

Meet The Simons

A Chronicles of the Infected Prequel

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Daddy told me to fit in.

He said it was essential, he said that if we were to keep our way of life, our way we love, then we should always, always, *always*, try to fit in because that way no one suspects anything at all and if no one suspect anything at all then that will mean we are normal.

But we aren't.

Normal.

We aren't normal.

That's what Mummy and Daddy say anyway. They say that normal is a point of view. I have to think what normal is like to others. I don't know why I should, but Daddy said it, and so did Mummy, so I will do my best to make them proud.

So I behave and act normal, in the way that normal looks to other people, and that way there's no way you would possibly in a million years suspect anything whatsoever. Because for all you know I could be your next-door neighbour. Or your daughter's best friend. Or your daughter herself.

So here I sit. Coffee shop. Mummy and Daddy ordering cups of tea. It's a regular kind of outing – not for the food because, well, you know, that's not what we eat – but because of what Daddy calls “social expectancies.” I don't really have any idea what that means, but I know that I'm supposed to watch and copy and study and be a good girl.

Another girl eight years old about my age sits with her mummy and daddy a few tables across from me.

She flicks her napkin like the flourish at the end of

a magic trick and places it on her lap so I look at my napkin and it's like a swan, made like a swan, I mean, folded that way at least, and I don't know why, because what does a swan have to do with being in a fancy café? But still, Daddy says I won't always understand I just need to make them *think* I understand so I copy. I flick the napkin out, unfolding the swan – or is it an ugly duckling? – and I place it on my lap.

What now?

It's on my lap, what's that supposed to do I wonder?

“Catching crumbs,” Mummy tells me as if reading my mind. That's what's so great about Mummy, she is always so good at knowing what's troubling me without me never ever actually having to say it with my own lips. I don't know what it's like to have crumbs seeing as I've never eaten anything particularly crumbly but other people do so I copy and be like them.

Mummy is wearing her hair down today, and it looks beautiful, blond curls over her Lora Piana fur jacket that keeps her warm over her long Valentino gown with extra lace over her shoulders. Daddy wears his grey Reiss Henry wool suit with a blue shirt and a black tie. When they come over and take his order he asks for what sherry brands they have and when they say Harvey Cream he pulls an expression like he just ate something really really chewy and it got stuck in his throat.

“Do you not have any Clos des Brusquieres? Any Grahams?”

“We may have the Grahams,” the waiter replies with cheeks really red and wide eyes.

“How many years as it been aged?”

“Er...” the waiter stutters.

“For Christ sake,” Daddy says whilst closing his eyes and sighing. “Fine, that will do.”

The waiter scurries away like a scared little rat.

I’m wearing my hair in a ponytail that sits on my shoulder. My dress is yellow with flowers on it and I picked it out myself because it’s my favourite and Mummy always says I look really pretty in it and I like it when Mummy says I’m pretty because it makes me feel all tingly and warm inside.

I look at the other little girl and she is picking up her cutlery and cutting some kind of green crunchy stuff I think it’s called lettuce. I’m watching her eat it feeling sick and I wonder what her intestines taste like with horseradish. Horseradish is my favourite. After White Truffle Marinara sauce. Her daddy dabs his mouth with his napkin but I don’t know why as there’s nothing on his mouth and I wonder if he imagined it and if he imagines things that aren’t there does that mean he’s crazy?

My cup of tea arrives. The red face man puts it in front of me and I look at it not quite knowing what to do. I search for someone else in the room with a cup of tea and I see an old man that would be really chewy because his skin is so wrinkly and he’s pouring something white into his tea. I look for a pot of something white I think it’s milk and the same kind of pot is in front of me with something white in so I pour that in. He circles the water with his spoon and taps the spoon on the side so I circle my water with my spoon and tap the spoon on the side and there’s steam coming off it so how am I meant to drink it? The man sips on his then blows on it and puts it down but I decide that I will wait for the steam to go because I know that when Mummy cooks something

with steam or smoke coming off it it's always really hot and I burn my tongue and I don't want to burn my tongue.

I can tell that Mummy and Daddy love each other because they are staring at each other with this really devious little smile they have. Like they are plotting something. Like they have a joke that's just between them. But I know what the joke is. Because I know what they are planning to do, and I can't wait!

"Have you found someone, Daddy?"

"Maybe." He grins. Nods to the window.

I turn and there is a really plump man sitting there. He looks sweaty but there are no spots and the meat on him must be so big that it would last us for weeks.

"What do you think?" Daddy asks me.

"He's very meaty, Daddy!"

Mummy and Daddy chuckle heartily then Daddy smiles at me and ruffles my hair which I like because it's affectionate but don't like because it messes up my hair.

I watch the girl again and she is having a conversation and I listen hard, blocking out everyone else in the room, so I can listen to what she's saying. It's really difficult because people are talking really loudly but when I finally strain enough I can just about make out her conversation.

"A puppy," she says.

"Are you sure?" the old man next to her says.

"Yes, a puppy," she says.

"Remember, a puppy isn't just something temporary, it's a present that lasts for the whole of the dog's life," the old man next to her says.

"I know, I promise I'll take care of it," she says.

"Well, if you're sure," the old man next to her says.

“I am positive,” she says.

“Okay then, that’s your birthday present decided,” the old man next to her says.

I don’t see how she’s that different to me in her birthday present to be honest because one time when I was really little, my parents bought me a puppy. I took care of it and took it everywhere and walked it and cleared up its poop and took it to the park and threw a stick for it and it came back and licked me and jumped on me and slept on my bed. But then I remember looking at it one day, really looking at it, and wondering what would happen if I kept hitting it and didn’t stop.

It was also really brown and furry.

So I hit it and hit it and it jumped off my bed and ran onto the floor then turned and looked at me with this slightly strange expression on its face. It looked like it was lost and it was looking at me for directions, and its tail didn’t wag anymore, it stood kind of halfway, turning to the door and to me. It was waiting for me to do something, like there was a question I was meant to answer.

I got off my bed, picked up my alarm clock that was next to my bed and turned blue when I was allowed to get up and yanked on it really hard. I ripped it out of its plug socket and threw it at the dog. The dog made a little whiny noise and ran out of the room so I followed it.

When I found it in the living room it was dark and I didn’t switch the light on. It was still night and Mummy and Daddy were upstairs asleep so I didn’t want to wake them. I walked up to the doggy and I stroked its back, trying to make it stay still, and eventually its tail started wagging again and its head rested on my knee and I waited and waited and waited

and then it did it – it flopped onto its back like it does when it wants me to tickle its belly. I leant my knee on its chest hard enough that it wouldn't move. It began to squirm so I decided I had to hurry up so I put my hands on its throat and I squeezed down and it didn't take long until it stopping struggling against my knee that was holding it down.

When I stopped it wouldn't move. I tried to push it, to move it, to get it to wake up, but it wasn't asleep, I know that because its eyes were open.

I wasn't sure what happened, so I waited until morning and that's when Daddy came downstairs and found me.

“What have you been doing?” he asks with his hands on his hips like Peter Pan.

I told him that the doggy had stopped moving because I leant on it.

He crouched down and looked at it. For a long time he didn't really move, just thoughts across his face zipped in small expressions that you wouldn't notice because they are minuscule, but I see them because he's my Daddy and I know him and I love him.

After a long silence, he turned to me and said, “Good girl.”

I smiled. I like it when he says I'm a good girl.

“Now let me show you what we do with the body next,” he says.

“Okay, Daddy,” I answer.

He picked the puppy up with one hand and took my hand with the other and took me to the garage where he opened the boot, put the puppy in and took me in a long drive still in my pyjamas to a bridge.

When I threw the puppy off the bridge and it made a splash Daddy looked so pleased. He had this pimple

on his cheek twitch in a way he does when he does a smile, not just a smile, but a really big smile that takes up a lot of his face.

Daddy told me that was one of his proudest moments.

I look at the girl who's just asked for a puppy. I watch as the old man next to her talks to her and I wonder if she's going to be like me and if the old man next to her is going to be really proud like Daddy was.

I look at Daddy. He's so handsome. He smiles at me.

I'm so happy.

I look at the girl. Look at her and imagine what would happen if I leant on her like I did with the puppy.

I hope she's happy too.