

BLUE

BLEEP-BLEEP-BLEEP

I groan and blindly reach for my phone. *Screw school!* I finally dismiss my alarm, filling my room with the most beautiful silence. It's times like this that I wish I could be Sleeping Beauty. Effortlessly beautiful, and a century long nap? Sign me up. But, unfortunately, that'll never happen. Why? Two reasons. One: this is real life. And two: I'm not beautiful.

I blink at my phone and, with a shock, realise it's 4:30 am. *Nononono.* I jump out of bed and run into my bathroom, nearly tripping over my stuffed cerulean folder. *Only three hours to get ready.* I scramble to find my makeup, before glancing in the mirror. I'm not exaggerating when I say I nearly scream in horror. My stupid, curly hair frames my face, the dark colour highlighting every unsavoury feature. Which, I remind myself, is everything. *You just have to mask your imperfections.* But today I look particularly horrible. My eye bags seem to have doubled in size overnight, emphasising my chipmunk cheeks. And...is my nose swollen? I sigh, taking myself in. All in all, I resemble a sickly panda. *Not ideal.* I can just imagine the comments.

"Ewww!"

"What is that?"

"Ugly!!"

"She'll never amount to anything!"

Never amount to anything.

Never amount to anything.

Never amount to anything.

I shake my head, snapping out of my thoughts. I can fix this. I look at my Barbie makeup bag and, ignoring the stab of repulse I feel whenever I see the colour pink, reach for the foundation, the smooth surface burning my hand. *Create a mask.*

Three hours later, and I'm finishing up my blush. I just need to do my pink lipstick. *Pretty and poised.* But, as I reach in to find it, my fingers circle another lipstick tube. My ocean-blue lipstick. My breath catches for a second, and it's enough for the dreams to start flooding in. Me, swimming among the dolphins. Me, running tests on microscopic organisms. Me, smiling, really smiling, for the first time in years, my teeth framed by blue. *Marine biology.* A hint of cerulean catches my eye, and I glance back at my folder. It's filled with photos and articles and...applications. Applications to prestigious marine biology programs. Applications I've never sent out. *Because you'll always be nothing.*

I shake my head for the second time that morning, and, applying the lipstick, glance at my watch. With a speed that would impress even Usain Bolt, I run out the door, tying up my hair.

On the tram, I notice the whispers directed towards me, the glances that linger just a second too long. *They hate me.* I close my eyes and inhale deeply, counting to ten. But I'm barely at three when I feel a heavy hand on my shoulder.

"You should smile more."

My eyes fly open, and the first thing I notice is the teeth. They're crooked and rotting, and there's definitely a few missing. Next, my eyes settle on his, and I'm shocked at the disdain I find there. I replay his comment in my head, conscious of his heavy fingers digging into my skin.

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"Of course!" I practically chirp, flashing my pageant smile, hoping he'll leave. He doesn't. His face contorts, and it takes me a second to realise he's smiling.

"Pretty..." he drawls, and my heart skips several beats.

"Hey!"

I whip my head around, thanking the gods. My saviour is a young, normal-looking woman but, there's something about her... As she continues to stride towards us, I realise. *Confidence*. It's emanating out of her, oozing into our surroundings. To my shock, the man lets go, mumbles a word vaguely resembling 'sorry', and leaves.

"H-how-?" I stutter, trying to regain control of my tongue. The woman simply smiles.

"Stand up for yourself, honey. It's the only way you'll survive," She intones, before starting to walk away.

"W-w-wait!" I cry out, stumbling after her, my limbs trying to keep up with my brain. Without breaking her stride, she turns around and winks at me.

"I'm sure you'd like a redo..."

I'm still stuck on the last part of her sentence when, suddenly, everything goes black...

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I jolt awake. *Where's the tram?* I check my phone, and '4:30 am' stares back at me. *Huh?* I feel my breathing start to pick up as I gingerly step out of bed. *Wait...* that lady. She mentioned something about a redo? The world suddenly spins out of balance and, next thing I know, I'm on the floor. Staring at a pile of paper. *My applications!*

I'll submit them, I decide, springing up, ignoring my developing headache. I shake my hair loose and, grabbing my blue lipstick, sweep it over my lips, chancing a look in the mirror, my heart pounding faster and faster. *I actually look...good.*

"Can I help you?" The receptionist smiles.

"I have some applications for your marine biology programs," I say, handing them over. I watch her scan them, fear and excitement pounding through my veins.

"You're perfect!" She exclaims, and my heart bursts with joy.

Perfect.

"Oh, I know," I say, my face breaking into my first real smile in years, the blue bringing out the best parts of me. *Which is everything...because everything about me is perfect.*