

to eat because I w

'Why?' I wrote on the notebook lying beside me with one hand into my sandwich, then turned the notebook his way.

He just shrugged. "It's easier for you to sign. Isn't it?"

I slowly nodded. It was true, signing was much easier than have write. Sometimes, even I gave up communicating some things because it's bothersome to write too much, and the other part would have to wait.

But it was my only means of communication with those around since none of them knew sign language. Well, with the exception Jim, whose knowledge of ASL was very limited.

But learning sign language wouldn't be simple for a person as he was. I mean, he arrived to work before everyone else.

'You don't have to learn it if it's just because of me,' I wrote. 'I mind writing.'

He read then shook his head. "It's a good thing to learn, anyway."

A frown tugged down my brows. Maybe it was bothersome to wait for me to write a reply each time. But no, it didn't feel that all. Besides, he could've just not come if he found my company bothersome. No, he actually wanted to learn sign language to communicate easier with me. It was heartwarming.

I finished my sandwich in record time as he took his last forkful of salad.

"Alright, let's begin," he said, rubbing his hands together with excited smile that drew a grin on my lips.

'Okay, so you know absolutely nothing about ASL?' I wrote.

"Nope," he said before he held up his hand. "Wait, I know this." He brought his palm up so his fingers touched his chin before swinging his stretched palm down.

It was the sign of thank you.

'You remember?' I wrote.

"So I got it right?" he asked.

I nodded, signing 'yes'.

"That means yes?"

I nodded again. He tried to do it as I signed it again for him.

'It's like nodding with your fist,' I wrote. 'That's how you can remember it.'

"Right," he said, repeating the sign again.

He was a quick learner. By the time our lunch hour approached end, we had shared his dessert again, two mini lemon pies. He learned how to sign yes no thank you please sorry, and bullshit, because he just had to know a curse word, which ended cracking him up because my face was red as I begrudgingly taught him how to sign it.

But I liked it the way he threw his head back and laughed. I found myself wishing I could hear the sound of his laughter. I liked to

imagine his voice would be a deep one, with a hint of husk to it. I voice I would never get tired of listening to.

It was time for me to go when he took a small book from behind and handed it to me. It was a book for learning Russian.

"You said you stopped learning because you didn't have time, but you can read the book on your way to work. It's yours."

I looked with wide eyes between him and the book, then smiled widely and signed 'thank you.'

He smiled back at me before frowning. "How do you say you're welcome?"

I chuckled silently as I wrote. 'There isn't an actual sign for 'you're welcome' that is used when responding to someone thanking you. Usually, you just sign 'thank you' back to the person, or maybe sign 'it's no problem' or 'it's fine'.'

He nodded, and after teaching him how to sign 'it's fine', I thanked him again then left for my work, holding the book close to my heart.

For a long time, I didn't have much time to go to the library and read books.

I wondered how I could pay him back. Sure, he had said not to worry about it and insisted that it was payment for teaching him ASL. But still. Teaching him how to sign was actually as much for my benefit as it was for his, if not more.

I walked with a spring in my step to the stairs. I was excited because of the new book. I had forgotten how much I enjoyed learning, and I was also excited because tomorrow was Saturday, and I would get to sleep late.

Yay!

Well, not so much when I had to go out looking for another job over weekends...

I still had some unpaid bills for this month. Since I monthly put a good sum of my earnings into a college fund for Jim, the meager amount that was left barely covered our needs.

Still, I allowed myself to sleep until nine o'clock, which was plenty of time. I hoped today would be a good one. I had struggled with finding a weekend part time job for quite some time now. All the ones available usually involved waitressing, which was out of the question for me. And even when there was something I was confident I could do, the employers always looked at me skeptically after I told them about my deafness. I had no idea how many times I had heard, or rather read, 'just leave us your number and we'll call you back.'

I never bothered to correct them and tell them that they could hire me because, well, because I was deaf. I knew the look in their eyes when I said that said "Why should I bother hiring her?"

I didn't blame them. Why bother with me when there were probably plenty of people who wanted the job and who could communicate easily.

After pulling on a long-sleeved black shirt and jeans, I threw on a cardigan, slid on my sneakers and walked out of the door. Despite the cold, it was rather sunny outside. Perfect weather for people watching. I planned a weekend out. I took the subway to a much busier place than my shabby neighbourhood.

Stores were already open. People walked in and out of stores, some with shopping bags, guys stealing glances at them. Kids basically dragging their half-asleep parents down the streets.

I walked alongside the shop windows, allowing myself some time for some window shopping. The last time I had bought new clothes seemed like ages ago. Before the accident. Afterwards, I had to do with hand-me-downs when I lived in my old town. When I moved to the city, I discovered the joy of flea markets, where you could buy everything you need without emptying your pockets.

I stopped in front of a large shop window and stared in awe at the item displayed. It was a wedding dress. The dress in the window was one fit for a princess. A pearly white gown with a sweetheart neckline. White and silver stones shimmered on the bodice. A full skirt of lace stretched around it like a fluffy cloud. It was breathtaking. I doubted anyone would look bad wearing this dress.

Well, it's out of the question for me anyway thought, recalling the burned skin on my body. Not that I could afford it.

I wrenched my gaze from the stunning dress, just in time to see two little kids running out of the wedding dress store. A girl and a boy, both with mops of blonde hair, who looked like twins. They stopped on the sidewalk, looking over their shoulder for a second. Then they held each other's hands and walked ahead.

I would have gushed at how cute they were in their matching pink jackets if not for the fact that they were heading straight to the subway. They couldn't be older than two. They wiggled their way to the edge of the sidewalk in the busy crowd not even glancing at them as they weaved around them.

My feet moved on their own. My hesitant steps turned into a full sprint when they were at the very edge of the sidewalk.

I caught them in time, my hands clamping on their shoulders and pulling them back right before they stepped down to the road.

Phew! that was close...

The kids turned to look at me. I was right, they were twins. The blonde wavy bangs tickled his large green eyes. The girl's pigtail bounced up when they turned around to look at me. Their blonde hair was mixed with light shades of brown, and their skin was a tanned shade. They were absolutely adorable.

Here's the thing about babies. They scared the crap out of me. It happened after I lost my hearing. I didn't know how to communicate with them since I couldn't hear what they said, and I obviously couldn't read their lips because baby talk just didn't make sense.

Okaaay! I crouched down in front of them. Their green eyes never mine. Maybe I should take them back to the store? That's what I walked out of! I held my hands towards them, thinking they probably wouldn't take a stranger's hand. I was wrong.

They did take my hands, quite willingly and quite fast. My brows raised in surprise as the little kids blinked up at me with large, trusting eyes. I turned around, holding their hands tightly in mine, and walked up to the store. They were still looking up at me with wide eyes.

I was almost at the door of the store when I spotted a woman, probably in her early thirties, inside the store looking around worriedly. Her mouth was moving fast as her panicked eyes searched around the place.

That must be the mom.

I pushed the glass door open with my shoulder, not letting go of the twins' hands, who still held calmly onto me.

The eyes of the woman turned to me, along with everyone else in the store. The woman, with green eyes and light brown hair that confirmed my theory, rushed towards us, her mouth uttering things I couldn't catch, I thought I could read something like 'oh my god' repeatedly and 'you little devils', but I wasn't sure.

I let go of the kids as the woman approached. She hugged them, squeezing the air out of them. I retreated quietly as another woman joined the happy gathering. I didn't get far, though, because the mother snapped her gaze to me, and next thing I knew, I was being hugged too.

Ookay...

I was sure she was saying something because I could feel her chest moving over my shoulder, but all I could do was pat her back awkwardly. The other woman, younger with pitch-black hair and bright blue eyes held onto the twins. The two children were still staring at me with wide eyes.

Do I have something on my face?

The woman thankfully pulled back after a few minutes. Her hands were still on my shoulders. I could see her lips now.

"Thank you so much! You have no idea how worried I was, I ... " she said, her anger that because she kept looking at me then over her shoulder to the twins. She let go of me completely, so I just smiled at her and waved my hands no, trying to convey that it was no problem.

She said something else, then looked at the black-haired woman who replied. It was all going too fast for me. I felt disoriented, not knowing where to look and what was happening. So I just turned my heels and tried to walk out of the place.

identical green eyes looked up at me. I tried prying their hands gently, but they just held onto my hands instead of my legs.

I looked behind me for some help, but the women looked like they had witnessed a miracle. Their stunned eyes bouncing between me and the twins.

The woman started speaking again, this time it was worse because she had her hand on her mouth in an expression of shock.

Alright, enough.

I somehow managed to shake the twins' hands off. They held onto my legs again. I pulled out my trusted notebook from my bag.

'Excuse me, but I'm deaf. Could you speak more clearly so I can see your lips?' I held up the notebook towards the woman, and the black-haired lady was standing next to her. They both frowned, reading what I had written. Their eyes widened when they finally realized the situation.

So that was how, several minutes later, I found myself sitting on a cream-colored couch in a luxurious wedding dress shop, surrounded on either side by a baby, while their mother and her friend sat across from me.

"I'm sorry about that," the black-haired lady said with a smile, pointing at the mother with her thumb. "She tends to lose it when she's nervous."

'It's okay.'

"So you can read lips?" the mother asked again, and I nodded. The little girl on my left climbed into my lap. The little boy looked at her, then frowned and tried climbing on my lap too, pushing her away.

I spaced my legs so I could put each one of them on a thigh. The girl happily settled down, then looked up at me. I smiled down at her. The girl grinned back and the little boy just looked at me with wide eyes, his little pink lips slightly ajar.

My eyes snapped up to the women who were staring almost in disbelief.

"Sorry," the black-haired lady said when she noticed my question. She frowned, then shook her head. "They don't like strangers usually. Actually, they don't like anyone."

They looked quite friendly to me.

The mother who just recovered from her shock stared at me, her eyes filled with equal parts desperation and hope. I felt like I was about to get into something way over my head.

"Oh my God! I finally found you!" she said. I doubted my lip-reading skills for a second. "Can you be a babysitter for them? Just for the weekend! I'll pay you anything you want! Anything..."

Then I lost her again because she had her hand over her mouth, her eyes almost tearing up.

I looked at the black-haired lady for help. She seemed less professional and dramatic. She smiled.

"What she's trying to say is, she had been looking for a babysitter as long as I can remember, and anyone she hired either quit because the twins were too difficult, or the twins simply didn't like them."

"So she's asking if you're willing to be a babysitter, just for the weekend since you must be busy on weekdays."

I slowly nodded, then looked at the mother who nodded eagerly, agreeing with her friend's interpretation. Then she looked at me in a sheepish manner.

"Are you busy on weekdays?"

I somehow managed to write around the twins. 'You don't even know me. I could be a bad person, for all you know.'

me. I could be a bad person, for all you know.'

She looked amused. "I'm going to run a background check if you accept my offer. So that's something else to consider," she said.

I bit my lip in thought. I liked the twins, I really did, but the idea of being responsible for two children, not even one, when I couldn't hear if they cried or asked for something just frightened me.

'I'm sorry, I don't think I'm the right person for this. Being alone with children is a bad idea for me. I can't hear them, so I won't be able to tell if something is wrong with them. I just can't. I'm sorry.'

Her smile turned into a disappointed frown as she read what I had written. She thought silently about something for a few seconds.

"What about if someone's with you?" she said. "All you have to do is stay with them, but there would be someone around at all times. You won't have to be alone with them."

'Then why hire me if there was someone around all the time?'

She smiled when she read what I wrote. "That someone will probably be one of us or a maid. What I actually need is someone who can be with them all the time, since they can't just sit by without having someone's attention on them. It also helps that you can keep them in line without even trying."

I thought some more, taking in the desperate look of the woman. She was in need of a job, and the only reason I didn't like being around children was because I was afraid of them. But if someone was always present, it could be possible, right?

I really, really needed the extra money.

The mother must have seen the hesitation in my eyes because she scooted forward until she was sitting on the edge of the couch.

"I'll pay you anything you want. Anything, just name the price."

I quickly shook my head. 'It's not that. I'm just scared for them. I want something to happen to them because of me.'

"I'll make sure someone is always around," she added eagerly. 'I promise you'll never be alone with them.'

I looked down at the twins. They looked up at me at the same time and grinned widely, their matching green eyes sparkling in childlike innocence. The boy reached out with a pudgy finger and poked my cheek. Poke. Poke. Poke.

Why not? I thought, let's give it a shot.

'Okay,' I wrote, and before I could hold up the notebook, the mom beamed, clapping her hands. She all but bounced in her seat. I could see why her friend cringed, she must be squealing.

"Thank you! You're a lifesaver! Are you sure you're busy on weekdays?" the mom added, making me smile.

'Yes, I'm working,' I replied, then figured that since I would be looking after her children, she had the right to know what kind of person I was.

'Irene Hooper, 22, work as a cleaning staff.' I held up the notebook so she and her friend could read.

They both smiled and nodded, no look of judgement in their eyes. They introduced themselves.

"I'm Lydia. I own the shop," she said, waving her hand around in a gesture at the shop we were sitting in.

"And I'm Julianna. I'm a café manager." The mom held her hand and shook her hand before checking if I got their names correct.

'Lydia and Julianna?'

They both nodded, smiling, then Julianna pointed to the twins.

"That's Eli and Emma."

"That's Eli and Emma."

'Eli and Emma.' I checked again, and she nodded, waves of excitement rolling off her body.

"So, are you busy today? Oh of course, silly me, you must have when are you free so we could discuss the details?"

'I'm free today, I was actually out looking for a weekend job.'

"Oh! That's perfect! We actually have a little dinner today and need someone to look after the twins. Will you be available at night too? I'll make sure to drive you home afterwards," Julianna said, nodding. My head hurt from constantly having to follow her lips' movement and her body language. She really spoke a lot.

"Oh, Great!" she said in an excited smile. "Perfect".

It turned out Julianna was just picking up Lydia before they both headed for Julianna's café. So after we left Lydia's shop in the hands of two women working for her, we headed to Julianna's café.

Lydia drove us in her car. I sat between the twins, almost in disbelief at how things turned out. The events of the morning played in my mind and I was amazed at how fate worked.

If I hadn't decided to oversleep, if I hadn't allowed myself to accidentally buy the dress on display, if I hadn't paid attention to my surroundings, I would still be scouring the city streets for a job.

Everything happens for a reason.

At the time, I didn't realize to what extent that was true.

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When Julianna said she was a cafe manager, I expected it to be a small coffee shop on the busy streets of the city.

I was not expecting it to be part of one of the most famous restaurant chains across the country, if not the world.

It was a luxurious shop. Spacious, with a soft beige and pastel blue color theme. I imagined soft music would be playing in the background as customers walked in and out, while others relaxed with their drinks and colorful desserts around the place. The glass-to-ceiling windows stretched across one entire wall and gave the place a natural lighting, making the atmosphere even more charming.

We took a corner booth close to the long counter. All the while, the twins wobbled on either side of me, holding my hands.

"It's amazing," Lydia said, looking at the twins as they settled in my lap again. "They're never this calm."

I smiled down at the twins. It was true that most kids their age were usually restless. But they seemed pretty easygoing to me.

Their mom slumped next to Lydia, a content expression on her face.

"This is a blessing. For once I will not run all around the place chasing them," she said. As if the twins heard her, they squirmed in my lap, then slid down. Even before I could reach for their hands, they grabbed mine and pulled me behind them to a display counter that showcased all sorts of colorful desserts, pies, and sandwiches.

They put their tiny hands on the glass. Their large green eyes stared at the sweets.

They wanted something. A feeling of frustration bubbled up in my chest. I wanted to talk to them, ask them if they wanted anything. Before I could wonder what to do, the twins both pointed to the same chocolate cheesecakes with cream and strawberry on top.

They looked back at me, their mouths moving in child talk that, to me, was perfectly understandable.

A worker was already waiting for us. I pointed to the same cake the twins did and held up two fingers.

"Two mini chocolate cheesecakes." The employer nodded, then proceeded to put two of them on two plates. I fished some money from my wallet, but the waiter pushed the plate to me on the counter and shook his head. "It's okay, the twins' dessert is always on the house."

It made sense; it was their mom's shop after all. I smiled at the twins and picked up the plates and went back to our place, making sure the twins followed. Which they did, very closely watching their dessert.

I sat down with a deep sigh. It felt like I somehow got over a huge weight when I successfully brought them back to their mother. Which was ridiculous since Julianna was literally right next to us the entire time.

"See, it wasn't so hard," Lydia said with soft eyes. I nodded, feeling an odd sense of accomplishment as the twins attacked their cake with the forks.

Although there was hardly any reason to feel that way, it was like something I had always been scared of today, ever since the accident.

After I lost my hearing, I was so scared of babies that I was so sure I would never dare have one of my own. The thought of a child being able to harm because of my disability or of being unable to tell if something was wrong with them made being a mother such a daunting thought.

But being around Eli and Emma made me reassess that conviction. I knew babysitting was not the same as having a baby of your own, but it was still a big step for me. Besides, I wasn't the only deaf person on the planet. Millions of women were doing just great as mothers, better than some 'normal' moms.

Eli took a forkful of cake, then held it up to me, looking at me with a chocolate-stained smile. My heart warmed as he pushed the fork into my mouth, the gooey chocolate cheese cream melting inside my mouth.

Emma was looking at Eli with a frown. She copied her brother and took a forkful in my mouth, too. Eli glared at her while my cheeks bloated like a chipmunk's. Lydia and Julianna's bodies shook with laughter, watching the twins babble and glare at each other.

I found myself smiling down at them. They were such adorable babies. I wished I could hear those cute baby sounds.

"They love you," Lydia said with a smile, her cheeks tinged pink because of her earlier fit of laughter. Julianna nodded and said something, of which I caught the end.

"...he's their uncle, and he doesn't even get half the attention for showing you."

I smiled, feeling my cheeks heat up as the kids went back to eating their cake. Half of which was on the table before it reached their mouths.

"So, do you need to be home early tonight?" Julianna inquired.

I shrugged. She grinned. "Great! Because we're having a little family dinner. I would be grateful if you were there to keep an eye on the two. I'm sure they'll pass out before the dinner is over. And I'll make sure you have a drive back home."

I nodded and smiled gratefully. The twins had finished their cake and took some tissues from the table and wiped what I could off the corners of their faces. They made cute wrinkly faces as I wiped every single smudge away.

Julianna and Lydia were such cheerful people. Apparently, they grew up neighbours and were practically raised together, so they were more like sisters.

Lydia was twenty-six, four years older than me, while Julianna was thirty-four. They were both very kind, gentle, and understanding.

thirty-four. They were both so nice to invite me to lunch, which had in the café itself, as we discussed the details of my babysitting. It would be on Saturdays and Sundays. Although I assured her I would take care of my transportation, she insisted on providing a driver for me, which was very generous of her.

She told me that she usually had family dinner or events to attend on Saturday, so I would get home late. But it wasn't a problem for her. Besides the fact that I would get paid for it, she seemed like such a good woman, Lydia and her both.

The afternoon was spent in a park near the café, where the kids dragged me everywhere behind them. I wondered what made them get attached to me so much. I wasn't much fun. I would play around with them, but I couldn't talk to them. We only communicated through gestures.

It made me think, maybe I could learn to use my voice again? But I would probably need therapy to be able to do that after five years of absolute silence. The cost was something I couldn't afford at the moment.

Maybe after Jim gets into college.

"We should get going," Julianna told me as she crouched in front of us, where Eli, Emma, and I were playing with a little puppy. It belonged to a nice lady that fell in love with the twins when we approached her dog.

I nodded to Julianna. The twins followed me as I took the dog back to his owner. Then they held onto my hands as we walked back to Julianna and Lydia were waiting.

"We'll go to my place first," Julianna said. "I need to change the clothes. Then we'll head to Lydia's parents' house, where the dinner is served. We live close to them, so we'll just walk there."

So we did. Lydia drove us to Julianna's home. I wasn't exactly surprised when she drove into one of the most expensive residential neighbourhoods in the city. I kind of figured they would be wealthy because Julianna managed a famous café and Lydia owned a luxurious wedding dress shop on a busy street. Of course they were well off.

It made my respect and admiration for them grow. Not because of their wealth, but because of the way they behaved. They weren't typical snobby and arrogant rich people I often saw portrayed on TV. They were generous, down to earth, and cared about each other deeply. It was nice knowing people like them still existed in this ruthless world.

Julianna's house was more like a mansion. The green garden was well cared for, like the other gardens in the neighbourhood. I imagined this place would be on the quiet side because the streets were practically empty.

Julianna's house was spacious but homey, with warm, earthy tones all over the house. She led me to the second story, where the twin room was.

I helped her change the two children. Dressing them up was more of a challenge than I expected. We managed to do it without Julianna fainting from exertion. While I sat cross-legged on the floor and changed Emma's clothes, Julianna ran around the room behind Eli. Eli was on the bed in nothing but his pants. His mom was across from him with her hands on her hips. He just grinned mischievously at me, then I caught his eyes and I waved him to me with a smile. Emma was next to me, completely ready, playing with one of her dolls.

Julianna gaped at her son as he jogged to where I was and stood in front of me, peeking at me from under his lashes with a shy smile. He was beyond adorable.