

## The Girl on the windowsill

Alia Maden started sitting on the windowsill three months ago. I had been peacefully sipping my morning coffee when I first saw her climb up onto her windowsill and dangle her legs over the edge. I had almost dropped my cup at the sight.

I never understood why she decided to endure the cold, snowy mornings of Up-State New York when she could sleep under the warm covers within her penthouse. She seldom wore a jacket or hat to stop herself from shivering, as if she wanted her skin to frost over in a still glaze.

Her teeth glimmered underneath the fading moon on the morning of May 2nd, but after a few moments, her smile slumped. I found it an odd phenomenon considering Alia never stopped smiling at school. She gripped the edge of the windowsill and stared at the moving cars below her. She smiled again, but it quickly faltered.

Icy and blue, her eyes watched the street buzz below.

I was never crazy enough to join her, but whenever her face turned stone cold and hard, I would stare out my window with the pane slightly open just in case. She never noticed me. Those last few days, I don't think she really noticed anything. Her eyes, though feigned with bright vivacity at school, dulled in the quiet moments above the road.

Today was my crazy day it seemed, and though I wasn't the type to be reckless, I wasn't the type to let a stone-faced Alia stare down at the street below her. I pressed my lips together and dropped my hand in my lap, the call to 911 fading away on the phone screen. They told me to stay in place, to not aggravate her further, but panic tickled at my skin. Instinctively, I worried my lip until my teeth clenched on bits of my skin.

How could I just sit and watch her twiddle her thumbs and stare down at the street as if it was her bed?

Half of me mocked my worry. Alia Maden—the girl who'd help the new kid find their way to class, the girl who danced and sang like no one was watching, the girl who adorned the most patches on her letterman jacket—why would she contemplate suicide?

My rational side mocked my reasoning. Everyone had a story, a secret, a lie they told to preserve their image. I had many myself, but the shock of this situation had yet to settle in my gut. Out of all people, *Alia Maden*?

A small tear slinked down her slender, pale, freshly powdered face. She hastily wiped it away and practiced her smile again, but another tear interrupted it. She sniffled and reached into the pocket of her dress, pulling out a sheet of torn journal paper with the fringe still on. Slowly, she picked at it, carefully tearing the teeth of the paper off and setting the scraps beside her.

I tossed the 911 caller's incessant advice not to get involved in the trash and heaved open my old and tight window, leaving enough room for me to carefully

swing my legs over. Immediately, I regretted it. The lash of air from the harsh New York wind and zooming cars below set my heart into a furious rampage. My hair blew in my face, but I was too terrified to move it out of my face.

Alia bundled the pile of paper into a ball and placed it into her pocket. I gripped onto the sill with every inch of my life, but she acted as if she were simply sitting on a couch, not a thin windowsill with no support, no backbone, and no safety.

She almost seemed used to it.

Her hands gripped the edge of the ledge until they turned purple. She sucked in a harsh breath as if it were her last. I leaned forward in panic, but nearly screamed when I caught another sight of the road. Pressing my eyes shut served as a decent mediator for the immense anxiety ready to burst out of my heart.

The police said to wait for them, to find the perfect time to confront. *If she doesn't seem to have decided, don't bother her. It might aggravate her further. Only talk to her once we get there.*

The sharp wail of sirens cut through the still air. I shuddered out a breath, nearly collapsing back into the comfort of my apartment. My hands tightened on the windowsill again, but this time, motivation surged through me.

"Hey!" I shouted. She glanced up, her eyes as hard as a rock. "Ya, you," I panted, stabilizing myself. "What do you think you're doing?"

She chuckled and brushed her blonde hair out of her face. “Depends,” she said. “Depends on the person watching.” She adjusted her coral dress and tilted her head. “Why do you care?”

“Please get off the ledge.”

“Why? You don’t like the breeze?”

I narrowed my eyes. “You’re going to get hurt.” I breathed, gaining balance. I slowly brushed the hair out of my face.

“Will I?” she asked. The sirens sounded again. She glanced down and sighed. A white puff of air came out of her pink lips.

She pulled her cigarette from behind her and lifted it to her lips. “Looks like you’ve intervened in my business.”

“Please just get off.”

She chuckled, throwing her head back. I shifted uncomfortably. “Who are you?” she sneered, sucking in another puff of air. “Why the hell do you care?”

“Because...” I bit my lip. “Because I don’t want anything to happen to you. I mean, you’re such a nice person. All my friends love you. Do you remember Anna? You helped her around school when she was knew. She never stops talking about how perfect you-”

“I’m not perfect,” she snapped, a gust of a laugh bursting from her lips. She glanced up. “What’s your name?”

“Katherine.” I didn’t expect her to remember me. “And nobody’s perfect, but you—you’ve got so much to live for.”

“It’s not that easy, Katherine.” she said, loud enough so I could hear. Her voice bridged on a breaking point. She shook her head. “I don’t expect you to understand.”

With each second, my fear spiked up exponentially. The wind only grew harsher and colder as if it wanted to blow me away.

“How’s your boyfriend?” I asked in an effort to start a conversation.

“I...I don’t want to talk about him.”

“Okay,” I shuddered. “What about dance? I heard your team’s going to nationals. You’re the captain, right?”

A small smile perked up on her face. “Yeah, I am.”

“My friends and I went to the last game, and we were so amazed by your performance. How can you lift your leg up that high?”

Her smile bloomed into a laugh. “A lot of practice, I guess.”

“That’s-”

“Look, Kath, I appreciate this...intervention,” she said, not removing her eyes from her lap. “But I can’t.” Her chest shook with a shadow of a sob. “I can’t anymore.”

“What’s wrong?” I asked. “I don’t know if I’ll know you feel, but I’m ready to listen.”

“Everything.” She teared up. “Everything.”

“Do you think it’ll get better?”

“No.” Her voice cracked. “It’ll only get worse.”

“Can you tell me why?”

Her eyes were glossed over. “I don’t want to burden you.”

“I’m here to listen.”

“Tell me why you want this,” I responded. “You’re just willing to throw your relationships, your accomplishments, your life...” My eyes softened. “Alia, it’s not worth it.”

She scoffed and picked at her manicured nails. “My life isn’t perfect, you know.”

“I never said it was, but you have friends to help you through this.”

Alia Maden closed her eyes and tilted her head up to the sky. “They all just talk to me because of my dad.”

“That’s not true. You’re sweet, smart, funny, pretty, talented-”

“And rich.”

The air stilled. “It’s your anxiety talking. Don’t listen to it.” I paused, thinking of ways to approach my next question. “Have you taken your meds?”

“They don’t help me. They—they make it worse.” She rubbed her shoulders. “I can feel all the eyes on me, all the pressure.” Her eyes flitted up, laced with a thread of madness. “They want me to die. They just want to party and get drunk and party and get drunk and die!”

I knew Alia wasn’t perfect. Far from, actually. Her two diagnoses didn’t fare well for her mind, but her parents had numbed her down through extreme medicine since she was young. It made her so happy that I almost believed it was true.

“You need to take them again,” I suggested. “It’ll get better then.”

She shook her head and pressed her hands to her knees. “I’m not going to live my life being numb, not feeling anything because of those meds. No, they’re all gone.”

“When’s the last time you refilled your prescription?”

“A week ago.”

I frowned. “Then why are they gone?”

I frowned, watching her legs dangle over the ledge. Large bags under her eyes peeked from under her concealer. Her hair frizzed up from her constant messing with it.

“So that’s why you’re here.”

“Why are you here?” she muttered. “You’re not supposed to help me, that’s not how it works.”

I tilted my lips up into a gentle smile and fiddled with my hands. “I don’t work by the laws of cinematography.”

At first, I didn’t receive a reaction, but gradually, a smile crept on her face. Then, she snorted. I burst out laughing. She cupped her hand over her mouth and doubled over in laughter. She snorted again, but this time, more tears ran down her cheeks. I furrowed my brows together.

“I won’t let you do it,” I said. “I’m not letting our history die with you.”

She rubbed her bloodshot eyes and sucked in a breath. They welled with tears. “I don’t know why I’m feeling this way,” she whispered, choking on her words.

“I have a good life, my mom’s still alive, dad’s finally around, my boyfriend’s...there, my friends are fine, I just...I’m missing something and I don’t know what.”

“I get it.” I brushed my hair back. “Life’s a bitch.”

“Yea,” she chortled. “Life is a bitch.”

“But it moves on, it keeps playing. The story doesn’t end. Your life, Alia, isn’t a movie. You don’t just get to decide when it ends. You have to punch those assholes straight in the gut and push past them. You gotta look Fate in its gnarly eye and write its destiny in the books,” I explained. “You have so much to live for-”

Tears streamed down her face. “Stop helping me!”

“No!” I shouted, holding onto the ledge. “You helped me back then. You *saved* my life. No matter what happened between us, I am *not* letting you go, Alia, no matter what you said, I’m here, okay?” A tear rushed down my face. “I’m gonna help you, okay? We’ll go to the principal and report him. We’ll visit your mom every day. We’ll get ice cream like we used to,” I urged. I flung my last desperate attempts her way, “You’re not alone,” I sputtered. “I’m here and I’m not going anywhere.”

She pressed the note to her heart and sobbed into her hand. Her makeup streaked. I tensed, looking down at the police watching from below.

“Get off the ledge, Alia,” I pleaded. “*Please.*”

She hesitated. Her hands still gripped the ledge, but her face was deathly pale. She gulped and moved her eyes away from the road below. Alia tilted her head up and shook her head.

She swung her legs over and back to the platform. I pressed my lips together, watching her get on her knees. Tears streamed down my face, but if I let go of the windowsill to wipe them away, I could've fallen. Tremors racked my body as she eyed the note. Her nimble hands, adorned in a thin, rope bracelet, tore the note into little bits until flakes of its remains floated down the building. She brushed her hair back and smudged her makeup, mouthing something to herself.

The air stilled. She looked over the ledge against and sniffed.

Flashing one last look at me, Alia Maden slipped back into her house and closed the window.

I shuddered and pressed my hand to my heart. As fast as I could, I climbed off the ledge and back to the rickety stairs of my apartment complex. Glancing out the window, I shut my window and raced out the door to her penthouse.