

Excerpt from "Season Premiere" -- Jasmine's story

From the far end of the table, her tablet burred a video call alert. Jasmine saw her mother's smiling picture above the phone icon and sighed. She tapped the answer button as she gulped down the rest of her tea. Too late, she remembered that she couldn't handle that much liquid in one swallow anymore: the tepid muck lodged in her damaged throat like a brick in a drainpipe, and the sudden pain brought tears to her eyes. Grunting with effort, she forced it down in pieces, dimly aware someone was calling to her.

"...Jasmine! *Jasmine!* Oh my God, are you choking?"

Jasmine waved a hand at the screen, shaking her head and blinking to clear her eyes. Her mother's panic subsided a little, but not her flow of words. "Sweetheart, are you all right? Are you in pain? Should I come over?"

Jasmine turned back to the screen long enough to roll her eyes, which was surprisingly difficult to do while wiping away the last of her tears. She shook her head while her mother's voice eased from concern to exasperation.

"Don't give me that look. I can see you're choking, you're clearly in distress, and when I ask what's wrong you don't say a word, so how --" She stopped herself with a little squeak, her face frozen in horror. "I – I only meant you're not signing anything. I didn't mean..."

She looked so flustered Jasmine took pity on her. Forcing herself to swallow again, she faced the screen full-on, waving her hand in a dismissive motion and mustering a smile. *Hi, Mom*, she signed, mouthing the words as well. *I'm fine. Really.*

As usual, her mother leaned closer to the screen, her eyes darting from Jasmine's mouth to her hands, as if determined not to miss a single detail. Message received, her mother sniffed, lifting a disbelieving eyebrow.

*Drank too much tea*, Jasmine signed next. Damn it, she couldn't remember the sign for 'swallow'. Her mother probably wouldn't know it anyway. *I'm fine.*

"Too much tea?" her mother said. "And that's what happened?"

Jasmine raised her hands and shoulders in an exaggerated shrug. Speaking with her mother was always a hodgepodge of bad charades and the ASL Jasmine had managed to learn so far. Whatever worked.

“What if you’d been all by yourself?”

*I am by myself, Mom. And I’m fine.*

“But... what if I hadn’t been here? How would you have called for help? You don’t even know your neighbours in that place. Jassy, I know you said you were ready to go back to work, but remember that therapist suggested taking a whole year...”

Jasmine narrowed her eyes at the screen in warning. The therapist fiasco was off-limits, as her mother well knew. It had been awkward from minute one, and during the second session, when she’d hesitantly risked the team’s non-disclosure agreement to talk, the guy had casually asked if Jasmine was taking any anti-psychotic medication. Remembering that day made her stomach heave. Since then, they hadn’t even talked about trying to find a new counselor.

Could be why she was still having nightmares, she reflected.

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BD Ferguson