

Let me go

by Lena Steinbrink – 12b

It snowed. How peaceful. How calm. She hadn't had that feeling for a long time. Little snowflakes were dancing under the glowing white lantern. The closer she got to the lantern, the warmer she got. No footsteps could be seen in the snow. Everything seemed so untouched. No tree top could be seen from afar. A light wind was blowing. The air was fresh. Her watch beat in time with her pulse. She hugged it and held out her hand. Just a little more and she could grab him. Suddenly, the light went out, the warmth faded, her hands turned blue. A storm was approaching. The silence, hardly bearable, suddenly felt unbearable and oppressive. She fought against the wind and wanted to get nearer. But the more she resisted, the further away she got. She hastily tried to grab something, anything. But there was nothing. "Don't let me go," the voice screamed. Then it fell silent.

Mary quickly woke up. Her hands appeared normal. No abnormalities except for her little scar. She had been having the same dream every night and she didn't know why. That night it was particularly bad. It felt so real. She sat up and pulled off her wet, sweaty sheets to wash them. The grey tiles reflected the first rays of the sun. They felt so cold when she walked on them. She tried to open the bathroom door, but it was stuck, again. She pressed her elbow against the rusted gold doorknob from below. The door rose a little and slammed against the wall. "Luckily I live alone," she muttered and pushed past the door with the wet sheets. She stared at herself in the mirror for a few minutes. Her brown hair lay smoothly over her pale face. Her black top was wrinkled. The only really colored thing seemed to be her glassy green eyes. She looked down and put the sheets on the floor.

A creak. It made her start. Again. Her heart started beating faster. Where did it come from? She looked around hastily. Her shaky hands tried to remove a razor blade from its holder. The creak grew louder. Steps seemed to be approaching. She dropped the razor. A deep cut ran down the palm of her hand. Fortunately, it didn't hit a vein. She suppressed a scream. Quickly, she crawled under the sheets and held her breath. She closed her eyes tightly.

"Mary? What are you doing?" He pulled the sheet off her and repeated the question. Mary looked up. "Oh, I ... I just cut myself on the razor here". She picked up the blade and slowly stood up. "Are you okay?" He helped her up. "Why were you under the sheets anyway?" He looked at her, confused. "And, how come you are still wearing the same shirt? Otherwise, you are always so picky about hygiene". Mary rolled her eyes and turned to the sink to wash the blood off her hand. "Well, then I'll stop asking. I'm sorry for worrying about how you are". And with those words he stepped through the doorway. "Why are you here?" Mary finally asked him. He stopped. "Michael said I should take a look at a bike nearby which we can possibly do up a little. If it looks as good as in the pictures, it'll be good business for sure. And then I thought I'd see what my little sister was up to". She nodded briefly and stuffed the sheets into the washing machine. "By the way, I brought you something to eat, unless you want your expired mayonnaise with some cucumber from the fridge for breakfast." She gave him a fleeting smile. "Okay, I'll be right there, I just need to shower really quick".

She closed the door and took a short breath. She hated it when Joe showed up unannounced. He'd recently been coming by her place spontaneously. In the past, her brother had done exactly the opposite. Suddenly Mary cried out. She got out of the shower and grabbed a towel. The water had suddenly turned ice cold. Then it occurred to her. She still hadn't paid the electricity bill. She quickly slipped into some warm clothes and went to the kitchen. But instead of meeting Joe there, as expected, the kitchen was empty. "Typical," thought Mary, and went to the front door. A stack of letters piled on the floor. She picked them up and placed them on the dining table. Half of the letters were reminder notices and invoices that had not been paid. How was she supposed to manage it all? She didn't even have a job anymore. Fired for alleged theft. Mary would still get upset about that sometimes. Her boss simply didn't like her, but instead of just firing her, she had to accuse her of a crime. She hit the table in anger and a glass fell onto the floor. The splinters spread over the tiles. Mary bit her lip and gently covered her face with her hands. Her eyes filled with tears. "Wait, let me do that for you". Joe picked up the broken pieces and mopped the floor. "What would you do without me?" Mary looked at him. His shirt was at least two sizes too small for him, but he always wanted to show that he went to the gym. In contrast to his basic blue pants, his shoes had always been quite spectacular, but lately he had been wearing the same old pair of red Jordans.

He looked at the letters. "Oh man! You really have to look for a new job. There's more red in them than on my thesis. It can't be that I earn more money than the nerd of the family". Mary wiped the tears from her face and sniffed: "I know, it is inexplicable to me, too". "Come on, let's get out of this old apartment and ask Alice. She said she had work for you in case you needed help". Mary wasn't very enthusiastic; she didn't like asking anyone for anything. However, she knew that when Joe put his mind to something, nothing could possibly stop him. Reluctantly, she followed him out of the apartment.

Alice lived only a few streets away. She owned a small café below her apartment. When they were in front of it, Joe sat down on a chair and grabbed a newspaper that was on the table in front of him. "Joe!", Mary hissed, "You don't even know who might be sitting there. Aren't you coming in?" Joe looked up, smiled briefly, and shrugged. "Well then, I'll just go alone". Annoyed, she went in through the door.

The doorbell made a familiar light sound and she could smell the freshly baked pastries. Alice seemed to have redecorated the place. The orange walls she'd known were now painted white and, along with the large yellow curtains, made the room look much more spacious and up-to-date. "Mary! Tell me, dear, how are you? Where have you been? I haven't seen you for two weeks" Two weeks? She hadn't been gone for that long. Alice must have once again exaggerated a little. Even back in elementary school, when she hadn't stopped by the café for two days after school, she would serve her a portion twice as big on her next visit. "All good. I see you've redecorated the place?" "Yes, indeed. I thought it was time for something new. Oh Mary, I'm so sorry I haven't been able to pay you a visit, but the café has been so busy". She came out from behind the counter. "If you want, we can go to the cinema tonight. I've heard there's a great film playing". Alice brushed a strand away from her face. "Oh, I ...", Mary wanted to reply but Alice interrupted her, "I'm sure you're hungry, you look very pale. Luckily I've just baked a cake". Alice disappeared into the kitchen. "No, it's fine, Alice, I'm not hungry," she answered.

"She will bring you something to eat anyways". She looked to her left into the room, which had tables and chairs for the guests. George wiped one more table and went up to her. "Please say you came to see me. We used to see each other every day. You must have missed me a lot, haven't you?". Mary smiled: "Actually, I wanted to ask Alice for a job". George swung the scarf over his shoulder and stroked his short brown hair: " You want to start here? Well then at least I'll have nice company." He smiled. Mary blushed a little and straightened her sweater. Alice came back with a large piece of cake. She was very pleased about the job request: "Of course. You can start tomorrow if you want. I always need a helping hand." She put the piece of cake in front of her and fished for a fork. "Speaking of a helping hand, the tables don't set themselves, honey". George sighed.

"Hey!", Mary suddenly heard from outside. She turned around quickly. Joe seemed to be calling her. "Thank you very much, Alice. I'll be here tomorrow. But now I have to go, bye". Before Alice could say anything else, Mary had left the café. George stood there and watched her walk away.

Outside, however, Mary couldn't see her brother anywhere. Had her brother gotten in trouble with the owner of the newspaper? She followed the voice down the street. "Mary!" His voice slowly grew louder. It had been a long time since she'd been so far from home. The density of the city slowly faded away and only a few small houses could now be sighted on the side of the road. The narrowness of the city could no longer be felt. His screaming seemed to come from a hill that a small sandy path led to. She followed it. It was a little wet. Next to the sandy path there was a huge lawn and two ravens were pecking leftovers from a rubbish bin by the side of the path. When Mary passed them, they flew away. Now she was all alone. She took a short breath and looked around. Everything looked so small from up there. She'd reached a forest. The sun rays couldn't make it through the dense tree tops. But where was her brother? She panicked more and more and started running around. She called his name a few times, but there was no answer. Her throat slowly went dry. Then she thought she'd heard something. A muffled scream. However, she couldn't tell where it was coming from. She ran deeper into the forest. Her shoes were already soaking from the wet grass. She ran on and on. Suddenly she tripped over a root and fell facedown to the ground. She called Joe's name in a hoarse voice. Then she tried to get up, but her leg hurt. She kept hearing her name. She looked up. The branches blocked the view of the sky. She felt trapped and the cold seemed to engulf her whole body. She was terrified. The forest looked gloomy and massive.

Suddenly, someone grabbed her from behind. She wanted to scream, but she couldn't. She tried to lash out and fight back but she was too weak. "Mary, stop it! Calm down". She looked at him with tearful eyes. Then she stopped fighting and wrapped her arms around his neck. He hugged her tightly and caressed her back. She must have been hypothermic. He gently stroked her hair. "What are you doing out here?" he asked. "My brother. He was calling me". George looked at her, worried. She tried to get up again. "Stay seated," he pointed at her leg. It seemed to be sprained. "He can't be far", she said. She tried to sight something among the densely planted trees. "Mary...your brother, he...". His words became more and more incomprehensible, and soon she couldn't hear anything. She fell backwards and everything went black.

She closed her eyes.

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She woke up. It was night. The moonlight fell into the little room. The small lamp on the white bedside table looked familiar and the little Baby Yoda doll was smiling at her. George used to take it everywhere with him. He caressed her hand gently. "You're awake. In the forest you suddenly passed out, so I took you to my place with me". "He's dead ". She stared at the scar on her finger. George was looking at her. Mary continued: "I still remember how he would always hid my notebook because I supposedly worked too much. Then I would hid his watch because he always planned everything down to the second. Somehow it became a little game between us. We started to look for more and more difficult hiding places. That day, as he wanted to leave for work, he still hadn't been able to find his watch. I'd hid it too well. Otherwise, he could have left much earlier. I didn't want to tell him where it was. He got really angry because he didn't want to be late. Finally, he decided to leave without it. He said, "You're crazy," and I laughed. Then he drove off. I'd hidden the watch in the washroom behind a small crack in the wooden wall." Again, she looked at her scar. "When I got it out, I cut my index finger on a splinter of wood. I waited anxiously to tell him about my hiding place. But he didn't come home in the evening. I took my notebook to work on my thesis and then I saw the news. There had been an accident with a truck. It had rammed three cars and gone up in flames. All of those involved had died on the spot. The bodies hadn't been identified yet, but I recognized our parents' old car. If I had just given him the watch, he would have left earlier and ... ". She fell silent.

"It was not your fault, Mary". He wiped a tear from her cheek. "How did you find me out there in the woods?" Mary asked him. "You've been so distant lately. I first thought you might need some time for yourself. Then, suddenly, after no one has seen you for two weeks, you show up at the café as if nothing had happened. I wanted to run after you and ask if everything was alright. But you were so far away I couldn't catch up with you. The cemetery was in that direction, so I went there. Then I heard you scream". Mary was staring at the ceiling: "I don't know what to do without Joe. He raised me. He was always there for me". "I'll always be there for you too and so will Alice. You're not alone. I know it's extremely difficult and painful and you miss him very much, but you need to get back to reality. I want to help you wherever I can. You are very important to me, Mary. Would you like to sleep at my place tonight? I'll make you some coffee". She was about to refuse; she thought she had already been enough of a burden to George, but he just went on: "Oh wait, you don't like coffee at all, then maybe hot chocolate? I'll make you a cup. You stay there". He disappeared into the kitchen and she looked him walk away.

That night her dream was different.

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