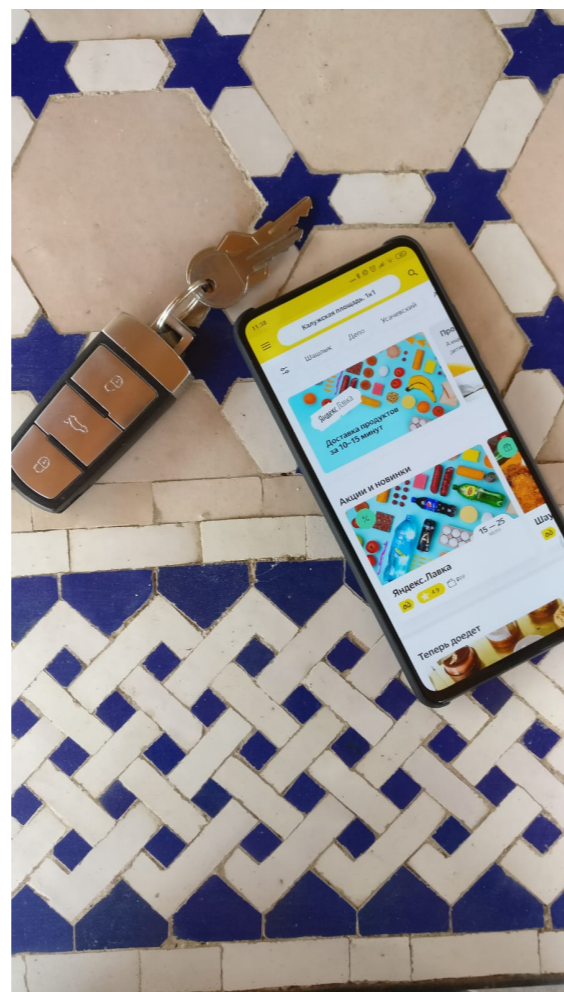


Photo by Emilio MELIS

## Chapter 2. The reason Katheryn changed

*I would have liked to sleep more this morning but hey I must be beautiful when I "wake up" for my followers. If it was up to me, I would gladly tell them to go elsewhere with their fake kindness. But hey I'm popular and I have an image to uphold. Oh, I guess I have math homework to do, but seriously, give me a break, I'm lazy and I'm too beautiful. This dirty work is for nerds, and that's precisely why a nerd will do it for me. Well I suppose I must tell my followers that I'm not single anymore, since I'm dating Matt. Yes, the hottest guy in high school, he's actually not my type but he's popular and that's what matters most, I guess. Here we go. I put a hypocrite smile on my face, take a picture and greet my followers in a story. Fortunately, this brings me money, otherwise I would have stopped a long time ago, since it's boring to act nice all the time. Well, I have to go to high school.*

Katheryn walked inside the school, ignoring the students that stood in her way and not hesitating to slightly shove them to the side if they didn't scuttle fast enough. She huffed in exasperation: *'who did they think they were, standing in her way like that.'* She quickly headed over to her friends, who were clustered around each other. Lola, a girl she had just met this year, hugged her lightly, trying not to disarray her hair in silent understanding. They then engaged in meaningless conversation about the latest clothes they had bought, only half-listening to each other. They still stood in the hallway, waiting for the last moment to join their classes. However, instead of being pushed around, they stood in a clear circle, some sort of invisible boundary separating them from the rest of the student body. Katheryn winked at her friends before heading to the bathroom. *'Ugh, it's so disgusting in here'*, she couldn't help but think. She carefully reapplied her makeup and fixed her golden-brown curls. She had carefully curled her hair this morning and was quite satisfied with the result. She had a reputation to uphold. When the first bell rang, she emerged out of the bathroom and distractedly noticed that her friends hadn't waited outside but had instead already left. She felt a slight pang at that but easily brushed it off. She headed to her class, readjusting her handbag along the way. As she opened the door to the classroom, she noted with a bit of relief that the teacher wasn't there yet. Although she could care about Literature less, getting a tardy or detention wasn't on her list. She had other places to be. However, her relief was short-lived when she noticed that her self-assigned desk was already occupied. A blonde girl with black-rimmed glasses was dutifully arranging her books and folders.

Katheryn inhaled slightly and the people who had turned towards her when she first stepped in were now looking at the blonde in pity. She slowly marched towards the girl and the buzzing in the classroom gradually faded. All eyes were on her. As the blonde turned around to see the reason for the sudden silence, two hands slammed on her desk, making her yelp in surprise. "I'm sorry, did I scare you?" Katheryn asked, in a sweet voice. "Oh no, it's alright" The girl managed to stammer out, looking at her with fear shining in her eyes. "I certainly hope it is because I'm sure there's been a misunderstanding somewhere." "Wha-what?" the blonde stammered out.

“Do you know where you’re sitting, girl? You’re sitting in my chair. *Mine.*”

“Oh-oh. I’m sorry, I had no idea. You-you see I need new glasses and I can’t see very well right now, so I needed to be close to the board. I hope-”

“Move.”

As Katheryn barked the word, she swiped her hand on the desk, making all the carefully placed papers scatter on the ground.

“And next time, I won’t be so tolerant you pathetic fool.”

The blonde hurried to the ground and slowly picked her papers up, soft sobs wracking her body.

As someone stepped forward to help her, Katheryn shot a withering glare in their direction, making them stop in their tracks.

The girl shuffled away, and Katheryn lowered herself on her chair, her eyes daring anyone to challenge her authority.

To her, they were like a pack of animals, and *she* was the Alpha.

This was far from abnormal. Katheryn had started bullying people last year and had soon become addicted to this feeling of power. She craved it, like a drug. It had all really started with Alicia Parker, this famous girl. She had been some sort of idol for Katheryn. Everyone admired her, girls felt jealous when she passed in the hallways, boys drooled over her perfect body. Katheryn secretly started analyzing her behavior towards others and now she was proud to say that she had become an even better person.

The door burst open at that exact moment and their Literature teacher hurriedly walked inside.

“Hello kids, how are you today? Did you have a nice weekend?”

“Yeah...” a few motivated kids muttered, while others ignored the question altogether.

“Well today we are going to study one of the most famous authors: Oscar Wilde. And we will begin with one of his stories: Dorian Gray.”

“Yay” one or two kids said, a bit of sarcasm shining through. “Open your book page 10, and Celina start reading please.”

Celina read and then they discussed about the book during the whole hour. The bell rung. Everyone stood up until Mrs. Collins said:

“Before you go, Celina will give you your essays from yesterday, and for your next one I want you to answer the question: “How did Dorian Gray express his anger and his feeling through the book”. 400 words minimum.

And Ms. Katheryn come to my desk please!”

Everyone left, leaving Katheryn alone in front of Mrs. Collins.

“Katheryn, your mark was quite terrible, and I know you are capable of. You are one of the most talented students in this class. Would you mind telling me what’s going on?” “Nothing. Absolutely nothing!”

“You know that the way you talk to others won’t help you make new friends. But tell me, why are you so rude to the students? If they have done something to you, I could help you.”

“I already said I’m okay. I can do whatever I want, and I seriously don’t need you sticking your nose in my business!”

Katheryn left the room in a hurry, slightly slamming the door in the process. Ms. Collins felt a bubble of sorrow for the girl. She seemed so lost and her talent was one that couldn’t be missed. The teacher vowed that she wouldn’t give up, no matter how many times she got rejected.

As the day passed, Katheryn’s mood didn’t improve. Her friends kept calling her “Kat” even though she had practically begged them not to, but apparently it was much more “fashionable” to them.

It seemed like the blonde from her first period appeared everywhere she went and to top it all off, she always cowered when Katheryn so much as entered the same room.

But it wasn’t like she cared. No, she didn’t care *at all*.

Still, it was with obvious relief that she left the school behind and got home. When she took her phone out and opened Instagram, she was surprised to see that most of the posts were about a certain virus.

It had been quite a few weeks since it had started, but today every account seemed to be focused on it. Katheryn frowned at that. *What was the big deal anyway?*

When she arrived in the driveway, she patted her pockets in search of her keys, before she remembered that her brother John had them.

It was in no way fair since he was two years younger than her, but her parents never really bothered with justice.

She let out an angry sigh and pressed the doorbell once.

When nobody answered she pressed it another time, and another, until she heard someone yell

“Coming!”

Her brother opened the door,

“Make a little more noise next time, will ya?”

Although it was meant as a joke, Katheryn glared at him and pushed her way in.

“Geez, what’s got you so moody?”

“I don’t want to speak to a pathetic loser like you John. Get out of the way.”

Her brother simply sighed. He didn’t even know why he expected a different outcome, when all she did was push the people around her away.

He raised his hands in mock surrender and said “Fine”, before leaving to his own room.

Katheryn felt a growing headache forming, so she quickly walked up the stairs to her room and flopped down on her bed.

She felt no desire to start her homework anytime soon, but she knew that she couldn’t get in trouble again, especially in English since she had shouted at the teacher.

It was honestly a surprise that she hadn’t gotten called to detention. Perhaps she should give her teacher more credit.

Katheryn stayed in the same position for a while, mulling over the events of the day. It hadn’t been very different from others, but she couldn’t help but think back to that blonde girl. Katheryn felt no remorse whatsoever, she was sure of that, but perhaps it was curiosity?

Had that girl seriously expected a different outcome? Everyone knew not to mess with her. She wasn’t one to forgive easily and people weren’t allowed to step out of line. She chose her friends carefully and they made a privileged inner circle.

Although these days it felt like she wasn’t really the center of that circle...

Katheryn jumped out of bed and checked her phone again. She was slightly taken aback by the number of new messages on it. And not just from her friends, but also from the entire class.

She nearly dropped her phone when she read the first messages. This had to be some sort of joke.

Lockdown?

Why would they be on lockdown. She was sure it was only some petty virus.

Did that mean... She quickly scrolled down, and her eyes widened in shock. No school??

She tried not to deal on what that meant for too long and instead shut her phone and rushed downstairs.

“JOHN!”

Although she didn’t like interacting with her family, this was for him as well. She watched as his head peeked over the staircase.

He smirked slightly,

“Oh, so now Missy wants to talk.”

She scowled at that,

“Hush up John. I have important news for you.”

“Well go on then. What is it?”

“Remember the virus we were talking about a few days ago?”

“Well yeah, get to the point.”

“I was getting there! So basically, we’re on lockdown and we can’t go out.”

He seemed shocked for a moment,  
“Wait. Does that mean what I think it means?”  
She rolled her eyes,  
“If you’re thinking that we can’t go to school, then yes that’s what it means.”  
He pressed his hand against his heart,  
“OH! MY! GOD!” he shrieked in a girly voice.  
She scowled at his antics and quickly rushed back inside her room.

*Finally, I just got home from high school and I can't take it anymore.  
It's always the same Ms. Collins still meddles with my life and ask me lots of questions. Apparently, she's worried that I'm not myself and blah blah blah.  
No, but I don't understand why she gets involved in my business and above all, does she even know who she's talking to? I have 3.4k followers and I'm sure that she doesn't even know what social media is.  
I swear people like that are beyond my understanding.*

It was approaching 7 pm. Her mother had arrived a while back. She had prepared dinner and was now shouting at the kids:

“The food is ready. Come down kids!”

Katheryn and her two brothers came down and sat. Her mother also sat and asked: “How was your day?”

John replied:

“My day was amazing since we don’t have school for the next two weeks or so. Can you believe it?”

“This is interesting. We could spend more quality time together as a family! Don’t you think?”

Katheryn?” her mother asked.

“Mm yeah. Fantastic.” she mumbled, disgust coating her words. “Why are you so rude Kate?” John asked her.

“Shut up. I can answer the way I want to.” Katheryn growled back “Katheryn be careful with your words. John is your brother. PLEASE.”

“Mom you don’t know how I feel. You think everything is fine, God you were always so oblivious. You do not know me. You were never there when I needed you, so why start now? I’m DONE here.”

Kat left the table without saying another word. She had been rude to everyone that day, at school and at home, especially to her mother who simply wanted to spend time with her. However, she could barely get herself to care. A certain numbness washed over her. She didn’t care about their opinion or their feelings. She didn’t care about *anything*.

She went into her room and slammed the door, sending a clear message to anyone who might have wanted to follow her.

She sat on her bed, took her diary out and started writing.

*My mother doesn't understand anything, and it annoys me more than everything else. She's an old lady and she thinks she knows more about technology than any of us. Seriously, instead of yelling at me because I spend too much time on my phone, she should take care of her wrinkles.*

*I actually earn money with my phone and I'm popular. She should feel honored that a person like HER gets to talk to a person like ME.*

*I honestly shouldn't get angry because it will damage my face like hers.*

*Who am I kidding? She didn't even do anything tonight.*

*I suppose I should explain the reason I'm like this. During my middle school years, we didn't live here, we were in another city. We moved because of my father's work but also because I was being bullied. From 7th grade to the end 8th grade, I was sick. I suffered from a lung disease. I spent so much time in the hospital that I did distance schooling or when I was lucky, at home.*

*It was hard to take distance classes and I didn't have any friends to help me...*

*Fortunately, I had surgery and from that moment on I thought all my misfortunes were coming to an end... However, they had just begun.*

*When I went back to school everything had changed: before having elastic bracelets in the shape of animals was considered fashionable, as well as talking about DS games and doing sleepovers. But when I got back, it was all out of date.*

*The girls wore makeup and went to parties with alcohol behind their parents' backs, wearing elastic bracelets was frowned upon, and having a DS was like having a typewriter, everyone had a phone now.*

*So, when I came back, I was years late and I wasn't exactly following "fashion trends".*

*I was quickly sidelined, and I found myself alone most of the time. In itself it did not bother me too much since I had always been alone. But it didn't stop there.*

*I was the 'fake-sick girl', the 'liar', the 'one who had an imaginary sickness'. Yes, everyone was certain I had only pretended to be sick.*

*I was bullied: people stole my lunch, shoved me in the corridors, made fun of me every opportunity they got, and if I didn't want to go home with bruises on my face I had to do their homework.*

*But my parents never saw it, they had already spent too many years looking after me. Now my brothers came first. I started to shut down on myself, I stopped eating, and disappeared a little more.*

*But one night, my parents announced that we were moving. It was a glimmer of hope for me. I had the end of the year and the summer holidays to change.*

*And believe me, I've changed. I installed all of the trendy apps and social media, changed my wardrobe and completely changed my personality because that's how I was going to crush the others and not be the one that got run over.*

*I took a liking to my popularity, I lied about my past to be popular and I became Kat, the girl with 3.4k followers. I'm pretty proud of myself, I'm the most beautiful and loved in high school so my life is perfect. Well my family is not perfect, but I catch up with my perfection.*

Katheryn scowled at herself in the mirror. She wasn’t a coward and she wasn’t going to let this stupid lockdown make her go all soft. She couldn’t believe she had written all of this in her diary last night. She was ready to make the most of this day.

It was Tuesday and she still had to attend her classes through online meetings.

Katheryn stared at the ceiling up ahead. She had expected to be satisfied that it was finally Saturday. But she had instead been laying in this position for the past hour because she was *bored*. What was she supposed to do? Her friends had gradually stopped replying to her messages throughout the week, which was strange, since she knew that they were always on their phones. Honestly, so was she and most of the teenagers these days.

She had actually tried to read a blog, what was it called, Honstall? Katheryn had sincerely hoped that it would give her ideas for her own account since she realized that finding topics to speak of and keep her followers interested was getting harder each and every day. Although it hadn’t been a very great source of inspiration, she had still recommended it to her followers, most of them eager to see how others were faring. She hadn’t gone past ‘day 5’ of the blog yet.

She was tempted to go downstairs and see what her family was doing, since she could hear laughter, but she quickly pushed the thought away.

They wouldn’t even want her there.

However, she had always had a soft spot for her younger brother Michael and that’s why she headed towards his room.

She hesitated in knocking before scoffing at the idea. Since when did she care about being polite? This week of lockdown was seriously starting to affect her.

Even though she would have liked to barge into the room, like she had a habit of doing, she gently opened the door.

Her heart melted at the sight in front of her. Her seven-year old brother was in his blue pajamas and had

fallen asleep while doing his math. She could relate, because seriously: who didn't feel like falling asleep while doing math?

But what she found funniest was that his left cheek was smudged in ink, since he had forgotten to close his fountain pen.

Katheryn softly walked in his direction before nudging him awake.

She watched his blue eyes flutter open as he stared up at her in confusion.

"Katycat?"

Although she had first been mad at the nickname, she had gradually accepted it, since it came from her little brother.

She might have been mean to everyone, but he held a special spot in her heart.

"Yup, that's me. Now Mickey, why are you drooling all over your homework? Shouldn't you be having breakfast right now?"

He yawned before fully raising his head,

"I probably should, but Mom forgot to wake me up, I guess."

Katheryn frowned. Their mom never forgot to wake Michael up. Although it was hard to admit. Their mom treated him like a little prince, and she wouldn't let him out of her sight for more than a couple minutes at a time.

"Well then, I think you should go down there. I heard that Mom made waffles." His eyes immediately brightened up,

"Seriously? Yay!"

He bolted for the door but stopped in his tracks when he noticed that she wasn't following. Her gaze was fixed on a family photo that he had placed on the wall, above his bed.

It showed all five of them at the beach. Michael was barely two years old back then, and Katheryn hadn't known about her sickness.

Everything had been so close to perfect. John was making a silly face, but the picture practically radiated happiness.

So much, that she had an urge to rip it from the wall.

"Hey! Are you coming or not?"

Michael brought her out of her reverie. She hesitated,

"I'm not that hungry, Michael. Go down, I'll just go back to my room." His lips turned down in disappointment.

"You know, Mom isn't that mad about the other night."

As he said this, he bolted down the hallway and Katheryn could clearly hear his thundering footsteps as he reached the kitchen.

She sighed. *What was happening to her?* She would never have gone and woken Michael up on a normal day, and although he hadn't noticed, she had called him "Mickey", which she hadn't done in years.

She took a deep breath before heading back to her room. This was only an accident; her façade most certainly wasn't failing her.

Little "accidents" as Katheryn liked to call them seemed to happen more and more often. She strangely found herself drawing with Michael, playing video games with John and even going as far as playing soccer with her father and brothers in their garden.

The fact that her friends were ignoring her didn't bother her as much as it should have, and any outsider would have noticed that she spent much more time with her family.

Well, not exactly. Although, she now watched films with her father and brothers, she pointedly ignored her mother.

It was some sort of odd feeling inside of her. When she was sick, her mother had always been there at her bedside, if there was one person she had entirely relied on, it was her mother. Perhaps, being the only girls in the house had been the reason why they had always been so close.

But when Katheryn had come home with bruises and her mother had accepted all her lies, it had felt like a betrayal. What others must have felt with their sisters, she had felt for her mother.

Perhaps she was in the wrong. After all she had lied.

But she was certain that her mom would know who hurt her. So, when her mom joked about her being clumsy in front of friends, when her mother had been oblivious to the fact that her daughter was slowly sinking into depression, growing invisible walls around herself, Katheryn felt that it was the worst betrayal.

She felt so much more pain when her mother would smile and joke about her, than when she received the punches of her bullies.

Perhaps she should have spoken up. But by the time she wanted to, a rift had formed between her and her mom.

Conversation after that became awkward. They didn't know what to say to each other. And honestly?

Katheryn wasn't really trying.

She was persuaded that her popularity was enough to replace her mom, and so were her friends.

And now, even though her relationship with her brothers and her father was slowly mending, the one with her mother made close to no progress. When her mom entered a room, Katheryn felt an urge to leave.

If the rest of her family noticed her strange behavior, no one said anything.

One day however, a few weeks into lockdown, her mother approached Katheryn. As she prepared herself to leave, her mother spoke up,

"No, Katheryn. Please stay."

Katheryn froze. She wanted nothing more than to run far away at that moment, but a minuscule part of her was begging to stay, to hear her mother out.

So, she stayed.

"Katheryn, my dear. I don't know if you realize how much it hurts to see you run away each time I so much as try to approach you. And I may not be as oblivious as you think I am, it's been more than a couple of years since you haven't outwardly spoken to me."

Her mother took a big shaky breath before continuing,

"You were always my baby girl, my little warrior. Tell me, what made you change? What made us change?"

Two glistening tears rolled down her face. Katheryn turned around to face her mom, and she saw much pain depicted in those eyes. Those green eyes so similar to her own. It had been so long since Katheryn had stared her mother directly in the eyes.

When her mother noticed the tears pooling from her eyes, she carefully spread her arms, silently inviting her daughter.

Katheryn stared at her mother for a second longer, before gently embracing her.

The hole had been breached. Katheryn took a breath to steady herself and told her mother everything.

It felt as though a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. She sagged in relief.

Perhaps things weren't going to be so bad after all.

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*Before the lockdown I would never have thought that I would be tired of the fact that my "followers" are interested in the Kate with 3.4k followers and not the real Kate.*

*But these days, it feels like I have too much time to think. I feel like I have to move away from social media to feel better and I must say that it feels good to focus only on myself. And I'm able to spend time with my family. Finding my family and mending the bridges has done me good, and I was able to actually discover passions, like drawing clothes. I want to make it my profession later.*

*I've become aware of my mistakes in the past. Like bullying this girl who had cried later on. I'll have to apologize for what I did when we go back to school. I feel terrible. I've been in her place I know how it feels.*

*I want to change but this time, I want to become someone kind and on whom people can count. Social media is over for me, I will only use it for my real friends, not to gain unnecessary friends or money.*

*Speaking of friends, mine have not spoken to me at all, it makes me a little sad but hey it's not like I've been a*

good friend either.

*This whole story actually gave me inspiration for the essay given by Ms. Collins. I really think she's the only one who saw that I wasn't myself; she's also the only one who believed in me, I'll have to thank her and apologize for hurting her.*

*Well, I'll stop writing because my brothers are waiting for me to play the Wii downstairs. Just one thing: this lockdown has opened my eyes and shown me the important things in life, and I do not intend to go back to the way it was before.*

Cheers, Katycat. ———

Katheryn played with her brothers and had fun. She was happy, finally realizing that life was worth it. All in all, the days of the quarantine had gone by. It was finally Sunday night and tomorrow Katheryn would start school again. She was quite excited to go back to school to make friends, see her teacher Mrs. Collins and apologize to her for her rude behavior. She was also excited for the essay she had prepared for her...

It was past eleven. It was time to go to bed. She prepared her backpack, tidied her desk and had already decided her outfit for tomorrow. While she was putting her last notebooks into the bag, her mother entered the room.

"Katheryn, is everything alright?"

"Yes, Mom. Everything is ready for tomorrow! It's going to be so weird to finally breathe the fresh air outside. Although I won't lie, I'm a little bit scared."

Her mother still had a hard time keeping the smile off her face every time her daughter spoke to her.

"Don't worry baby girl, time has gone by. I'm sure everyone will be delighted to see you, once they see how much you've changed, especially that teacher. However, worrying about tomorrow isn't going to make it come faster so I think you have to go to bed."

"I hope you're right Mom. Good night."

"Goodnight, and don't forget that you're much stronger than you think, my little warrior".

Katheryn tried to calm her nerves and focused on enjoying the new, yet fragile relationship they shared. She couldn't lie and say that she hadn't missed her mother more than anything.

-----  
The next day had come. She woke up, ate breakfast, dressed up, and went to school with the biggest smile she could muster.

She wanted to find the girl who she had been rude to and had made fun of. She found her in front of the lockers and apologized to her. Although conversation was awkward at first, Katheryn soon found out that the girl, Emily, was kind and funny. They immediately got along.

She dreaded the moment she would have to speak to her friends, since quarantine had made her realize that they weren't true friends. It didn't matter to her. She was happy to have found a friend that she knew she would be always there for her.

Surprisingly, her friends reacted well to the fact that she had changed during the lockdown and understood the reason why she felt that they couldn't really hang around each other anymore, Lola more so than the others. Perhaps she wasn't the only one who had changed...

Perhaps one day they would forget about the past and become friends. Until that day, Katheryn was satisfied with knowing that she was forgiven. It was more than she could have ever asked for.

The bell rung. They entered Mrs. Collins lesson. They read each other's essays and continued Dorian Gray's analysis. The bell rung, signaling break. Everyone quickly went outside. Katheryn stayed in class. She wanted to apologize to her teacher, so she went in front of her desk, took a deep breath and said: "I am sorry Ms. Collins for the ways I spoke to you whenever you were trying to help. I was rude and impolite, but in quarantine I realized that I didn't have to be like this. Thank you for believing in me and for your advice. I can't even begin to express how much I'm grateful for your presence."

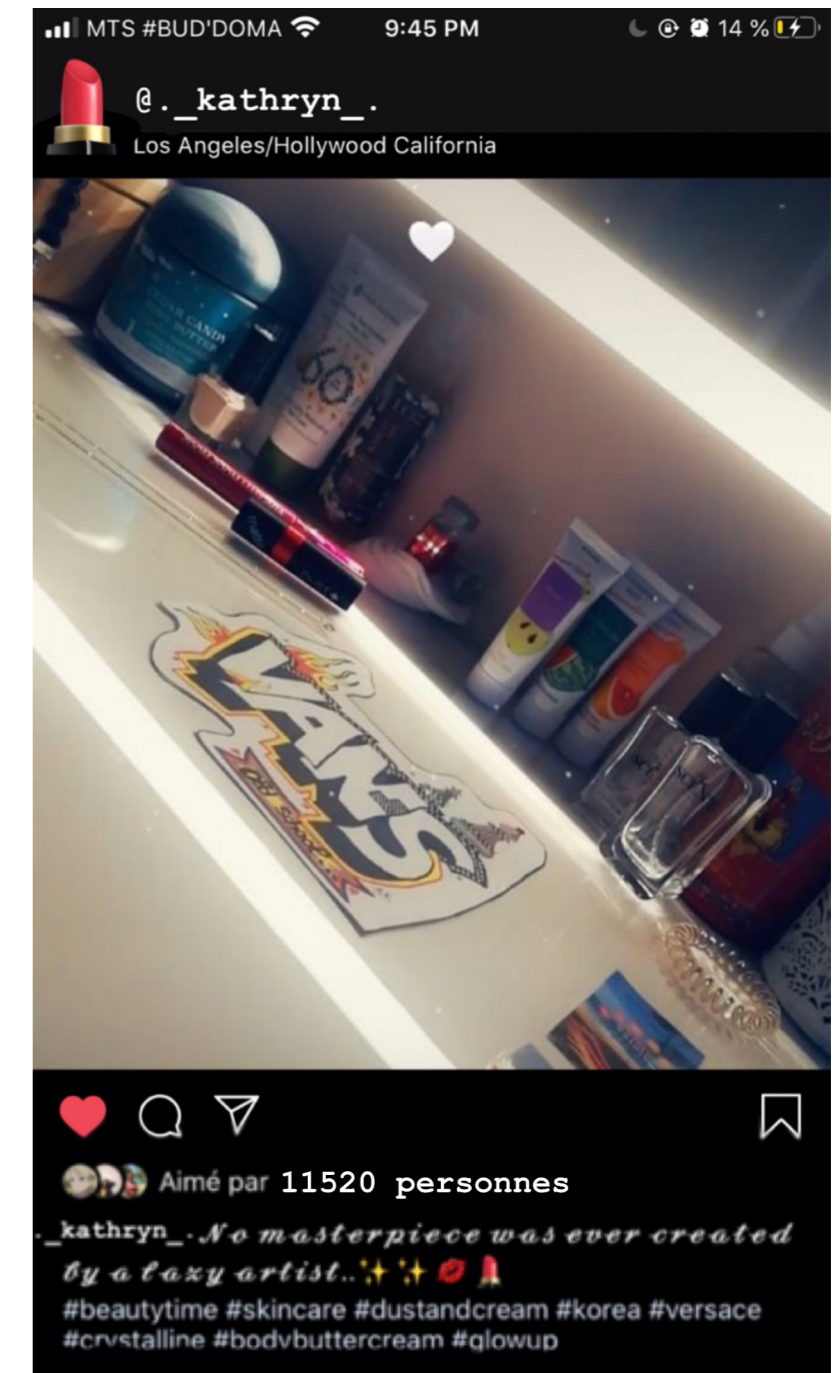
"I am glad you are feeling better now. Your essay today showed me that I was right in seeing your talent

all along. Enjoy your break, I can see someone waiting for you."

Katheryn was satisfied with the outcome of the day; she had fixed her past mistakes as much as she possibly could. Although she was ashamed of what she had done in her past, it had served as a lesson. No matter what happens, we must not let the bad situations take us down. We mustn't be ashamed to seek help and find comfort in others, instead of locking ourselves in. So, like Katheryn, if you ever need to talk, just know, there is always someone there for you, and you should never feel the need to change who you are in order to satisfy the people around you. Embrace who you are,

Cheers,

THE END



Do you want to find out if Lola changed during the lockdown? Read Chapter 3. To find out more about Katheryn's idol, Alicia Parker, read Chapter 6. If you are interested in that blog that Katheryn read at the beginning of the lockdown, read Chapter 10 - Honstall.



## Chapter 3. Lola

### DAY 1

As Lola Evans woke up on the first day of lockdown, she didn't panic quite as much as most teenagers did. She stayed in bed for a while, waiting for her dad, Joseph, to burst into her room with breakfast. He'd always do that when he'd been on a long trip. He'd come in with pancakes, humming, glad to get some time with his daughter.

But after half an hour, Lola still hadn't heard him and the phone started ringing. She stood up grumpily and dragged herself to the kitchen.

"Who even uses the landline anymore?"

Her mother did. Karen Green lived in Costa Rica with her French boyfriend, Pablo, and they probably didn't own mobile phones.

"Hi sweetie, are you alright?"

"Hi Mom. To what do I owe the pleasure? It's kind of 7 am..."

"I know but your dad just called." She sighed: "He's stuck in China."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, because of the lockdown. Will you be okay all alone? I could send someone to check on you..."

"Stupid lockdown", Lola mouthed silently. She went to check her dad's bedroom. It was empty.

"I'll be alright. How are you and Pablo doing?" She didn't really care.

"We're great. Since we've moved here from Paris, things have been a bit hectic. All we've been waiting for is a vacation."

Lola could sense that her mom was smiling. For some reason, that hurt her.

"Ok, great, mom. I've got to go, I'll call you back."

Lola hung up the phone and exhaled loudly. Stupid lockdown, stupid mom and stupid Pablo.

Why hadn't her dad called her?

She went to the bathroom to shower and do her make-up. It usually soothed her.

She put on her blue contacts - brown eyes were terribly boring- and thought about the situation. She was capable of taking care of herself, her dad was hardly ever there. But she would be lonely without her friends.

"It's ok", she thought, "I still have my phone, I can just text them."

She exhaled and put on her fake eyelashes. Then, she contoured her face. It was chubby, in a cute way, but she didn't like it. There was not much Lola liked about herself. And yet, all she could think about most days was herself.

After doing her make-up, Lola was forced to face her own boredom. She'd ordered groceries the day before and the cleaning lady had come three days ago. There wasn't much that she needed to do. She couldn't even call her mom, she'd hung up on her half an hour ago. She decided to look inside her secret box. Her dad had given it to her when she was nine, to put all the photos and memories worth keeping. Lola opened the box and went through the papers. She was disappointed. She had a lot of pretty pictures of herself but not much more. She suddenly felt like her childhood had been terribly empty.

"Maybe mom has the rest", she whispered.

She kept looking, hoping that she would at least find her diary. She had kept it when she was eleven as a training to become a writer. She chuckled. She sure had things to say. And she was talented, you couldn't deny it. The more she thought about it, the more Lola liked the idea. She stood up, closed the box and went looking for her computer. She opened a Word document and started typing:

"Lockdown diary"

There was her occupation for the next few days.

"Dear diary,

Because of covid19, it looks like I'm going to be writing to you a lot.

My name is Lola Evans and I'm 16.

My mom lives in Costa Rica with a French guy named Pablo. My dad lives with me in London but he's stuck in China right now because of the covid-19 pandemic, and I'm alone at home. It really sucks. I had plans for this month, I wanted to have a vintage photo shoot with my closest friends. Their names are Nellie and Amy. Nellie is whiny and sometimes, I wonder if she's stupid, but she's gorgeous, so everything is easy for her. Amy is...well, she's the most boring person I've ever met, it's like she has no personality. I hang out with her because she's friends with the older students, so we get invited to parties. I know that sounds kind of wrong, but you mustn't think that I'm a bad person! I make the most out of what I have. Right or wrong are very abstract notions, you can't just try to be a good person all the time. You have to make things work for yourself."

Satisfied with how she'd expressed her philosophy, Lola closed the document and ignored the feeling of emptiness in her stomach. She decided it was time to call her dad.

"Lola?"

"Hey dad. Why'd you call mom instead of me this morning?"

"Well, I didn't want to wake you. It's only 8 am in London, right?"

"FYI, mom kind of did that for you. When will you be back?"

"I have no clue, honey, the pandemic started here so people aren't allowed to leave. All official flights to London were cancelled for the next few days. I think I won't be back before a week at least."

"It's ok, I get it. Is Tessa coming next week?" Tessa was the cleaning lady.

"I don't think so, sweetheart, she's staying home as well. We can't ask her to endanger her health just to dust off our shelves."

"Well, so...I have to do it?"

"Yes. That's just how it is, sweetie, we all have to make concessions. Oh, and by the way, I'll put money on your credit card for groceries."

"Alright. Bye."

"Bye honey."

Lola hung up. This was all very annoying. Her dad wouldn't be back in a long time. And she was going to have to clean the apartment herself. Not to mention the grocery shopping, the cooking...

Not once did the thought of people dying cross her mind.

That was Lola: she was absorbed with herself and the rest didn't matter. But can we really blame her?

After all, we all have that trait, no matter how much we try to repress it, and her first morning of lockdown hadn't been easy.

### DAY 2

Lola was making breakfast at 12 am. She had decided that she was going to sleep a lot to avoid doing anything else. She had already skipped two online classes but she didn't really care.

"It's just science", she said out loud. "It's not like I'm the next Einstein."

She threw some bread in the toaster and sat down. For some reason, she felt tired having done absolutely nothing. She texted Nellie.

"hey, how u doing?"

Nellie was fast to answer. "Well, she really has no life", sighed Lola.

"Don't talk to me."

Lola frowned. Since when could Nellie read minds?

“What? Why?”

“Well, I don’t know. Why would you want to talk to an idiot who complains all the time? Isn’t that what you told Amy?”

Lola hit her forehead. Why in the world had she trusted Amy?

“Of course not, honey. I would never!”

“Except you did. You’re heartless, Lola, I don’t understand why you’d pretend to be my friend.”

Lola wanted to reply but the conversation disappeared. Nellie had blocked her.

Lola was lost. What had she done wrong? People weren’t supposed to ally against her.

Lola didn’t see that Amy had talked to Nellie out of empathy, a feeling that she had hardly ever experienced.

So she wiped away her tears – heartless was a painful word – and whispered :

“It’s alright. They don’t deserve you.”

Perhaps she knew, deep down, that it was the other way around.

#### DAY 3

Lola had spent all day cleaning the apartment. She felt better.

Even though cleaning was strangely soothing, she was still angry with Amy and Nellie. Of course, they hadn’t done anything wrong, but being mad at them was easier than questioning her own behaviour.

She opened her “Lockdown diary”.

“Dear diary,

I had a fight with my friends. I don’t think our friendship is going to recover from this. It wasn’t very solid to begin with, and now that they know what I think of them, they’re not going to want to make efforts.

They’re so selfish! Just because of their stupid pride, I’m going to spend lockdown alone, with no one to talk to. Well, not no one, there’s still Katheryn. I didn’t tell you about her because we’re not that close. She’s a bit mean sometimes.”

Lola read her entry again and felt like an idiot. This whole situation was nobody’s fault but hers. She dropped on the couch and hid her face with her hand. Was she a bad person? And why did it matter now?

Lola was suddenly aware of who she was becoming.

“I need to talk to mom”, she sobbed.

She dialled the number and prayed silently that her mother would answer. She needed her.

“Honey? Is everything alright?”

Lola sighed in relief. Thank God, she could drop a little bit of the weight on someone else’s shoulders.

“Not really. You remember Nellie?”

Lola talked and Karen listened silently. When her daughter was finished, she exhaled.

“Oh darling...I wish I was here to hug you.”

“I know, mom. But what do I do now?”

“Well, you’ve got to apologize to Nellie. You two probably won’t be friends after this, but maybe you’ll let go of the hard feelings. And then...you’ll have to start over, Lola, change the way you think. This has to happen now, while you’re still a teenager. You can become better.”

“Okay. I- Thanks mom.”

“You’re welcome honey. It’ll be alright, I love you.”

“Me too”, Lola muttered. She meant it.

#### DAY 4

On the fourth day, Lola’s head was full of her mum’s words. She had to become better. And she would start by facetimeing Nellie. She had tried to write a letter but she figured her friend would like it better face to face.

“Nellie?”

“What do you want?”

Nellie looked hostile, as people often do when they feel hurt. Lola knew that a little too well.

“Please listen. You don’t have to forgive me. I was horrible to you. I don’t even have an excuse...I just, I...”

Nellie sighed.

“It’s okay, Lola. I just wish you would’ve made the effort to listen to us. How else would you know if we’re interesting? I’m not even angry that you gossiped about me. I just think you never cared enough in the first place.”

Lola was outraged:

“Come on now, Nellie! I wasn’t that bad of a friend! Maybe you two didn’t listen to me either! ”

“Oh please, Lola, it was all we did. You don’t know how to talk about anything but yourself. I’m almost glad that we have a reason to ditch you.”

“I-I...You can’t just say stuff like that. But...I don’t care. I really don’t care. I’m just going to find friends who appreciate me.”

“Alright, Lola. Go ahead.”, Nellie said in a tired voice. She wanted to help, she really did, but Lola was too hard to deal with.

Lola hung up, still in rage. She had done the right thing, and somehow, Nellie hadn’t forgiven her. Worse, she didn’t even care if Lola was hurt. Maybe her mom was wrong. She shouldn’t have apologized.

She went to the kitchen to cook. She put on music and started making scrambled eggs. She wasn’t hungry, but it would keep her head busy for a while. As she was stirring, the phone started ringing.

“Ugh”, Lola thought, “People never call at the right time.”

She deliberately ignored it, but the caller was persistent. He (or she) called two more times and left a message.

“Lola, it’s Nana. I know you’re there, you sneaky child. For God’s sake, call me back, I am terribly bored. Bye, love.”

Lola exhaled. She didn’t have the strength to listen to Nana. The woman was overly enthusiastic, whatever she was talking about. Lola’s mom found it “refreshing”, but her daughter couldn’t stand it. She decided to keep cooking and pretend she was asleep. Afterwards, she ran back to her room and opened the “Lockdown diary”. She was starting to think of it as almost a friend, or at least something that made her feel slightly better.

“Dear diary,

Do you know that feeling that weighs you down? It’s guilt. I’ve felt it before, I just didn’t understand it, but now I do. I still think that Nellie was mean today, but I’ve been mean to her so many times in the past...

And I think she may have been right.

This is hard, you know? It's like I'm taking my soul, erasing it all because it's worth nothing, and starting over from scratch. What if I can't do it? What will I do, then?"

The phone started ringing again. Secretly hoping it was her dad, Lola picked up.

"Finally! I thought you were dead!"

Nana was very excited to have someone to talk to. Lola, on the other end, was pretty disappointed.

"Hi, Nana. How are you?"

"Pretty great, dear. Lockdown isn't quite as bad as I had planned. I garden, I bake and I get to call all the people I haven't called in years."

"Is that why you're calling me?"

"No, your mum told me you were alone. I wanted to make sure you were okay."

Lola smiled a little. She was surprisingly glad to hear her grandmother. Nana was perhaps a bit too eager but a warm voice was much needed at the moment.

"I was worried, you know. Your cousin Kira is alone as well and she's not doing great. She lost all her Instagram followers."

"Instagram, Nana. But it's strange, I remember her being quite popular..."

"Well, don't get me wrong, I love Kira, but I'm not sure she had that many things to say. Maybe people want real distractions now. Anyway, how are you?"

"Well, I've started writing in my diary again."

"That's fabulous, dear! You used to want to be a writer, remember?"

"Yeah, I do. I was passionate, wasn't I?"

"For sure. You would make a great author, you know? You have a fantastic imagination."

"You think so, for real?"

"Of course, honey. What happened to that novel you had started?"

"Oh, I remember that! I think mum has it. I gave it to her as a present when she left."

"Well, ask her to send you a photo, and finish it! That'll be a great occupation."

After a bit more talking, Nana went to make herself some lunch. Lola was pleasantly surprised. She could see now what her mum had meant with "refreshing". When you actually participated in the conversation, talking to Nana was quite enjoyable. And she thought Lola had a "fantastic imagination". That was a nice thing to hear, especially when you were questioning everything about yourself.

Lola decided to write a new diary entry.

"Dear diary,

I've come to realize that Nana is not that annoying after all. She said sweet things to me and the joy in her voice made me feel much better. It's crazy to see how happy a single conversation can make you feel. I wonder: If warm people can make you feel so great, how much do mean people impact your mood? And to think I've been purposely mean for years to the people around me...I think I've ruined a lot of happy days for them. Being nice isn't that easy, it takes effort. But I can see why it's worth it."

Afterwards, Lola closed the diary, made herself an avocado toast and listened to music. She wasn't worthless, she understood that now. She certainly had a bad side, but a good side as well. It was her call, which one she wanted to be.

Slightly reassured, Lola stood up and went to her dad's bedroom. She took off her socks and sweater and

slipped into the covers. Her dad's bed was always warm even when he wasn't there. It was silly, but Lola could feel his presence, almost as if he was hugging her. She stuffed her head in the pillow and realized she wasn't wearing make-up.

"Huh.", she smiled, "That's progress."

Of course, make-up itself wasn't wrong. But feeling forced to look her best when she was alone at home had been a bit of a strange behaviour.

The phone started ringing. Lola had heard this sound so many times in the last few days that she wondered whether she was imagining it. Luckily, she wasn't. Her mum was calling again.

"Hi honey, I just wanted to check in with you. How's the change coming along?"

"It's alright, I think. I am starting to appreciate things in a different way. Nana's blabbering this morning was refreshing!"

"Well that's great! I'll be honest, I didn't think you'd find it this easy."

"I don't, mum, it's not easy. I just hope I'm doing good."

"Oh, sweetheart. You are doing good. Just the fact that you seem invested in this conversation shows me just how great you're doing."

"That's really nice, mum. I miss you."

"Me too, honey." Karen's voice broke a little. "I have a question I'd like to ask you."

"Sure, go ahead."

"Are you ever angry at me? For leaving?"

Lola stayed quiet for a minute. What was she supposed to say?

"Yeah, sometimes. I know your situation required selfishness, but still, it hurts to know you chose Pablo over us."

"I didn't, Lola, please don't say that. I chose Pablo over your dad because I was happier with him. I didn't choose Pablo over you. You're still my one and only daughter and I love you, so, so much."

"What'll happen when you have another one?"

"If that happens, which I don't think it will, then I'll love you both equally. You know that, Lola."

"How can you love us both equally if she's with you and I'm at the other end of the world?"

"The love of a mother can resist anything, sweetie."

"Right."

Lola had closed up again. Karen sighed and said quietly:

"Please Lola, don't be like that. You can be angry but at some point, you have to forgive me."

"Easy for you to say, what do you have to forgive?"

Karen chuckled.

"A lot of things, some even worse than what I did to you. But I don't want to die alone and full of spite, and to keep some people around, you have to accept that they'll hurt you some day and be ready to forgive them. Do you understand?"

"I do.", Lola muttered. "But being a good person is seriously challenging."

"Oh yes. But if you're not, what's the point?"

"I know. Thanks for the talk, mum."

"You're welcome, honey."

"And it's ok that you left.", Lola said quietly, so quietly in fact, that her mum didn't hear it.

Then, she hung up the phone and wiped away a single tear from her eye. So...good people were at peace with their past? Huh.

She made herself dinner and went to sleep in her dad's bed.

DAY 5

As Lola woke up the next day, she heard dishes clattering in the kitchen. She held her breath, stood up and looked for a sharp object. She was not going to let someone rob her, not after everything she'd been through. She snuck into the kitchen, a golden lamp in her right hand.

The intruder was standing there, his back facing her. He was...making pancakes?

"Lola, finally!"

"Jesus, dad! I was about to knock you out!"

"Well, I didn't know you missed me that much..."

"Ha-ha. When did you get back, and why in the world didn't you tell me?"

"The Chinese government put me on a plane with other British citizens. I left as soon as possible, but it was 2am here. I couldn't call you in the middle of the night.

Anyway, care for a pancake?"

"Have I ever not cared for a pancake?"

Joseph chuckled and put two in his daughter's plate. He kept the third one for himself and sat down.

"So...How were those four days alone?"

Lola smiled and put down the lamp. This was going to take a while.

If you'd like to know more about Kira, Lola's formerly popular cousin, read chapter 8.

As for her mean friend Katheryn, she will be described in chapter 2.



Illustration by Anna GUEGAN

## Chapter 4. What is left behind the door

It all started on an early spring morning when Charles took the car out of his garage. The car created and moved slowly. By the look of the automobile, it was clear that it had not been used for months. For the last time Charles thought about cancelling the meeting, but mentally rejected this option. He resigned himself to the upcoming event and forced himself to press the gas.

The road was almost empty. Only passers-by walked slowly along the sidewalk. Noticing his neighbors passing near the car, Charles smiled broadly and waved to them. When the family went out of sight, he straightened up, and his face again became emotionless.

«Annoying little people...» - smirked young man straightening his golden hair.

Such mood swings that happened regularly affected his face a little bit. They were expressed by pallor of the skin and a cold look, which were the only flaws of his beautiful appearance. Charles's green eyes perfectly accentuated his fair hair and white, almost transparent skin, but something dark was hiding in them.

He was driving fast, gripping the steering wheel tightly.

«The sooner it starts, the faster it will end... The result justifies the means».

A spark of cunning flashed across his face.

«It takes only a little patience. This woman is definitely more interesting than everyone else is».

He was thinking about his aunt Ann. The old lady lived alone in a huge cottage in the countryside. Her father disappeared back in 1965. Last month she invited Charles and other relatives to her birthday. The young man did not communicate with his mother's sister for years, but after receiving an invitation, he decided to visit her for some reason.

There were fewer and fewer urban houses, trees and cottages slowly replaced them. The car rode out of town.

«I wonder what she looks like... Most likely the same wrinkled and scraggy. It must be that she continues to consider herself a psychologist and read her stupid books».

To distract himself from thoughts, Charles turned on the radio. He was surprised to hear that the broadcasting was paused because of an urgent news announcement. A reporter's voice came from the speaker:

«... Due to the rapid spread of the yet unknown virus, a state of emergency is being introduced in the country. The government announced the introduction of compulsory quarantine. From today, it is forbidden to leave home and go outside without the need. Violators will be fined. Until a vaccine for the virus is found and the spread of the virus stops, everyone should stay inside...»

«No way!»

But it was too late to go back: his aunt's house was already visible in the distance.

Charles nervously rubbed his forehead.

His aunt was already standing in the yard. The gates creaked and opened.

Anne and Charles stopped in front of each other, not knowing what to do: they were too close for the usual formal greeting and had not seen each other for too long for a hug. Finally, Ann came a few steps

closer and held out her hand. Charles held out his hand in response. From childhood, he hated touching, except for those that were initiated by him.

“Hello, Charlie.” Ann smiled affably.

“Ann! I am so glad to see you! - Charles portrayed the most sincere smile of all that he was capable of.»

“Have you heard the news?» - Charles asked first.

“Yes of course! Unfortunately, we will have to celebrate my birthday by two”.

“By two?» - Panic flashed in Charles’s eyes.

«Other guests will not be able to come, and you arrived before everyone else. Come on, Ellen has already prepared a room for you”.

Ann went back to the mansion, leaving Charles to stand beside his car. Apathy reappeared on his face.

«Who is Ellen? Probably a new house cleaner».

Ann changed her maids almost every month. The last servant Charles saw was Penny. He was still a teenager then. She decided to call him Charlie, not Charles, which made him furious. He then poured sleeping pills into her food, so she overslept her working day. Ann fired her when she accidentally spilled coffee on her dress while being sleepy.

Charles headed for the house. Everything remained the same. Perfect cleanliness and expensive furniture. Ann was already waiting for him at the table with two cups of coffee. The house cleaner appeared in the doorway, carrying a large plate of cookies. She was a pretty girl with dark hair neatly laid in a bun.

“Thank you, Ellen,” - Ann said when the maid put the plate on the table.

The aunt brought the cup to her lips.

«I advanced in search of Liam. Do you remember who’s that? It’s your grandfather. I wrote a letter to several archives at the same time. Somewhere there should be information about him. Although the last archive, which I called, as it turned out, was transferred to another place in 1981.»

Charles took a deep breath. He never saw his grandfather.

“By the way, Charles, how’s your girlfriend doing? Lily, it seems?» His aunt switched to a more cheerful tone.

Charles remained calm, but it took him a big effort. Lily broke up with him a few days ago. His fists clenched.

“We broke up”.

-That’s good. In the photographs, she looked too much like your mother. I started to worry.

Charles wanted to get up and hit her, but he did not. He was angry with his mother for telling everyone about his personal life. Keeping a smile on his face, he replied:

- You read so many books. Ever thought of becoming a psychologist?

-I did, and more than once! - Ann began to talk with enthusiasm about psychology.

In the evening, finally reaching his room, Charles threw the porcelain figurine against the wall, unable to contain his anger. Why did his aunt get the idea that she could judge his personal life?! There was a knock on the door, and Ellen entered without waiting for an answer.

«Is everything okay?»

Charles got nervous.

- The wind rushed into my room.

The servant’s gaze went through the fragments of a porcelain figurine and a closed window.

- As you say. I will remove the fragments.

“You need to keep your emotions to yourself” - Charles thought as he went down to the garden. However, he was stopped by his aunt’s sudden voice: “Charlie, dear, get me some water please.”

«My God, am I her servant?» -Charles thought as he headed for the kitchen.

Taking a glass, he began to fill it; everything irritated him in this house: especially his aunt’s clueless instructions. Suddenly a glass cracked in his hand.

“Damn it” - swore the young man.

He had to take out another glass again and fill it with water.

«Here you are, Auntie»- said Charles, handing the glass to his aunt with a forced smile.

«Thank you, sweetheart» – Ann smiled at him, but there was sadness in her eyes.

“Two of the archives I wrote to said they hadn’t heard anything about my father. All hope for the third archive.»

«I can’t put your thanks in my pocket»- young man thought as he closed the door – «Yet». Obviously, he didn’t really care about his grandfather.

In the garden, Charles was able to organize his thoughts. Aunt Ann rarely went there, and the only person working outside was the gardener, who spent more time around a pond and rose bushes. Sitting on the bench, he started muttering:

«After all, the quarantine will not last long and I will regain my freedom, but now the most important thing is to keep everything to myself.» From the depths of the house, Ann’s voice came again: «Charlie...».

Unable to resist, Charles jumped up and kicked a nearby-planted bush of peonies.

«Charlie, Charlie, dear! How long can it be? Can she do anything herself? When will she pass away and leave it all to me?» He whispered fiercely to himself.

«Charlie!»- The voice became more insistent, but Charles deliberately ignored it.

«I'm not her servant, it would be wonderful if she lost her voice once and for all and stopped bothering me.» - pronounced the nephew quietly.

«Don't pretend you don't hear me, sweetheart! »

With all his strength, Charles kicked another bush.

«Sir, um, sorry to interrupt, but your aunt Ann is waiting for you in her room, and it's probably none of my business, but are you all right?»

When he turned around, the young man saw the shocked servant standing in front of him.

“I am sorry you had to see such an inappropriate scene, and yes, I am all right, it's none of your business, but I'll tell you. I'm worried about my failed relationship.» - Charles lied again and squeezed out a smile - “And tell my dear aunt that I will be in her room in a moment.”

Servant nodded and hurried away. “She's as stupid as my obnoxious aunt”- Charles thought, watching her go. Straightening his hair, he climbed up the stairs. After knocking on the door and receiving a positive response, he opened it smiling:

«I'm sorry, Auntie, I was in the garden, thinking about my problems, and I didn't hear you, what happened?»

\*\*\*

Hours slowly turned into days, and days into weeks. Ann never stopped reminding Charles how happy she was about being with him on quarantine that incidentally was not going to end. Scientists did not advance in search of a vaccine, so the government had no reasons to revoke quarantine or reduce any precautions. It was still forbidden to go outside, the streets were completely empty.

Ann fired the gardener in order to minimize the interactions with the outward and locked all the doors, because her nephew began to suffer sleepwalking. At night, he was silently getting out of bed and walking towards the exit. However, Ann, who was always sleeping very sensitively, heard his footsteps and stopped Charles every time he almost left the house.

«Poor boy! » – Lipped the woman caressing Charles's hair in the morning – «I totally understand. In psychology, we call this «an involuntary desire»: we all are so tired of being locked inside that when we fall asleep our body feels free and automatically tries to go out».

“Involuntary... of course» - Young man rolled his eyes, - «I wonder where she hid the key».  
«Although we can't go out for a walk, the fresh air is still available. I will leave this window opened if you don't mind.

«Sure, Auntie...»

The doorbell rang.

«Oh, it must be Ellen. She brought us some food. I promised to pay her twice more for working on quarantine. I hope there were no problems with the police... Could you please open the door, sweetie? »

Charles's eye twitched.

«You better pay me for my patience».

And it should be noted that little patience was left. Any types of glass in Charles's bedroom were constantly breaking. Mirrors, cups, windows... It was either the wind, or the flying crow that was breaking into the room. What a mystery!

Under Charles's bed, Ellen found a piece of paper on which were drawn sticks that usually use prisoners who count how many days they spent in the cell. Ironic, isn't it?

On this day, time went especially slowly. Early in the morning after breakfast with his aunt Charles went out into the garden again in a rage.

Rage was almost the only emotion he had experienced in recent days. In this state he laid down and woke up. It chased him, sneaking up behind him and forcing his whole anger to spill out.

Having carefully looked around, he reached the very garden fence. Here was the last chance that someone would see him. He sat on a bench overgrown with moss and clutched his head.

All the morning, his aunt told him how she wanted to find her father. «This is the dream of my whole remaining life,» she said with tears in her eyes. «I'm still waiting for the answer from the third archive»

Charles wanted to delve into his thoughts, but the singing of a lonely bird was interrupting him. Its gullible eyes looked at him. He practically stopped moving and unexpectedly pulled out a piece of bread from his pocket and held it out in his palm. The bird flew closer and closer until it landed right on his hand. Charles watched the bird eating bread for a few minutes.

«You interrupted me» he hissed and before the bird could react, he squeezed it in his hand. He squeezed the bird harder until her eyes became lifeless. Suddenly Charles dropped the breathless body of the bird from his hand and stepped back, conscious, his act.

He began to frantically look around and saw Ellen's curious look. The maid backed up, covered her mouth with her hand and ran back to the house.

Charles turned pale. The servant saw him! Surely, she will tell everything to his aunt. He ran to the house along the way, straightening his clothes. Ann shouldn't know anything. Somehow, he was faster than the maid and burst into Ann's room. She looked at him with a good-natured look.

«Charlie? Did something happen? I seem to have seen the postman. Maybe he brought some news about Liam...»

«No, I don't think so» said Charles, glancing nervously out of the window.

«Charlie, you're not yourself today, sit down next to me and we'll talk, I've missed our conversations so much!»- Ann said sincerely.

«Hmm, if I play the role of the perfect heir now and talk to her, then when this hopeless servant comes with her report on me, my aunt won't believe her, and if luck is on my side today, she'll throw her out.» – he thought.

Aunt Ann's voice roused him from his reverie- «Charlie, did you notice something there?» Charles looked from the window to his aunt- «I'm sorry what?»

«After my suggestion, you froze and stared out the window»- the agitated aunt finished her sentence.

«Don't worry»- nephew assured her - «Aunt, you look exhausted, let me stretch your shoulders»

«God, Charlie, you're so caring» – aunt Ann was embarrassed, but agreed - «You know, I'm worried about you, you started sleepwalking, you're not yourself, and Ellen started to be afraid of you, it's weird».

At these words Charles reluctantly squeezed his aunt's shoulders hard.

“Ouch! Charlie, carefully!”

“I'm sorry, continue please”

“Well, I just can't believe Ellen, even though she's proving that you're the one who breaks the glass in the house...”

“Damn»- Charles whispered to himself.

“And she says: «mistress Ann, can't you see that Charles is a monster!” and I tell her: “why is he a monster, he had a difficult childhood, but he still grew up a wonderful boy!»

«Ann, fire her»- Charles said quietly.

«What?»- the woman turned to him.

“Fire her” - he repeats.

“I won't do it, she's doing a good job and she stays with us through these difficult times, have a conscience”- Ann declared.

“I said fire that maid»- Charles broke into a shout.

“Charles Harris! Don't talk to me like that! Was Ellen really right about you?”- aunt said threateningly.

She hoped that with these words, her beloved nephew would understand that he had said something stupid, apologize for his words, and they would go down to the dinner table together. And everyone would live in peace and harmony. But these words only added fuel to the fire.

“Oh how dare you talk to me like that, you're just a pathetic, worthless old woman!”- said Charles. Aunt was so shocked by the words of her beloved Charlie that she could not say a word, but her 'sweet nephew' was getting angrier and angrier by the second.

“You, you... wore me out every minute I was in this damn house”.

Ann's eyes began to fill with tears and she turned away from Charles but it didn't stop him. On the contrary, it gave him more confidence and he felt the forgotten freedom deep inside.

‘Can you shut up at least for one second? Have you ever thought why you've been living here alone all this time? Because your chatter is unbearable! Are all the people so annoying? I wouldn't be surprised if this Ellen was here not just like that. I bet she's hanging around you because of your money!’ – he emphasized the last word – ‘Oh, let me tell you an unpleasant truth: I was here for the same reason as well! My new strategy was perfect until you started torturing me with stupid talks, and your constant questions and

requests... Nobody did that to me before. Everyone is useful, everyone can give you something. But not this time... You are way too annoying and stubborn than normal people are! That's probably why your precious Liam ran away from you. You're pathetic! So pathetic!”

Charles went silent for a second. He looked furious like a beast. Golden hair disheveled, shirt unbuttoned, face reddened. He was breathing heavily. For the first time in his life Charles was saying what he actually was thinking. It felt so... unusual. And... relieving. He slowly turned his head towards Ann's chair. It was empty. Aunt's body was lying nearby. Charles saw her empty eyes blindly looking at the ceiling. Ann's hand leaned on her chest and froze in this position. Forever.

Charles was shouting so loud, that he didn't even notice her fall.

“Ann?”- he asked, slowly approaching the body. She had no pulse.

“Damn it”- Charles muttered. His hands were shaking. -“A heart attack...”

Everything mixed in his head. The view blurred...

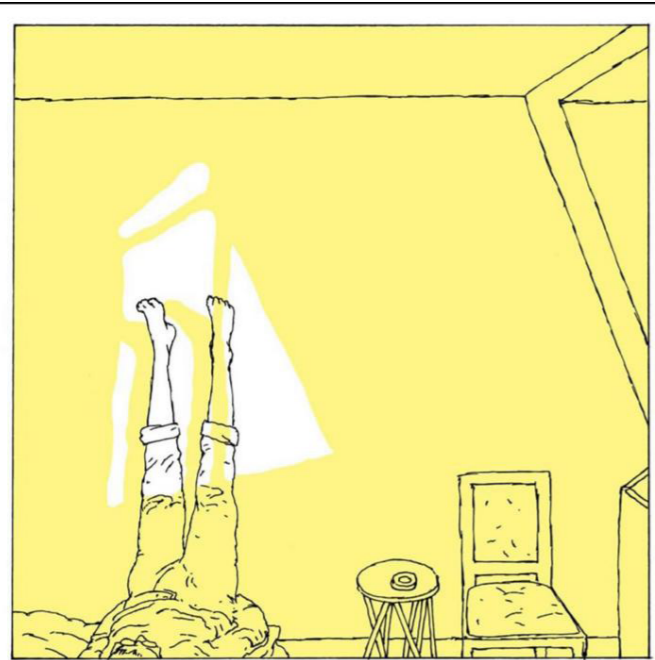
At this moment Helen entered the room and stopped speechless. Charles quickly pulled himself together, jumped up and ran out of the bedroom. Automatically walking down the stairs he heard muffled Helen's cries. Staircase, living room, open window... He fell on the ground and blindly moved towards the forest, leaving everything that happened behind the door.

‘Now run. As far as possible.’

Charles was consumed with emotion. He ran to his hiding place, the local forest. The road would have taken 15 minutes, but Charles decided to take a shortcut and ran out onto the road. He didn't even notice the approaching car, the last thing he saw before he fell asleep forever was the bright headlights.



Do you want to know who was in that car? Read chapter 1.



## Chapter 5. Eglantine

The facts take place in May 2020. Half of the human population is confined since a few months because a virus threatens the world. The economy is at a standstill, flights are reduced, countries are closed and confined must remain at home with family, or sometimes alone.

This is the case of Eglantine. She has lived in Paris for several years now. She lives there alone, and this confinement will literally change her life. Before the government's announcement, she traveled everywhere, always went out, and, aged 31, had little time for her private life. Indeed, working in modeling, she only stayed at home for a short time and was always gone in the 4 corners of the planet. She was always surrounded, but her personality tended to annoy everyone around her. She only thinks of her. The quality of the image of her that she reflected is her main goal in life. She forgets her family and close friends for foreign people for whom she doesn't count, contrary to what she thinks. Her days have been the same almost for 3 months now, that she is bored and is surprised not to have heard any news from her family or friends. During the lockdown, Eglantine keeps her habit, of teaching some mathematics to an adolescent, Bob. This is kind of her only occupation. She decided to give some lessons only for the money; she really doesn't care about Bob. Every day, she has a routine, first she get bored during hours and then at 5pm, she does her shopping but it seems like it's the same schedule of her neighbour, John, that she can't stand. So every day she gets upset and she is rude with him and he imitates her so it doesn't help at all. But this May 27th won't be a day like the others.

Early in the morning she gets a call from one of her best friend who exactly looks like her. Tobie is selfish, egocentric and self-regarding, just like Eglantine. This is kind of the unique reason why they are good friends. He tells her on the phone that he is really sick, he's got the virus around a week ago and now he's at the hospital. A lot of doctors told him that he might not end the week alive. Though, he still has a lot of faith in his recovery because he finds himself very strong and he is almost certain to be tough enough to survive. Eglantine doesn't know what to say, she is shocked and sad at the same time. She finds it unbelievable. At the first time that the idea of his death opens up she first questions herself: « who am I going to replace him by? ». While she does all this thinking, Tobie hung up, he wanted her to tell him that everything was going to be fine and great again: talk about him. So, during the end of the week Eglantine only thinks about Tobie and she wonders who she would go shopping with, go to the cinema with...

Week pass by without others inconvenient or news from Tobie. On a Monday, Eglantine gets an email that announce the death of Tobie. She is devastated and she can't even go out to attend his funeral. During several days, she doesn't sleep or eat. She is really hurt and feels awful, the last time she could have talked to Tobie she couldn't even say a word to him or comfort him. One afternoon she gets a message from a friend, Alicia, (who isn't really her friend by the way) which says « Hi there Eglantine! You didn't talk to me during the whole lockdown, don't you even care a little bit about me? It doesn't look like you even worried about me, you didn't get news from me, nothing! ». Because of the death of her friend she starts thinking about all her other friends and her family, she realizes that she starts missing them. Two days later she realizes how the life is short, life is worth living fully instead of spoil it by not taking care of her family and friends. If she cares about some people, she has to show them and don't let them apart. She becomes aware of the fact that she is self-centered and selfish like Tobie who died without really somebody caring about it. She doesn't want to be forget after her death. The tragic death also makes her realize that she needs to stop pretending to be someone else that she isn't and just be herself she has to stop trying to please people that doesn't care about her. She has to take care of her parents whom she only sees once per year; she has to learn how to reassure someone when they are sad or devastated and stop thinking only about herself and her problems: she has to learn to be the person she wants to be. She decided to completely change her life and he relationship with people who cares about her, first of all her family and her friends. During all the end of the lockdown she thinks about herself and what she has to change about her character. She can't live like that anymore. She works a lot on herself. And every day at 5pm when she goes shopping she controls herself to be nice to John who seems to do some efforts too. The lockdown ends a week after the bad news. The first thing Eglantine does is to sell her apartments and quit her job. She goes live with her parents outside of the city and works in their farm. When she announced it to her parents, they were really happy but also a lot surprised, they really love their daughter but after she left, they didn't expect her to come back soon or later. Her mother cried so much she was so glad and delighted. So, she tells them that she came back because the lockdown made her think about how selfish and self-centered, she was. She did really change; her parents notice it very fast as soon as they see her at work.

After a few months, she became a totally different person, for once in a long time she was really happy: she has caring friends, a proud family, and everyone that loves her and respects her.

If you are interested in Alicia's story, you can take a look at the chapter number 6.





## Chapter 6. Alicia Parker's story

### Part 1

This is a story about a young lady that has changed her life, her character and her behavior due to the pandemic that made her quarantined for three months.

Alicia Parker was born in San Francisco in a big and wealthy family. She was a beautiful and charming little girl. Her blonde hair was shining when the sun was touching it and people could drown in her big blue eyes. Our young heroine has always lived in a luxury environment and was a spoiled child.

From the day she was born, she was told that she was superior to other people and that she only needed to care about herself, the way she looked and that she shouldn't think about the way she treated people that were inferior to her family and to herself. Alicia was taught to be rude and harsh to the people who were working for her family and even though she was delightful, nobody really liked her. Her parents were not present for her so she ended up surrounded by lots of unknown people. She didn't feel the love and the attention that usually given by the parents and thus she felt lonely, abandoned by everyone and lost in this big world. Alicia tried to get some attention from her parents for more than seven years but her father was a busy executive who traveled a lot and her mother was always invited to some parties and when she used to come back home, she was going to some spa procedures and was taking care of herself.

The little girl thought that she was the problem and that her parents didn't love her because of her ugliness, her stupidity.... She never understood that she was one of the most beautiful young ladies and has always underestimated herself and her physical beauty.

She came soon to the realization that she is not at fault but that she can't change anything. Alicia felt that she would be alone forever if she doesn't change herself internally. She has built some kind of an internal wall and this wall consisted in being selfish, to never be attached to anyone, to never love anyone in order not to hurt herself. For that, she needed to be some sort of impolite, discourteous, and jarring when talking to people. This wall made her feel numb and as the days passed, she stopped to feel anything and her « good » part drowned.

When she was about 16 years old, during Christmas holidays, her father invited a painter to represent her. The painter was amazed by the young lady as he has never seen such a beauty in his life. Her father went away and the painter began the painting. Alicia was very impatient and moved way too much. The painter couldn't concentrate and asked her to stay calm. Alicia could not bear that some provincial guy had the guts to tell her what to do. She then said: « Who do you think you are to talk to me this way? You are nothing, do you hear me? I do whatever I want and you don't have the right to even open your mouth. I do not care about what you want me to do. You came here to do your job, so shut up and get to work. ».

To say that the painter was shocked is to say nothing but you could imagine that he has never expected this kind of treatment from such a charming person. After long hours of hard work, the painting was completed. Alicia stood up and approached with a little nervousness. When she saw herself in the painting, the whole world stopped, the time became slower and her heart almost stopped. The young lady has never had an idea about her own beauty and discovering it made her feel proud and her self confidence was stronger than ever.

She finally understood that she was magnificent and this physical beauty became her weapon against the world. She was now putting all her energy in making herself prettier than she was and started to forget about her education and everything but her beauty. She didn't pay attention to her studies, her life, the few friends that she had. The thing that mattered for her, was her beauty and she did everything in her power to become the prettiest young lady in the whole world.

Alicia's father sent her to a private school for wealthy families in Switzerland. She was always the smartest and the most delightful young lady in the whole school and every boy was trying to be with her. Most of the girls were very jealous of her and did everything in their power for Alicia to feel bad in this school. Because of the wall built by her, she couldn't feel any pain, but the numbness was

eating her from the inside which was more hurtful than everything that the girls were trying to do. They were trying to spread some horrible rumors, they were trying to frame her, they were trying to make a bad image of her in front of the professors and the students but everyone knew who Alicia was and nobody believed them.

She had two friends, Elizabeth and Katheryn, who were always by her side and the group of three had quite the same mentality which made their friendship easy. After Christmas holidays and after the painting was made Alicia suddenly started to have bad grades, to lose the predisposition of the professors. She lost her only two friends and stayed alone with herself and her beauty. Some guys were still running after her, but others couldn't stand her anymore. When she was eighteen, her mother died from cancer which made the young lady even more selfish and far from the reality. Her only hobby was looking at herself in the mirror and contemplate her magnificence. After her graduation, she was sent to a very good college in New York not because she was smart but because her father had lot of power and could afford the price of it. Her college life didn't really change from her school one. She didn't have any friends, boyfriends or interest but her physical beauty. The most important thing that I have forgotten to tell you is that she loved attention. She couldn't live without it. She liked when her classmates were gazing at her, when passers-by stopped to look at her. Every time that she went shopping or to a restaurant, she was the center of attention and this made her feel powerful. Many people were trying to talk to her, but after discovering her internal world, they almost ran away from her. She was also very popular not because of her father, but because she was signed up in the best model agency in the world and everyone liked her though just a few people knew who she really was internally.

Two months of the year 2020 has changed her life completely. The coronavirus pandemic started ; an unearthly object attacked earthlings. It became obvious that the representatives of extraterrestrial civilization spread the infection and the infection comes from the ship. First, it wasn't something really important because it was only happening in China but after, when thousands of people started to die from an unknown disease, the site of the fall was surrounded by a fence and cordoned off by the military. In Moscow, a curfew and a regime of self-isolation have been announced. Everyone had to stay home as well as Elizabeth, who has moved to Moscow after her studies in Switzerland.  
(To find out more about Elizabeth's life, read chapter 9)

### Part 2

Never in her life, except when she was little, Alicia has spent more than two days at home. For her, the whole pandemic wasn't real and she didn't believe in it. She didn't want to stay home because she was very bored and wanted to go out so much that she did it. She went to restaurants, went shopping etc but when her father found out what she was doing, he was so enraged that she has been obliged to stay home. Her father knew that it was crucial for his daughter to maintain her reputation as worldwide model and as his daughter and couldn't let her ruin everything.

Everyone was meant to be quarantined for two weeks at first.

The first 3 days were not hard at all. She was glued to her phone the whole day, scrolling through social media, watching movies, taking multiple pictures of herself and taking hours to observe herself in the mirror... but then, as the days passed, these activities became to be annoying for her, except her beauty. One day when she was scrolling through her feed on instagram, she found a page of a girl from her old school. "Hmm .. terrible photos! The photos with her family? Where is the aesthetic part here ..?". Then, she has decided to go to her subscriptions; "I wonder what inspires her to upload such awful photos." There, she came across an account of her very old friend Honstall. "It's him! I will subscribe and write to him!" she said hi and he answered immediately. After a long conversation, he wrote that she had changed but. Alicia did not understand how and wanted to know his opinion about her. Honstall, wrote her a big message, the main meaning of which was that she was narcissistic and stupid. Alicia was terrified and started to think about her personality.

As the second week began, she didn't know what to do to spend time, how to deal with her boredom and what will make her happy so this led her to stay with her thoughts alone. It was the first time in multiple years that she had to face her thoughts, her emotions and feelings. She was trying to avoid them at first,

but the wall that she had built was being destroyed little by little and the waves of emotions drowned her. As she couldn't accept them, she fell into a deep depression and when she learned that quarantine was prolonged for two more months, she was broken. Alicia tried to get rid of her thoughts, to pretend that they were not there, to forget about them but it was pointless. She was trying to pay attention to her physical beauty and was horrified when she saw herself. The young lady had big dark circles under her eyes, her face was gray, little wrinkles started to appear on her face. She decided to make a live on Instagram and when she showed her face everyone started to write terrible things, call her ugly and unsubscribe from her. Everyone began to hate her and that made the situation even worse. As she was depressed, the only thing that "saved" her was eating much and at the end of two weeks she took some weight. She barely even looked at herself and started to understand that if she didn't deal with her emotions and feelings, her life wouldn't endure.

Alicia wanted to do something with these horrible feelings and emotions that she was overflowed with and with a big willpower she started to analyze every emotion and feeling that she had.

One of the most painful was the fact that her parents never cared for her and never loved her. Alicia didn't even try to justify their behavior. She just burst into tears and spent the rest of the day sleeping and crying. The pain and sorrow she was overflowed with was really hard to bear and it took her almost a week to accept that but she knew that even if they have never loved her, she would always have them in her heart.

Then, Alicia has decided to write down every feeling that she hid all these years and tried to find a solution to every problem that she had. This took her a lot of time and at the end of each day, she was more than exhausted. All this mind cleaning took her more than a month. After she had finished everything, she had a feeling that a burden was felt from her shoulders. Alicia came to a realization, that she hasn't been doing anything in her life. She had ruined everything while concentrating on her beauty. She knew that she had wasted all those years not studying but concentrating on something that doesn't last long.

The president has announced then that people will need to quarantine for two more months and Alicia was overflowed with joy. During this whole time she has decided to literally change her life. She has started with her studies. At first, it was very hard and exhausting to learn everything again but as the time passed this became a habit. After that, she has decided to change her mindset, which was one of the most difficult things to do.

She knew that her beauty was not something important but something was restraining her from putting it aside. She started to read lots of physiological books, to meditate, to concentrate her attention on her studies and to find new things that she then enjoyed. For instance, she had never liked horse riding before because she was scared to fall and to injure her face but now, she went to her father's stables three times a week and very enjoyed it. She also started to play chess and to learn a new language. Alicia has also learned about the issues in our planet concerning global warming and hunger and has decided to make her Instagram account focus on these important issues. She has also asked her father to help her make a charity project in order to help children and animals in difficult situations.

As for her friend Katheryn, she spent more time with her brothers and had fun. She was happy, finally realizing that life was worth it. Quarantine made her understand that being mean, rude and in a bad mood was not worth it and this has changed her life.

(To find out more about Katheryn's life, read chapter 2)

### Part 3

The quarantine was soon to come to an end and she was a little bit scared to go out being her new self. When it finally ended she went back to university and to say that her classmates were shocked is to say basically nothing. She was very kind to everyone, very polite. She was ready to help everyone in everything and was not rude at all. Everyone was aware of the strength of her character so no one really wanted to make her angry. She had found a lot of new friends and understood that she has wasted so much time being selfish, impolite and harsh to people when she could really be surrounded by such wonderful, smart and funny people as her friends.

Soon, she has met a young man who came from a very good family. He was very charming and polite. He

was always surrounded by lots of girls from her class and was never alone. When Alicia first saw him, she was amazed by his handsomeness and didn't know how to approach him. During this whole time when she was being her new self, the only thing that she was avoiding is being in a relationship with someone. She was still scared to be betrayed, left alone and hurt. She was trying to do anything in her power to overcome this feeling. She went to a psychologist, she read lots of books, she watched lots of movies but nothing helped her.

This was the first time she saw James being alone. Alicia didn't know how to start a conversation with him and wanted to walk away when he called her. When she heard him pronouncing her name, she froze to the ground and her cheeks became red. She could barely move but made it to the bench where he was sitting. He started talking to her very kindly but she barely could move her mouth to say a word. After a while, he went to class. Alicia forgot about everything. She was so amazed by James that she couldn't even get up from the bench. He was everything he had ever wished for. A handsome, polite, artful young man. She came to a realization that she probably couldn't build any relationships with men because her relationship with her father was not very good.

The next day, she has decided to overcome her anger and pain that she had for her father and decided to tell him everything that had happened because of his carelessness.

They met in a big luxury restaurant, his favorite one. She told her father that she didn't care about his business now and wanted him to concentrate only on her. She has told him everything that she has been feeling during these whole years and to say that her father was shocked is to say nothing.

He was mad at himself for being distant and always away and tried to justify his behavior by telling Alicia that her grandparents were never close to him so he thought that this is the right way to treat and to educate his child. They have talked multiple hours after that and this was the first time that Alicia understood what family really means.

When she came home, Alicia has had a feeling that she needed to call Honstall. She didn't know why, but her intuition was telling her to call him. She was very stressed and scared that something horrible happened to him. His voice was very weak and bitter which made her stress even more. She said the following words: "Honstall, even if you don't believe me, I have lived through what you have. I know what you feel, how you feel, what you were about to do but listen to me carefully. You are the most amazing person I have ever known. You showed me that my behavior wasn't acceptable and that I needed to change and I did. Look at the result! I have a lot of work to do, but you showed me the light when I only saw the dark. I have completely changed myself and this happened because of you. If you didn't help me out, my life wouldn't endure. I don't want to sound selfish, but I want to be the light in your life. Keep on going, keep on living, keep on succeeding, keep on working on yourself, keep on believing in yourself, in life. I believe in you. I love you so much and want you to hold on."

(To find out more about Honstall's change, read chapter 10)

The next day, James invited her to a party and she was so relaxed, happy and confident that at the end of the party, they ended up being together.

I don't want to make the whole story about James but as you can imagine, they soon got married and lived happily ever after.



## Chapter 7. John Binger

John Binger was a 25-year-old man who lived in London with 2 friends. He was a nice guy and his friends loved him because he was funny but sometimes he was very self-centered and arrogant. One day when he was having dinner with his girlfriend, Alice, they had a big fight. Alice was no longer happy with him, she said that their relationship was too toxic, and that John was becoming more and more selfish every day. She said that he no longer cares about her and that she didn't want to be with someone so arrogant and self-centered. John left the restaurant and Alice without saying a word; he was sincerely in love with her. It's been 3 years since they were together, but he didn't understand why she characterized him like that, she had never told him this before. When he came back to his apartment, nobody was here so he turned on the television. There was the info but he was not paying attention until they announced that because of the Coronavirus everyone would be quarantined the next day.

He was very sad and didn't know what to think about this whole breakup situation. His friends arrived and asked him why he was so sad. John explained that he just broke up with his girlfriend Alice and he couldn't stay with her for the lockdown. Sam and Max questioned him about the reason of the breakup. John told them that Alice was tired of his behaviour because she was thinking that he was too self-centered and wasn't spending enough time with her.

After a moment, John asked to his friends if they were thinking so too. Sam and Max looked at each other and answered « yes ». John « appreciated » their honesty but was sad and angry at the same time, because he realized that his close friends had the same opinion and that they didn't support him through this rough time. He took the time of the lockdown for an opportunity to think about his character and his behavior around Alice and his friends.

John returned to his room, being saddened by the elements that followed his breakup. He questioned himself after the discussion he had with his friends. Did he really deserve these words, and was he really egocentric like everyone close to him thought? John was seriously starting to think that the problem was not with others, but he was feeling guilty and trying to find a solution to change. He remembered situations where he realized he was egocentric. And said to himself that from now nothing would be as before and he would think of the happiness of others before his own. He had sent a message to his girlfriend to say that he was sorry and that he was well aware of his past mistakes and that he was solely responsible for their breakup. So he committed to change and to become a better person. But his girlfriend still hadn't seen or answered his apology message.

The next day, he really needed to get out so he went out to do some sport and ran around his district. The streets were empty except for two or three other people like him, running to get some fresh air. One of them looked worried, though. Was he trying to run away from himself, too? John was thinking about what he should do about the discussion he had with Alice. He was feeling so guilty about the breakup. He went back to his building and while he was getting to his apartment he met his neighbor taking out the trash. John froze for a fraction of a second : he completely forgot he had a neighbor next door. John understood that James was probably dealing with something tough and swore to himself he could help him get out of his misery and reinforce his mental stability. Since then, when he couldn't bear the company of his roommates, he would go out of his apartment and wait for James to get out. Then they would sit next to each other on the stairs and exchange a few words.

It was the first day that people were allowed to go out without restrictions. John was feeling so grateful to feel again the fresh air on his face and to be able to walk through the city. He went to the park not far from Alice's house and sat on a bench to organize his thoughts. It was 8pm and almost the end of the day. There was a beautiful sunset light passing through the branches and the leaves of the trees ; it was creating pretty shapes on the ground and the brick walls. There were a lot of people walking around slowly, talking and laughing ; they seemed so happy to finally go out and to be able to see their friends

and family. He was observing this background and was kind of jealous of this happiness, he wanted to be happy again ! He wanted so hard to go and apologize to Alice to tell her that he has changed, that he's not the same person anymore. Finally he stood up, went to Alice's house and rang the doorbell. Alice opened the door. He asked her if she could go out for just ten minutes to talk with him. She wasn't so happy to see him but she grabbed her coat and came out. Alice didn't say a word so John started explaining his lockdown and how he has changed etc. She was very shocked to hear that but didn't say anything back. He asked her then how was she and how was her lockdown. He actually cared. This is when she realized that everything he just told her was true : he really changed during time apart. She accepted his apologies. She started talking a lot ; about her family, her friends,... John was listening and interested in everything she was saying. He realized it himself and saw how he was feeling great about his new behaviors . Now he has a completely different point of view of the world : he really liked it that way.

To find out more about the mysterious runner, read chapter 4.



Melancholy. Edvard MUNCH

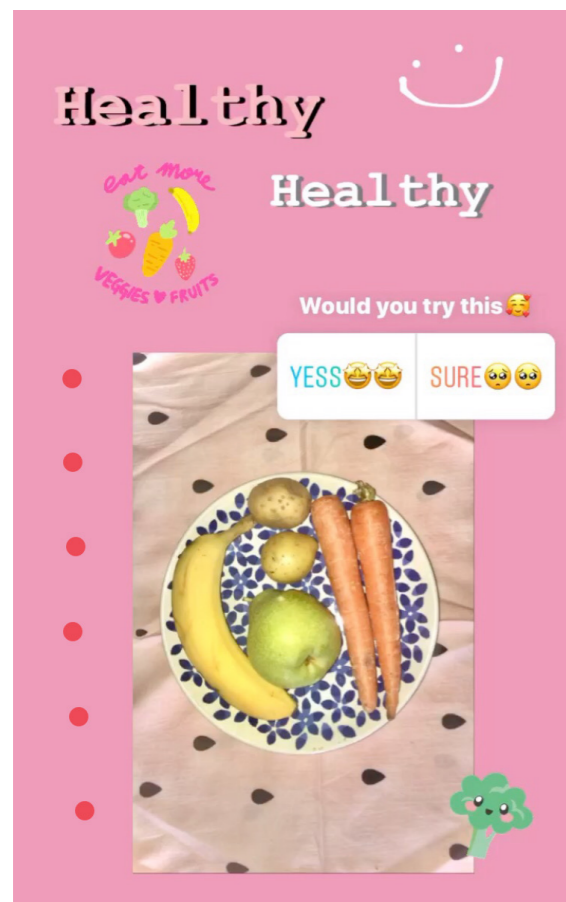
## Chapter 8. Kira Davis

“Fake it till you make it”, that’s 17 years old Kira, Kira Davis’ motto for 2020.

She is an influencer, as she likes to call herself, she even wrote it in her Instagram bio: I mean what talent could the girl possibly have? She only posts duckface selfies of herself in different angles that she heavily edits, and spends hours admiring Alicia Parker on all her social media, a gorgeous international model she envied for months. The girl has it all: modeling agencies scouting her, active followers commenting under every post, rich parents who help her with her career...

They are so perfect vlogging their daily life: Kira would kill to have her mom and dad on social media. However, hers do not even consider being an influencer as a “real job”! What do they want her to do, go to college? That would be so boring! Alicia Parker did not even finish high school and she is doing way better than her whole family combined...

But that is beside the point. The fact that all of Kira’s posts are sponsored has not made her naïve 12 years old fanbase think she is in it for the money. They will realize one day that she is not as genuine as she portrays herself to be...



How to even describe her? Well, she is the kind of person who stares a little too long in the mirror, distracted by their own gorgeous reflection. She may seem like a sweetheart when you look at her Instagram pictures, but she is arrogant and selfish, and she considers herself better than anyone else. For example, every week or so, Kira and her friends Vanessa, Kylie and Jenna have a photoshoot together at Starbucks, because it’s trendy and aesthetic, obviously. When you figure what works for you, you continue to do it, right? In this case, these pictures get the most likes and comments. While Kira strikes her best pose, her little minions are busy taking pictures of her, adjusting her hair and makeup, and choosing the best filters ever. They’re blindly following around their self-obsessed narcissistic queen. Poor girls. They would be way better off without her.

The day lockdown measures were taken by her state, Kira was devastated. What could she possibly do now, without her obedience little companions? No more shopping? No more socializing? No more sunbathing? What was the whole point of moving to LA if she could not go outside?

She had to find a way to keep her followers active on Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and Tik Tok during this hard time. She decided to start vlogging about her perfect quarantine morning and night routine. That of course meant posting unrealistically beautiful pictures of things she never actually did, like cooking a dozen perfect-looking pancakes with blueberries on top and her healthy avocado toast, to maintain a pretty feed. But as she was getting tired of “cooking”, she came across an Instagram post on John Doe’s account (he was one her many followers). He was doing a food delivery haul where he showed everyone what he had gotten. Kira was fascinated! She was so used to going to expensive restaurants that this idea had never crossed her mind. So, she started ordering food every single day, claiming to her fellow subscribers that she had prepared it herself (for more views, obviously).

She also spent hours doing her makeup and putting together trendy outfits. She always seemed to think that she had nothing to wear, even though her closet was filled with over 2000 pieces of clothing. After that she spend the rest of the day taking pictures on her balcony, on her bed, on her couch, and on almost everything she owned. Pictures of her reading books (she hates reading), pictures of her working out (she did about 3 pushups), pictures of her doing this, pictures of her doing that...

That went on for weeks.

Eventually the lack of self-care started showing up. She relied too much on Photoshop, makeup, and her favorite pair of extra high waisted jeans: dark circles have started appearing under her pretty blue eyes; her once flat stomach gained a few pounds. She did not want to admit that she simply looked hideous. Hideous because of sleep deprivation. Hideous because of junk food, laziness, and lack of fresh air. The excessive amount of retouching was getting obvious, which led her haters to create exposing posts, pointing out her flaws.

She saw her number of followers drop. As she scrolled through her comments section, she noticed that people were calling her “fake”, “liar”, “catfish” and all belittling words... She felt as if she had taken a gunshot to the heart.

Her self-esteem went down. She lost the motivation to do pretty much anything. She stopped eating. She stopped going out as well. Stopped calling her parents. Stopped everything. She could not even look in the mirror without despising herself. Social media had really taken a toll on her. Physically, but mostly mentally. She constantly compared herself to others, just like her followers must have done to her before. She boiled with jealousy when she stumbled upon pictures of her friends showing off their gorgeous summer bodies: Vanessa, Kylie and Jenna were working out, eating healthy and getting their beauty sleep. The cyber-bullying she was getting even led her to delete her 598k followers account...

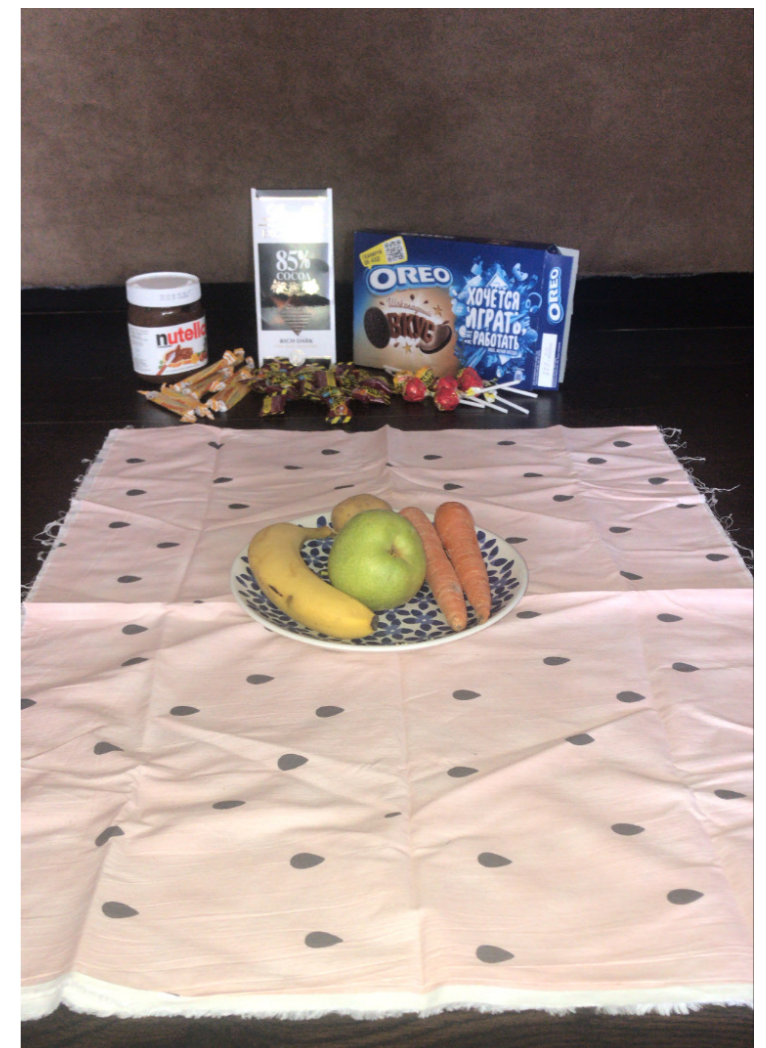
One day, as if all of this wasn’t enough, Kira received a call. It was from Eglantine, one of her old friends with whom she had kept contact with. Her voice was shaking, and Kira could tell that she had been crying... Eglantine had just found out that her bestfriend Tobbie passed away... Poor girl, she didn’t know what to do. They ended up speaking for about an hour, Kira hypocritically comforting her so-called friend. The most disgusting thing about this is that Kira didn’t care. She didn’t care about Eglantine, nor about Tobbie. The only thing she cared about was HERSELF. HER safety. Nothing else.

Eventually, quarantine ended. It did not stop the constant fear of catching the virus, but at least people were slowly coming out of their homes, relieved.

Did Kira go out as well? No. Here’s why: A few days before the end of quarantine, she found out that John Doe had tragically died in a car crash, because of the virus. She was in utter shock. For the first time in forever, Kira was affected by someone else’s life. She was terrified. She had apparently underestimated the deadliness of covid-19...

She just couldn’t go outside. She was too scared. Too ashamed. Too depressed. She did not even fit in most of her clothes anymore. She was so tired. Tired of everything. She should have valued health above all. But she did not. And that was life’s revenge on her loving herself a little too much.

Do you want to know what happened to the other characters during this major crisis? Well you should go read about gorgeous Alicia Parker (chapter 6), Eglantine (chapter 5) and John Doe’s tragic story (chapter 1).



## Chapter 9. Elizabeth

Foreword:

Faure is a representative of an extraterrestrial race, biologically identical to the human, but more developed technologically - secretly flew to planet Earth for the purpose of research. At the end of December 2019 in Moscow, people gathered in large open spaces to observe an unusual phenomenon - meteor shower. The alien ship - "COVID-19" - fell into this meteorite stream, and its masking system was disrupted. The Russian military discovered an unidentified object, not like a meteorite, over the territory of Russia and, suspecting that it might threaten their country, decided to shoot it down with accompanying interceptors. As a result, a wrecked alien ship made an emergency landing in Moscow, while destroying several houses.

20/03/20

An unearthly object attacked earthlings. It became obvious that the representatives of extraterrestrial civilization spread the infection and the infection comes from the ship. People die from an unknown disease. For this reason, the site of the fall is surrounded by a fence and cordoned off by the military. In Moscow, a curfew and a regime of self-isolation have been announced in connection with the events.

Retreat:

(The plot also focuses on the relationship between Muscovites: schoolgirl Elizabeth, her father, Colonel Yevgeny Sergeyev, who manages the defense department's operations in connection with the incident, and Steven, friend of Elizabeth, a representative of modern aggressive youth.

In an incomplete family of Sergeyevs, relations do not develop - the father, being a military man, is constantly busy, and he is little interested in the details of his daughter's life. He is trying in his own way, in a military way, to protect her from troubles, she protests in a teenage way and tries to arrange her life herself. As a high school student, Elizabeth is in couple with Steven, who does not find approval from Eugene Sergeyev.)

28/04/20

As a result of the mysterious virus, close friends of Elizabeth and Steven die, which causes both hatred of aliens, a pandemic, and self-isolation. Trying to figure out the purpose of the visit of an alien ship, the guys, together with their friends, secretly go to the closed zone of its fall, cordoned off by the military. There they meet with Faure dressed in an exoskeleton. The alien saved Elizabeth from falling from a dilapidated skyscraper, but he himself suffered as a result of the actions of Steven and his aggressive friends.

Unbeknownst to them, Faure fell out of his suit.

29/04/20 (night)

Elizabeth, contrary to all prohibitions, violates the regime, crosses a closed zone and arrives at night to an alien who has fallen out of a suit to help him recover and "get out of planet Earth."

01/05/20

Recovering himself, Faure looked like an ordinary young man, even a very handsome one. At the same time, he almost instantly mastered the Russian language. Faure briefly spoke about the goals of his visit and asked for help to get his high-tech items back and return to his ship - "COVID-19". Still angry with anger, Elizabeth kicked him out, and, not knowing the rules of conduct on a street in Moscow, he ended up in the police station, continuing to neighing people.

02/05/20

Elizabeth still decided to help the stranger, using her position as the daughter of Colonel Sergeyev. Faure says that their ship broke down and they cannot fly.

03/05/20

All this leads to the development between Elizabeth and Faure. romantic feelings.

The alien says that in reality he was not going to hit the Earth, but because of meteor shower the ship lost control and he had to board. If people try to get to the ship, "COVID-19", according to an alien protocol, it will destroy humanity so that their technology does not reach people.

05/05/20

Faure disfigures Elizabeth and tells her that the infection from the ship will not be able to infect her body.

20/05/20

Steven calls on Muscovites, run wild from the regime of self-isolation, people who have lost their loved ones due to an unknown virus, to revolt against government officials and attack the alien ship in order to "protect their land" from strangers. In addition, the ship causes the depletion of food in the city.

09/06/20

Having broken through the perimeter defense, the rebels approached the ship, but were stopped by bots of an alien race, protecting the secrets of more advanced technologies. The Russian military also tried to stop the development of the conflict.

In the end, the confrontation ended happily. No one died, but thousands of people are infected. Only Elizabeth and Fore suffered, they were shot by Steven from a machine gun.

Fore, who had biological immortality, sacrificed his life to save Elizabeth's life, she remained alive.

10/06/20

The alien ship "COVID-19" eliminates breakdowns and leaves planet Earth

Mankind will for a long time eliminate the consequences after foreign guests and an alien virus, but the life of an ordinary girl Elizabeth will certainly never be the same ...

To find out about some victims of the virus, read chapters 1 or 5.



## Chapter 10. Honstall

### Quarantine recording day 1

Hello everyone, my name is Honstall and in this diary I will describe my quarantined days to you. Today was my first day in quarantine, it wasn't anything unusual – I mostly stay at home anyway, except for when I need to go do groceries. However, starting from today I completely switched to online work. All day I had meetings where we tried to figure out the applications in which we would work. As the government announced, quarantine should end in a couple of weeks, which was a relief... However it felt a little too optimistic. In the evening I decided to go out, because in my opinion nothing has changed since yesterday. And I was right - people still walked without masks and life went on. Nothing extraordinary, the routine of life.

### Quarantine recording day 5

Hello everybody. Today is the fifth day of quarantine and life still goes on. My days all look like one another, so sorry for not writing here every day. Today I noticed an interesting fact - women with children stopped going out. I understand them and I think it is right, because children are the most sacred of what we have. I still go out in the evenings to walk in the park and watch what is happening around, how people react. Every night I try to watch the news to understand how things are going on with the virus. They say that 10-15 people are getting infected every day. That this is not much I guess, there are 20 million people living in this city. In my opinion, the situation is under control. Thank you all and talk to you guys soon.

### Quarantine recording day 9

What's up everyone! Day nine of quarantine today. As you remember I said at the beginning of my blog that it will last 2 weeks, but it seems to me it will be extended for another week. I have already fully mastered the online system and my working days have become even more difficult compared to normal. My boss gives me more and more work. I think that this is connected to the stagnation of the global economy, because in many countries people are under quarantine so they can't work, and many are fired. It is also possible that my boss is just a jerk and thinks that nobody's working at home, so the deadlines have never been tighter. My evenings have not changed but I noted that there are more and more people wearing masks. I still don't wear it. I heard it in the news that it's a waste of money, and you can't find buy them anywhere anyway. After all, we only have about 100 sick people after 9 days, in a city with an eight-digit population it's no big deal. I think maybe the number of infected will grow to a maximum of 500. Doctors say that in most cases the virus is asymptomatic. I don't attribute much importance to this, I think it may be even less dangerous than flu. My blog will probably be over soon.

### Quarantine recording day 15

Hello everyone. Today is the 15th day of quarantine and I'm already starting to get a little tired of the whole situation. Days go by, I'm bored out of my mind and I feel like time has stopped. However, outside the situation is becoming more critical every day: they say on TV that 200 people are now infected every day and 5 die, mostly old people or those who had severe diseases before getting the infection. I nevertheless stepped over and ordered masks and antiseptics online. According to the news, they say that in other countries the situation is much more critical, they justify this with the fact that Europe for one did not close restaurants and shopping centers. I also heard that the virus can mutate and become stronger. Although it seems to me that this is propaganda, as I read it on the Internet - and we all how much fake news is there – I sense that people around are starting to worry.

### Quarantine recording day 25

I have already lost the desire to write this diary to you. I don't even know where to start. The situation is getting worse and worse. Thousands of people are being infected every day. My friend says that the first symptoms are the same as with a cold, but what comes after is deadly. The government closed all the shopping centers and parks, only the metro is still working. I think this is a very stupid idea and they should have closed the metro first. But now let me tell you something else - people have almost stopped going out in the street, everyone is sitting at home. On the street you can see only a couple of people returning from the store. They say that in Italy there are more than 300 thousand infected. Not only old people and people with incurable diseases die, but also children and doctors. No matter how strange it is here, no such cases have been revealed on TV or even on local websites. It seems to me that I am slowly starting to go crazy. The quarantine has been extended for another 3 weeks. According to the latest news, airports stopped working and most countries closed all borders. It feels like a zombie apocalypse. Without the zombies. For now.

### Quarantine recording day 34

Hi guys. Where should I start... time has stopped here, I have lost any landmarks in time. The landmarks in space are still here though, my apartment seemed small to me before the quarantine, but I never imagined I would spend so much time here basically without going out. I spend my days asking different existential questions. I'm wondering: what is the meaning of life? Can we still call ourselves human without social interaction? I am fed up with conference calls, although they are part of my life now – work meetings, birthday parties... that's how we as humans communicate now apparently. I truly understood that we don't value what we have. I haven't left home for a week; I do groceries online. I now do everything online to be honest. That's just how life is now. With this way of life, I now have trouble sleeping. I am convinced that humanity has no control over this virus.

We no longer have any protection, the virus has gotten to most of our bodies, and to the heads of the remaining. To find an entirely sane person beside me would live in but a whimsical fantasy right now.

I have now gotten rid of any germ "holders" I could find. Washed all clothing, bed sheets and other similarities. I also somehow felt the pressure to wash the floors and wipe the telly and bookshelves, as well as other furniture that cannot be washed simply. Now I am here, sitting before my diary with a cup of my favourite tea, waiting for my bed sheets to come out of the drier. Knowing how full the hospitals are, catching anything worse than a simple cold would be idiotic of me. I have to pay attention to my health. Better to be safe than sorry, as they say.

Dear Diary... that ... was plainly ridiculous.... ..  
.....?

Upon seeing my reflection in the mirror, I was horrified to see the pallor of my face. The fact that such a petty situation has affected me this much. My long honey coloured locks no longer shine under the warm sun, no longer look so lively, as if proud to exist and to be taken care of. My sapphire blue eyes no longer shine, no longer show my intelligence, nor my predatory self confidence. The confinement has sucked my seemingly never ending strength. With such a weakened state, Death herself shall knock on my door without further hesitation. The thought of countless people coughing their guts out, as if the Black Plague herself has paid us a visit once again? Hah! Couldn't care less, do believe me. For Her to knock on MY door ?? Heavens forbid.

I have now lost count of the days passing by...

All sense of time seems to me nothing but a hypocrisy. This entry is made under the effect of alcohol, painkillers, and sweat from pushing myself to my limits. I have to keep shape, don't I? My weight is

dropping, the eyebags under my eyes increasing, my sleep patterns getting more and more disordered. Would it make any sense to say I feel threatened? I no longer recognize myself in the mirror. Honstall? I no longer know the man. I do not even appreciate the name anymore. It may have seemed fun at first, having a made up name that sounds a bit like Honesty, which is an equally pretty name, albeit a tad bit feminine, no? I don't know. I cannot think properly anymore. Could I at least know why? How did all this happen? The news on the telly seem falser than ever. A bat? An infection? What is this? An haute cuisine parody competition? Let's see who can feed us the most atrocious things without us puking! Eating bats. Ha! Dimwits and buffoons. That is all they are, all they'd ever be.

I suppose the virus affected us all, after all. He who shan't lose their health shall lose their mind. I no longer feel alone. I have noticed only now how each entry seems more and more erratic and more off-topic. Eh, my notes, my rules. I decided to wash my hands a little more often, and decided to wash them three times each time. I was quite surprised but freaked out when I saw pieces of presumably dirt rolling down the drain, off my hands. So would that mean I have been letting my hands so dirty and not taken care of for so long? I have also washed the soles of each pair of shoes I own. I also rarely ever open the windows now too. Because.. That's logical, right? We're told to protect ourselves and wear masks. That is because the virus can be transmitted through breath, coughing and sneezing, right? That's logical, right? I feel like I shouldn't be explaining any of this, yet i feel like someone's going through my mind like pages of a book when I'm at rest. They might as well have something to occupy themselves with, correct? I should feel calmer now. It's strange how anyone could underestimate the power of the occult. With each restless night, they come visit me. Visit... that's a far too pleasant way to describe it. They haunt me. Screaming restlessly, or simply whispering incomprehensible but understandably harsh curses. I do not remember when did I last ate, nor when did I last had more than 3 hours of sleep. I do not even feel the wish to sleep. Each hour seems longer and more excruciating than the previous ones. I no longer care about this petty virus, nor those suffering from it. What are the odds I'd die from some mutations happening.... I cannot let my precious self succumb to that. No.. There's no need to fear anything of the sort. I still am the powerful, the great, the proud, the gracious and prepossessing Honstall the mighty. And may anyone who dares tell me I am delusional ROT IN THE DEPTHS OF HELL.

I have cut myself on the shards of the mirror I have hit with my fist. What I saw wasn't me. It couldn't have been me. It has to be it. This was the most horrendous sight on Earth. The once shining, voluminous golden locks have become dull , lifeless hay, lamentably hanging from the scalp. The milky rose skin has become muddy grey, even somewhat wrinkled at some places. I have to admit. This is not even amusing. I'd abstain from describing it the way it should, for the sake of readers. I know you guys are here. You always are. Lurking, whispering in my head, judging every action that does not befit your taste. So.. The curtain shall rise soon.

Here it is. The grand show you, dearest listeners and readers, tormentors and sadists, have been all waiting. The curtain shall rise.....only to reveal the ugliness of my fate. Here, I will lie restlessly yet calmly, right in my grave, after the authorities or other jokes will retrieve my body from the ceiling. Yes. This is the show you've all been waiting for. Time to leave this book, or even burn it to ashes, do as you please. It's time for the final show. The Hanging of Honstal the Great. Or so I once used to be. Well.. This is it. This is my goodbye. To the world, to those reading, to those feasting upon the pain of the haven't met.

GOODBYE.

Wait, what's that noise?...



Illustration by Chamirame ISRAILYAN

That's.... awkward? It was supposed to be the last entry of the diary. Noose tight round my neck, as I entered the living room, turned out that I didn't turn my phone off. That ruined the whole drama, not gonna lie. But it felt so relieving to hear the voice of whom I always trusted. It sure did calm me. Her sweet voice and soft accent became the light of the day, a glimmer of hope shining through ash clouds. Cheerful as ever, though a tad bit self centered, Alicia rang the phone. Oh Alicia, how I missed your voice.. How I longed to hear those sweet words of yours.. I truly wouldn't ever forget your kindness. From the bottom of my heart, I shall never forget you.

Do you want to know more about the girl who saved Honstall's life? Read chapter 6.

## Characters

John Doe, a self-centered rich man who needs to be appreciated by the others. He can't tolerate the isolation.

Katheryn is a high-school student, beautiful, but lazy and bad-tempered, popular now, but unhappy in the past.

She passes her time in social media and despises her classmates who don't belong to her circle. She lives with her parents and her two brothers John and Michael.

Being on lockdown, she starts to think over her behaviour, and finally she feels terrible. She improves the relations with the members of her family. The social media is now over for her!

Lola Evans is a 16 years old girl who lives in London with her father. Her mother lives in Costa Rica with her boyfriend.

Unfortunately, Lola's father is stuck in China, so Lola has to stay alone during the lockdown. She decides to keep a lockdown diary. She starts appreciating things in a different way. She understands the importance of having good relations with her friends and her family

Charles and his aunt Ann whom he hadn't seen for a long time.

Charles has to stay on lockdown with his aunt and her servant Helen. The life in isolation makes him absolutely mad. He can't restrain his bad inclinations.

During the quarrel, Ann dies of heart attack and Charles disappears.

Eglandine is a 31-years-old woman who lives in Paris. She works in modeling and travels a lot. She is self-centered and she breaks with her family and her friends. The death of his friend Tobie during the lockdown makes her realize that she needs to stop thinking only about herself and to take care of her parents.

Alicia is beautiful girl, accustomed to luxury, born in San Francisco. However, she feels lonely, because her parents are not interested in her.

She is selfish, rude and isn't attached to anyone and she suffers of it.

She is signed up in the best model agency of the world and she is very popular.

But her problem gets worse, especially after her mother's death.

The quarantine has completely changed her character and her behaviour.

John Binger is a 25 years-old man, who lives in London. He is a nice guy, but sometimes he is very self-centered. That's why his girlfriend Alice breaks with him.

At the quarantine's time, John changes for the better.

Kira Davis is a 17 years-old teenager, an Instablogger, selfish and narcissistic. The quarantine makes depressive, so when it is over she doesn't want to go out.

Faure is an extraterrest, biologically identical to a human being but more developed technologically, whose spaceship makes an emergency landing in Moscow and spreads an infection.

The other heroes are Moscovites : Elizabeth, a school-girl, Colonel Eugene Sergueev, his father and Steven, her boyfriend.

Honstall is a young man who lives alone and works at distance at quarantine time. He keeps his diary in which he writes his impressions who become more and more gloomy. Finally, he becomes crazy and thinks about suicide when he hears a phone call.

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I'm really proud of what we've managed to achieve. This whole project was a new experience, since it was the first time that I ever had to do such a co-writing task and solely through electronic devices.

Marie

The final result is very exciting and feels almost like a detective story with different leads to follow. I think everyone did great on this project.

Lina

I was really impressed with all of the chapters, they were original, very detailed and interesting to read !

Alyssa

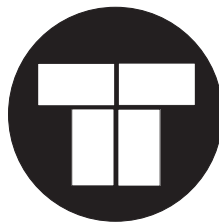
The chapters are all beautifully written, everyone did a great job with their self-centred characters. I am fond of the fact that there is a correlation between them, it makes them more interesting.

Cassandre

I think that this project is great because there is a lot of interesting stories, and all these stories are connected by different characters each more interesting than the other.

These stories are also very interesting to read because they describe well what millions of people are going through right now.

Arman



**FRENCH SCHOOL  
ALEXANDRE DUMAS  
MOSCOW RUSSIA  
2020**