

## *Snow Falling*

*A short novel inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic, honoring those who passed and anyone who's lost a loved one during these hard times.*

The snowflakes fell soundlessly to the ground on that grey Sunday evening. The earth was neatly covered in a thin layer of white, glistening as you walked by. As far as the eye could see, smooth-surfaced stones were reaching up from the ground, each symbolizing the end. A life lived... and then not. The graveyard was dead silent. The sound of the birds echoed through the field. I watched as they brought down the shiny, dark, wooden casket to the ground, gently placing it in the arms of the earth, never to be harmed, ever again. I watched as a handful of earth fell onto the near-perfectly spotless box, and then another and more and more fell onto the casket. What would it feel like, being in there? Would it be peaceful, calm even? To not ever have to worry about anything for the rest of your life? But knowing that this, all of this, would be my fate in the end? What kind of ending is this? Then, suddenly, I was the one standing in front of the pit, the pile of dirt next to me, and my open palm at my side.

As the wind rustled through my hair and caressed my face I could feel my heart beating in my chest as my fingers broke the earth. It felt dry and cold to the touch. With a handful of what was by now mud in my hand, I looked down into the hole. The box gleamed under the dirt. *After I throw this in... It's all over. The pain and hurt. All gone.* It sounded as if I was merely trying to convince myself. My mind was racing, my head and my body were in a fighting state against each other and nobody seemed to be winning. I stood paralyzed by the pit, the snow falling heavier and heavier as the moments passed me by. Standing tense, my body unwilling to move. Why was this so hard? Why can't I do this? Just throw it, come on, why are you just standing there like an idiot?

"I can't," I whispered to the snow, the hole, the casket. Tears pierced my eyes and I fell to my knees, the handful of dirt falling to the ground next to me. The tears streamed down my face and dripped onto the perfect snow, breaking the white. Then my mind threw his last punch and left me tumbling through the ground. Falling into internal blackness and succumbed to the dark.

I woke up with a screaming headache. As I opened my eyes and glanced around, the room was spinning. The white was blinding. When my eyes focused I realized I was in a hospital room, strapped to a hospital bed with monitors sounding in the background. The white marble floors gleamed under the even whiter LED-lamps. The smell of bleach and lemons was distinct in the air and the smell of air fresheners was intoxicating. I adjusted my position towards the door and glass window. I saw people go by with white scrubs.

My thoughts were interrupted by a woman entering through the door. She wore scrubs and a green shirt underneath, a plastic sheet over her face, and plastic gloves. Holding a notepad she had her blonde hair in a bun, a pen sticking out of it. As she pulled the pen out from her hair and set her golden curls free I noticed something glistening around her neck. It was a

small golden locket with a lion carefully engraved on the lid. She walked up to my bed and sat down on the chair next to me.

“Hello, dear.” She said, placing her gloved hand on my arm. It was cold. “What’s your name?” I said nothing. She shook her head at my silence. She glanced at her notepad and said, without looking up, “Ms. Bianca Williams, is it?”

“If you knew my name, why did you ask?” I said quietly. She dismissed my question and flipped through the pages of her notebook.

“It says here you blacked out during a funeral?” She glanced at me and continued, “You’ve suffered a minor concussion and have some bruises but you’ll be able to leave here in a couple of days.” She then said, not bothering to look me in my eyes. “I will be here with you these next few days, monitoring your health and such.” She then looked up from her papers and looked at me up and down before standing up straight, turning away from me, and walking towards the door. Before walking out she turned back for a moment. “If you need anything you just click that button,” She said pointing at something on the bedside table. It was a little button that was connected with a plastic-covered wire to somewhere behind the bed. Then the door slammed shut and she was gone.

Things got quiet for a minute after the woman left. I took in the sounds of the heart monitors and the air conditioner in the corner of the room. I zoned out while looking out the window and thought about the snow falling on the other side, so peaceful, so innocent. Then the events of the funeral came to mind and tears threatened to sting my eyes. It was my dad’s funeral. I could imagine him in front of me. His dark hair and weirdly blue eyes. He would always wear the torn leather jacket that grandpa gave him when he was younger. No matter how many buttons fell off or how much the zipper got stuck or broke. He never threw it away. He loved it so much, and now he’s gone. He stood in front of my bed, with a sad smile haunting his lips. “Why did you leave me alone?” I asked him with tears in my eyes. He only smiled at me and walked towards the chair by the bed. He put his hand on mine and just looked at me for a moment as I drifted back to sleep.

I woke up a few hours later, my head pounding and my mind racing. Where am I, what happened? I came to remember that I was in the hospital. I pushed myself upright in bed and glanced around the room. It looked the same as before, polished floors, blinding white lights, and the fresh smell of bleach still haunted the room. I heard voices from the other side of the door and the door swung open to reveal... a woman and a man. The woman was short and dark-haired and she wore a black pantsuit with a brown coat. Her hair was put up in a ponytail and she wore high heels. The man wore a blue suit and tie and had thick brown hair in a buzzcut. “Bianca Williams?” The man asked. I nodded in reply. “We are from social services.” The woman said. “It’s about your father.” I sat up straight, suddenly tense. “Yes? What about him?” I said, trying to keep calm. I knew what this was about. They are going to put me in the system. I’m only 15, so they’ll put me up for adoption or something. “Since your father has passed and has no other living relatives that can take care of you until you come of age, we are required to find you a family that can.” The man continued. “So you’re going to put me in some foster home?” I said, my breath trembling and tears threatening to escape my eyes. The woman's expression softened at my words and she gave

me a sad smile. Pity. She was pitying me. Me and my sad, sad life. Dead father, lost mother. I was completely alone. I had nobody. I don't know why but this made me angry. I don't need anyone's pity. I'm fine. Sure, it all sucks. But I can manage. I don't need foster care. I have myself and that's enough. My trail of thought was interrupted. "Honey," the woman said. "I know you must feel horrible right now, but trust me when I say that things get better, and we are here to help you on that path." I fought the tears and stared at her dead in the eyes. "How would you know?" I said, anger empowering my every word. "Your dad didn't just die because of the virus. Your dad wasn't plugged into oxygen tanks and machines the last week of his life!" I shouted. "And I didn't get to see him! Nobody let me go see him, because I would've gotten sick but do you think I cared? I loved him, and now he's gone and I didn't even get to say goodbye." Tears were streaming down my cheeks. I felt a stabbing pain in my chest. I was hyperventilating now, and my throat was tightening. "I didn't get to say goodbye..." I whispered to the air. I felt a hand on my shoulder and looked into the brown eyes of the woman. She had a painful expression on her face. "I know. I understand. Don't cry, okay?" She put her hand on my face and wiped off my tears. "This isn't exactly corona-friendly now is it?" She joked and I let myself chuckle. "No, not really." I agreed, wiping off my tears with my sleeve. "Let's get you out of here," She said smiling.

I soon learned that the woman was named Ashlynn and that she would be my supervisor throughout the process of me, hopefully soon, getting adopted. She told me that the other man was named Chase and was her partner. "He's a real piece of work, that man." She told me while we were packing up my things from the hospital. "But he is a decent person- when it suits him." We made our way out of the hospital with masks on, we checked out by the reception, and walked out of the building. Ashlynn showed me to a black SUV in the parking lot and gentlemanly Chase held the door open with his free hand. With his other, he held a phone to his ear. He then drove out of the parking spot and onto the road. We drove in silence for a while, I was looking out the window, watching the snow fall silently on the other side of the glass and the city rushing past. Soon enough, we came to a stop by a big, grey, glass building surrounded by an empty parking lot. We got out of the car and made our way to the building.

Chase had yet to end his call when we reached the big glass door that made the entrance. He dug in his pocket for a moment and retrieved a silvery card. He brought the card to the keypad on the door and with a tiny click the door slid smoothly open. We walked in, Ashlynn gently placing her hand on my shoulder. The lobby was huge and opened up to a grand staircase made almost entirely out of glass. The floor was out of black marble and almost everything else I could see was out of glass. Ashlynn brought me to an office area in the corner of the lobby. The entire building was so silent you could hear a pin drop. It didn't seem like anyone had been here for days. The small office we walked into didn't contain much. There was a desk in the middle of the room, a chair on either side, a huge screen in between, and a few drawers and shelves on the black-painted walls. Chase stood waiting on the other side of the glass door. Ashlynn pulled up the chair for me and I sat down quietly. Shouldn't we wear masks or something here, given the circumstances? As if she'd read my mind she said: "I know this isn't exactly virus-friendly behavior, but everyone who comes in gets

tested every week and you got tested during your stay at the hospital, so we were willing to take a chance with you,” she said apologetically with a grin plastered across her face. “It’s fine, I guess,” I said smiling. Then a question came to mind. “I was tested?” “Oh, that’s right! You probably don’t remember.” She said. “We came to visit you earlier but you were pretty heavily sedated after your injury. It was minor, yes, but you seemed tired so we decided to postpone the visit until you got better. I suppose they performed the test then.” “We were informed later that you had been tested negative for COVID-19 so we thought it would only smoothen the transition.” She added. “Okay, so what am I doing here?” I asked stupidly. “Well, Bianca, right now I need to fix the documents of your personal information for your new legal guardians at the foster home.” She replied while digging through a cabinet behind the desk. We spent the next hour talking about my history and after a lengthy discussion about my previous schools she breached the “family”-subject. “So, what happened to your mother?” She asked carefully, glancing at me. Probably making sure I wouldn’t start crying, but it was honestly getting old for me. So I didn’t. I simply said; “She left and didn’t come back so she doesn’t matter.” Ashlynn looked at me for a moment before scribbling something on a piece of paper and moving on. When we were done we exited the building and made our way back to the car. Chase was walking up to us. “The foster home has been assigned.” He said courtly. “Eastside, Apatria.” Ashlynn nodded and opened the door to the back seat, and I climbed in.

We drove for what seemed like hours, woodlands thinning out and snow thickening as we drove. When the car finally came to a stop we were standing in front of a large red house with green windows and a bronze-green roof. Ashlynn walked me to the door and ringed on the doorbell. The door opened to reveal a large woman wearing a purple shirt and jeans with long curly black hair and a face full of makeup. The sound of screaming and yelling children sounded from behind her. She introduced herself as Jennifer and told me that she would introduce me to the rest of the kids during my stay. Ashlynn and I said our goodbyes and I watched as they drove off.

Days turned into weeks and nothing changed. It was all just an endless haze of screaming children and staring out of windows. Ashlynn came to visit every other day for the first week and when she came we would go for a walk and talk about our days. It was nice, having someone to talk to. Almost like normal, with dad. There had come several pairs looking to adopt, all wearing masks and having a bottle full of sanitizer in their purses and bags but only a couple of children got adopted. Although, I sincerely doubted I’d be one of them. They don’t like teenagers. Too much work and too many years. One week Ashlynn didn’t come to visit at all. I spent every single day waiting by the window expecting her car to drive up by the house. But nobody was there. I was hurt. Why wouldn’t she come and check up on me after everything she knew I’d been through? My mom, my dad, having to go into foster care? I fought back tears as I went to the living room and slouched down heavily on the couch.

Then I noticed a pamphlet on the coffee table. I grabbed it and looked at it. Something interesting must be written here. The pamphlet turned out to be a map. Of the very area that

we were in. There wasn't much on it though. There was a supermarket nearby, a couple of miles west. There was a farm a bit east and there was a cemetery only half-a-mile away. Easy walking distance. Then I read the name of the cemetery. *Apatria Church Cemetery* and my heart almost stopped. It was there my father was buried. Without a word, I ran up to my room, grabbed a jacket from the wardrobe and I ran back down. I slid into my shoes and shot through the door. I walked and walked. Uphill, downhill, and through the woods, map in hand. Unbothered by the cold snow. I walked through the trees as the day darkened. When I saw the stones half-buried in the ground I knew I'd arrived. I walked around the cemetery, without any sense of direction. Suddenly I felt my foot hit something. Something metal, by the sound of it. I looked down and saw a tipped over oil-lantern. I quickly picked it up and turned it on. I strolled around, bringing the light closer to the graves. I was near, I could feel it, and then I saw it. The name *Jacob Williams* was engraved into a silky white gravestone. I tripped over my feet and fell to my knees into the snow. I touched the stone. I felt the carvings with my fingertips. The pain was like no other I'd ever endured. Starting in my chest it was reaching into the deepest part of my soul, tearing me up from the inside. I felt tears rolling down my face and I was too weak to stop them. I wrapped my arms around the cold gravestone and let the tears drip onto the rock. I felt hopeless and kept crying until I finally, and truly gave way to the darkness.

When I opened my eyes I was not in the cemetery. I was in a white room, but there was no furniture. Just white, blinding bright. Pushing myself up to my feet, I looked around. Where am I? What is this place? I took a step forward, my steps echoing around the room. "Peaceful. Isn't it?" I heard a voice behind me say. I turned around and I saw... my father. Absolutely glowing and smiling at me. I was gaping. "Dad?" I stuttered. He only smiled. I ran to him and I wrapped my arms around him." Is it really you?" He didn't reply, only wrapped his arms around me and didn't let go. "I don't understand," I said. "Am I dead?" He looked me in the eyes with his ocean blue eyes. "No. You are not. And you're not going to be any time soon." I wrapped my arms tighter around him. "I-I'm sorry, dad. I should've-" He shushed me. We stood quiet for some time. "I love you, Dad," I said. He just held me. After that, we said nothing more. Because everything had already been said.

I opened my eyes and gasped for breath. I blinked and looked around. I was back in my hospital room, Ashlynn sitting by my side. I saw Chase by the door, speaking to a person in a full-blown protective suit. I saw Jennifer standing in the corner of the room and doctors in protective gear speaking hurriedly, giving instructions left and right. I looked back at Ashlynn. "Ashlynn? Wha-What happened?" I said, confused. I could see the tears in her eyes. She grabbed my hand. "We almost lost you." She said finally after a moment of silence. My mouth gaped open. "You mean I...I...?" I struggled to find the words. She nodded, tears rolling down her face. "Bianca. I promise you that I will never leave you alone, ever again." She said, trying to steady her voice. She then pulled out a piece of paper. The words *Report of Adoption* stared me right in the face. I gaped at it for a moment before jumping in her arms. She wrapped her arms around me and we sat like that for a moment. Locked in each other's embrace. Because at that moment, nothing else mattered.