

FOURTEEN

Written by

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INT. LUCIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

HENRY, 45, stands at the counter, chopping carrots. A bowl of chopped veggies is next to him. Something cooks on the stove.

LUCIE, 14, enters, a backpack over one shoulder.

Henry looks up as he daughter approaches.

LUCIE

Hey, Dad.

Lucie swings her backpack onto a chair and drops down next to it. She sighs.

HENRY

Lucie! How was school? How was the math test?

LUCIE

Fine. The test was hard, but that's expected. What're you making?

Henry resumes chopping carrots.

HENRY

Butter chicken. We'll watch a movie and celebrate the weekend.

Lucie jumps up.

LUCIE

Could we watch The Life of a Teenage Zombie?

HENRY

Whatever you want.

Lucie runs to her dad and hugs him.

LUCIE

Thank you, thank you, thank you!
Oh, this is way better than that stupid dance.

Henry stops chopping and looks at his daughter.

HENRY

What dance?

LUCIE

Oh, nothing.

HENRY
Why aren't you going?

LUCIE
I wanted to stay home tonight.
Especially now, with the movie.

Henry stares down Lucie.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
I'm just tired.

HENRY
Are you having a hard time?

LUCIE
What? No. I have tons of friends.

Henry resumes chopping, slower than before.

HENRY
I'll make you a deal. You'll go to
the dance for an hour. Then we'll
talk, and I can pick you up.

LUCIE
Dad, no! It's just a stupid dance!

HENRY
I promised your mother I'd raise a
happy, well-adjusted child--

LUCIE
I am happy and well-adjusted!

HENRY
Happy children go to dances.

LUCIE
Dad, I don't have any friends.

Henry hugs his daughter.

HENRY
You just need to keep trying. Give
me one hour of trying, then we can
watch your zombie friend try.

LUCIE
Elizabeth.

HENRY
Sure.

INT. HENRY'S CAR - NIGHT

Henry sits in the driver's seat by the gym. Lucie sits beside him. Colorful lights flash through the windows.

Lucie wears a tee with a hip zombie speaking on a cell.

HENRY

I'll talk to you in an hour, okay?

LUCIE

Do you like my shirt?

HENRY

Yes, you look great, honey.

LUCIE

This is Elizabeth, star of The Life of a Teenage Zombie. Get ready for the best movie ever.

HENRY

Lucie. Go.

Lucie groans, opens the car door, steps out, then looks back.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Have fun.

LUCIE

I won't.

Lucie shuts the car door.

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Adults, including MS. DANIELS, 40, stand at a table with a cashbox and colorful flyers. Thumping music is heard.

Lucie enters and stops at the table.

MS. DANIELS

Hey, Lucie. I'm glad to see you. I didn't think you were coming.

LUCIE

Hi, Ms. Daniels. My dad made me come for an hour.

Lucie pulls cash from her pocket.

Ms. Daniels takes the money and puts it in the cashbox.

MS. DANIELS
Enjoy yourself. You might change
your mind.

LUCIE
Maybe. I'm gonna--

Lucie gestures at the doors to the dance.

MS. DANIELS
Have fun!

Lucie exits.

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DANCE - NIGHT

A DJ plays music. Bright, colored lights rotate. Kids in
groups sit on the bleachers. Some dance.

Lucie skirts the edges. She looks at the groups she passes.
She grabs an abandoned folding chair and sits.

LUCIE
Okay, now you only have--

She pulls out her phone. It reads: 6:35 PM.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
55 minutes.

She messes on her phone, glancing up and around.

Cheers come from the floor as a popular boy-band plays.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
Ugh.

Lucie stands and retraces her path to the doors, past Ms.
Daniels and another woman from the entrance.

MS. DANIELS
Lucie? Where are you going?

LUCIE
Oh, it's just so hot in here.

MS. DANIELS
No one can leave until their
parents come. Have a drink.

Ms. Daniels gestures to the wall of soda and snacks.

LUCIE
Right. Thanks.

Lucie walks over, pours soda, and grabs a cookie. She returns to her seat, and texts her dad: "Please let me leave."

She texts again: "I'll even watch *Jaws*. Again."

Henry responds: "You have 45 minutes. [shark emoji]"

Lucie sighs, puts her phone away, stands, and walks past Ms. Daniels near the door, who speaks to another person.

Lucie creeps to the door and pushes it open.

MS. DANIELS
Lucie!

Lucie turns. The doors shut behind her.

LUCIE
Hi, Ms. Daniels. Having fun?

MS. DANIELS
What did I tell you about leaving?

LUCIE
We can't until our parents come.

MS. DANIELS
Then why did you just try to leave?

LUCIE
I left something in my locker. Some homework. It's due Monday.

MS. DANIELS
Unfortunately, the school is locked up, like it always is after 6pm.

LUCIE
Oh. Right.

MS. DANIELS
Why don't you go dance?

LUCIE
I'm not much of a dancer.

Lucie walks past Ms. Daniels.

MS. DANIELS
Lucie?

Lucie turns back.

MS. DANIELS (CONT'D)
Don't try to leave again. Please?

Lucie nods and walks around the gym. She glances at cliques. In a corner, MALLORY, 14, stands fiddling with her phone.

Lucie smiles and heads to her. A basketball bounces into Mallory, who startles, turns, and laughs.

MALLORY
Terrance, you idiot!

Mallory throws the ball back, and jogs to students who laugh.

Lucie walks on. She sits on the bleachers and watches the dancers. She takes out her phone again. It reads 6:54 PM.

She sighs, puts it away, and walks to the restroom.

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - WOMEN'S RESTROOM - NIGHT

It looks old but clean. A small window sits high on the wall above a radiator. Music filters in from the dance.

Two girls chat at the sinks, applying lip gloss.

Lucie enters. They see her, make eye contact, and leave.

She goes to the sink, splashes her face, and stares in the mirror. She turns and notices the window.

She glances at the door, climbs the radiator, and examines the window. It's painted shut, but one edge is peeling.

LUCIE
Maybe I can--

She picks at it with her nails, revealing the metal frame. She tugs the window. It wiggles.

She retrieves her student ID from her pocket. She runs it under the edge. Dried paint flakes off in its wake.

She smiles, jimmies it, and slides it open a little. The door opens, the music louder, but Lucie doesn't notice.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
Freedom!

She continues working the window with her ID.

MS. DANIELS

I have to give it to you. I've never seen a student so determined to escape a dance.

Lucie gets off the radiator and puts her ID away.

LUCIE

Are you going to write me up?

MS. DANIELS

Why do you want to leave so badly?

LUCIE

I'd rather be with my dad on the couch than here, alone.

MS. DANIELS

How would escaping the gym and wandering in the cold help you?

LUCIE

The cold is better than in there.

Lucie gestures to the door.

LUCIE (CONT'D)

I won't be alone while surrounded by people.

Ms. Daniels sighs and gestures to the floor.

MS. DANIELS

Let's sit.

They sit on the floor, against the wall.

MS. DANIELS (CONT'D)

I was like you. I moved away from my town just before 8th grade. I was scared and lonely.

LUCIE

Why?

Ms. Daniels smiles at her.

MS. DANIELS

For the same reason as you.

LUCIE

My mom is dead. My dad is awesome, but he doesn't really understand me. He doesn't get being a girl.

MS. DANIELS
I'm sorry.

LUCIE
Did your mom die, too?

MS. DANIELS
No, Lucie. My sister did.

Cheering is heard from the dance.

LUCIE
I'm sorry.

MS. DANIELS
It's okay. It's been awhile. But it
felt like no one else would
understand-- could understand.

Lucie nods.

LUCIE
How did you manage being alone?

MS. DANIELS
I didn't. I made friends by joining
clubs-- finding others who like
what I liked.

LUCIE
But how? How did you talk to them?

A moment of silence.

MS. DANIELS
I thought of my sister. She
wouldn't want me to be lonely.

LUCIE
My dad said-- that my mom wanted me
to be happy. He said that happy
kids go to dances and make friends.

MS. DANIELS
Your father is a wise man.

Ms. Daniels checks her watch, then pushes up off the floor.
She offers a hand to Lucie, who accepts.

MS. DANIELS (CONT'D)
It's 7:18. Your dad said you could
leave at 7:30, right?

Lucie nods.

MS. DANIELS (CONT'D)
So why don't you spend the next 15
minutes trying? For your mom.

Lucie hesitates, then nods.

MS. DANIELS (CONT'D)
And for yourself.

Lucie straightens up and strides out of the bathroom.

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DANCE - NIGHT

Lucie walks the perimeter. She spots her target-- the girl
from before. Lucie approaches her. Mallory is on her phone.

LUCIE
Hi! I'm Lucie.

Mallory looks up.

LUCIE (CONT'D)
I don't know if you've seen me
around, but I'm new.

Mallory smiles.

MALLORY
Yeah, we're in the same English
class. Period 3 with Ms. Daniels?

LUCIE
That's the one!

MALLORY
I'm Mallory. I love your shirt.

LUCIE
Oh, this? It's a character from--

MALLORY
The Life of a Teenage Zombie. I'm a
huge fan.

LUCIE
Have you seen the movie yet?

MALLORY
I need to finish the book.

She holds up her phone, showing a page of an ebook.

LUCIE

That's the way to do it! First read
the book--

MALLORY

Then see the movie!

The girls laugh.

LUCIE

Do you think--

Lucie's phone rings. The screen shows her it's her dad.

LUCIE (CONT'D)

Sorry, give me one sec.

Lucie turns and steps away, answering the phone.

LUCIE (CONT'D)

Hi, Dad? Yeah, I'm staying. I think
I'm making a friend.

Lucie smiles.