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## Her

They came running at the sound of a large splash. This was the fourth time Breana's parents had to drag her small frame out from the pool. Each time, she cried harder than the last. No matter how much her mother tried to console her, Breana's tears continued to flow. Despite the constant warnings from her stepfather about staying away from the deep end, that forbidden side beckoned her.

The family had moved into the home a few months ago. Not even a day had gone by before the wide-eyed four-year old made her way towards the pool for the first time. It was covered haphazardly, putrid green water lapping dangerously around the sides. Breana trotted towards the deepest side and plopped down on her knees. Peering over the edge, she began to reach for the pool cover, losing her balance in the process and falling into darkness. This marked the day it all began.

"Has she stopped crying yet?" her stepfather asks. Breana's mother responds by saying she finally fell asleep on her brother's lap. Their hushed whispers that could honestly be heard throughout the neighborhood filled the otherwise quiet house.

"This is the fourth time this has happened."

"I know --"

"Why does she insist on going to the pool when no one is out there?"

"I don't --"

"Should we put some sort of childproof lock on the back door?"

“No, that’s a bit much.”

Sighing, the stepfather replies, “Then what do you suggest, Tracy?”

“Maybe we should start by trying to figure out *why* she keeps falling into the pool” suggests her mother.

“Well for starters, the kid has a watermelon head. The weight is probably too much for her to handle when trying to look over the side of the pool, so she just falls right in.”

“Michael!” the mother exclaims, “Breana’s does not have a big head! She just has really fat cheeks.”

“You’re just mad because she got her big head from you. Anyways, what do you think she’s trying to look at?”

“I don’t know. Maybe she dropped something in again.”

Suddenly, a small voice says, “No...” Breana slowly makes her way from around the corner where she had been standing. Simultaneously, her parents ask her what it is she keeps looking for. “There was someone in the water. She looked sad, so I wanted to comfort her. She’s always by herself. She says that I’m all she has. I have to be there for her.” Silence fills the room. Neither parent knew how to respond, and in the end, they wrote it off as being an imaginary friend.

They came running at the sound of a large splash. This was the eighth time Breana’s parents had to drag her small frame out from the pool. Each time, she cried harder than the last. However, this time she was silent. No matter how much her mother called her name, Breana’s mouth remained shut. Despite her stepfather constantly shaking her, her lifeless eyes remained focused on the pool.

Eventually, they just carried her inside. Once in the living room, they continued their attempts at getting their child to move or say something. Finally, Breana pointed her cold eyes at Michael. "Why did you save me?" At first, Breana had been resigned. She grew tired of this constant back-and-forth between them. Her stepfather cautiously said, "Breana? Your mother and I don't think you should talk to your friend in the pool anymore. She is putting you in danger. We don't want to see you get hurt."

Breana's cold façade broke into hysterics. "I don't want to see her anymore, either!" she cried. "She follows me everywhere. No matter where I am, she is also there. I tell her to go away, but she won't. All she does is look at me with her sad eyes. I can't take it! I keep trying to get rid of her, but you keep ruining my plans! I just want her to disappear. I'm going to get rid of her!" and with that, Breana took off running as fast as her short legs would go.

It was only a matter of time before she was out the door and in the backyard. All the while her parents were giving chase, yelling at her to stop. Once she reached the pool, she bent down and started slapping the water profusely, tears streaming down her face. She got ready to jump, but her stepfather's strong arms quickly wrapped around her and hoisted her up. Breana started kicking and screaming. "Let me go! Let go of me!" she yelled. However, Michael's grip remained strong. Breana continued, "Stop it! Put me down! I'm going to get rid of her! Why won't you let me get rid of her! You told me not to play with her anymore, so shouldn't you be happy? Let me end this!"

"Breana, please stop this!" her mother choked out through her sobs. However the child persisted in her struggle to remove herself from her stepfather's grasp. If she could free herself from him, freeing herself from the girl in the pool would be an easy feat. After a while, it became clear that Breana would not be able to escape with force.

She realized that if she wanted Michael to put her down, then she would have to give up on her struggle and fully resign.

Her parents heaved a sigh of relief as Breana stopped resisting and quieted down. However, Michael continued to keep a tight hold on her until they were all inside with the door locked. No one said a word for the rest of the day. Breana's parents asked no more questions and she offered no answers. Come dinner time, Breana barely ate anything. She forced down a few bites of macaroni and pushed the rest around her plate for a bit, hinting that she wouldn't eat anymore. Her mother finally excused her, and she trudged towards her room. On the way there, she passed by a mirror and grimaced.

It wasn't long before Breana's mother came and tucked her into bed. Again, the room was filled with a tense silence. Unable to stand it anymore, her mother kissed her forehead, headed for the door, and turned off the light. "See you in the morning, tatorbug" she said, and then she walked out the bedroom leaving Breana alone with her thoughts.

Breana wasn't sure how much time had passed as she lay in bed. She listened carefully for any sounds indicating life but was only met by the sounds of the house settling. Finally, her parents were asleep. Slowly, she got out of bed and walked to her bedroom door but stopped before crossing the threshold. She turned and looked out of her window which faced the backyard, eyeing the pool. After a moment, she set off throughout the dark house with quiet solemnity. Whether she was filled with determination or resignation, she did not know but she continued to make her way to the pool.

The night air as Breana stepped out chilled her bare feet and stung her round face. That didn't matter, though. The only thing Breana cared about was making it to the side of the pool.

As she had often done, she headed towards the deep end. However, this time she did not get down on her knees. She stood up tall and she peered into the water.

Again, her parents pulled her out of the pool. However, this would be the last time. Michael tried performing CPR while his wife stood beside him with tears streaming down her face as she contacted 911. Breana's stepbrother stood by the backdoor with a look of remorse tattooed on his face. He had come home drunk late last night and, in the midst of sneaking in through the back, saw a scene he didn't think about too much, briskly heading inside after watching for a few seconds.

Leaning over the pool's side a bit, Breana closed her eyes and took a deep breath, readying herself. Then, opening her eyes, she was met by another pair in the water. Staring at the girl in the water, she said, "I don't want to see my reflection anymore." Her hushed voice was tinged with disgust. Reflected in the water, Breana saw a hollow shell of herself. She was lonely and, from older versions of herself that she had previously seen in the water, she knew that the things she felt now would only worsen. She always knew that if she wanted to free herself from the clutches of her utter despair, then she would have to resign herself, much like the way she did with her stepfather earlier that day. That's what she had been trying to do every time she was "saved". Though, this time would be different. No one would hear her fall in because that's not what she would do. Instead, she turned her back to the pool, got on her knees, inched backwards towards the edge and stuck her legs in. Then, ever so slowly, she lowered herself into the water until it lapped at her chin and then, finally, she let go.