

A starved belly, dirt clinging to skin, and a lingering headache. These things were expected in ten year old Cassidy's life. Her home was a dingy, lackluster apartment in a neighborhood filled with bad kids-although she didn't go out enough for that to be a problem. Her only family was her mother who had long struggled to pay bills, but she was in more dismay than ever, having been fired.

Despite all the misfortunes and pains surrounding Cassidy, washing dishes was a task that proved she could be of use to her mother. It also helped negate the head pangs she regularly felt. Although, there being little to eat meant there was not that much to wash. She took a stool from the cabinet, white flakes of paint barely holding on.

She mixed soap into her sponge and squeezed tight. The gentle ooze of the cleanser contrasted the rough porcelain in her hands. The sink filled with water and in which she could make out her button nose and hazel eyes that her mom often praised. She then slowly encompassed the plate with the sponge, easing her mind. She recalled math her mother once tried to teach her and imitated the songs of sparrows nested above the roof.

Eventually, she made her way to the last dish, but upon picking it up a sudden burst of pain filled her head, images invading her mind. It surely had built up after the weeks of headaches. She tipped off the stool and hardenly hit the ground in a loud thump. She laid there, processing all that she'd seen. Her mom's room had been empty which uncovered stains sprawled on the grayed walls. There was a familiar sound of tears, and the calendar was dated August 17, 2003-five days from now.

Unfortunately, the pain of falling finally settled in, snapping Cassidy out of the thoughts. Her mom had rushed in, apologizing, "Oh no, no. I'm so sorry. Let me get you to your bed. I'm so sorry." Her eyes were bloodshot and her voice was strained.

Cassidy could not recall what happened after, but upon waking up she heard her mother's usual cries. Though prepared to sit up and wipe the floors as she normally did on Tuesday, a sharp pain in her side left her in bed. Without a task to keep her mind in check, she became overly aware of the emptiness in her stomach. Listlessly, she recalled the visions, noting how they made her feel empty in a different way. She compelled herself to figure out how to prevent whatever would happen, which seemed to be her mom disappearing. Why her mom would disappear was a mystery to Cassidy. It's possible she could be taken in a few days. The visions appeared when she washed the dishes so she thought it best to sleep and wash them again tomorrow.

Cassidy was restricted, however, from washing the dishes by her mother as she could get injured again. Despite that high chance of bursting in pain again, Cassidy slept, and woke at night to rinse the dishes that would hopefully help to gain a clearer vision. Unexpectedly, picking up the first dish was enough to receive the images. The shock was even more unbearable this time, though. The distress passed through her body and she let out a harsh scream.

Her mom rushed in again, sobbing, uttering the same words of apology. "Sorry." "It's my fault." Cassidy shut her eyes and woke to the familiar water damaged ceiling. She felt a pang of guilt for the trouble she kept causing, but the vision was important to remember. There had been the sounds of a car driving up to the house and a note

under the date of August 17 on the calendar. Although, the note was blurred and the irritable sounds of the car engine took over the end of the visions.

Cassidy checked the calendar and saw it was the 15th. The prediction would soon be realized and she needed to prevent it. She faced the reality of hollowness she would feel from losing her caring mother.

Sprinting to the sink, she saw that the dishes had already been washed and neatly put away. She couldn't be sure of the requirements for her divination, but she swiftly ate a slice of stale bread and ensured the plate was riddled with crumbs. She clasped the soap and sponge and soaked the plate. As anticipated, she received a clearer vision of the mysterious note. Focused, and enduring the rupture of pain, she managed to not pass out. She read the note, and the contents of which made her quite angry. The note confessed her mother's inconceivable thoughts that she was not worthy and incapable of caring for Cassidy. Her mom had left to who knows where and called Child Protective Services. All this time trying to help and she was just causing the problem by stressing out her mother.

In a swift act, Cassidy ran through her mom's door, grasping at her, "Mom, you don't have to apologize to me, and you don't have to leave. I didn't realize how you had felt o-or how much you care for me." Tears welled up in both of their eyes and she struggled to choke out words.

After a minute, her mother resolved to speak up, "I love you so much. It's just that I can barely keep a job, let alone even keep you from getting harmed. You try so hard to help me though, I can't help but feel I've failed you. But I know that's unfair."

Eric Ton, Age 14

Through the snot covering her face, Cassidy grinned, "Mom, no matter what happens to us, you will never fail me and we will get through it together."

Then Cassidy and her mother laid asleep, atop each other, in the not empty and, for once, silent room.