

In June, Fawn had been sitting at her desk, art supplies cluttered around the surface as a sketchbook took up the center, splotted full of colors and pencil strokes. Soft music played quietly in her ears, headphones connected to her phone sitting on the edge of the desk.

Her father gently rapped at her closed door, slowly opening and closing the door as he walked in. Fawn peeled a headphone out from her ear as she turned to find her father entering with a detached expression.

"Fawn," he simply stated. The word was laced with an emotion she couldn't track, an abnormal pause as he leaned against the wood of the door he just closed.

"Grandfather passed away today." Her breath hitched quickly, she felt the air leave her lungs, tears beginning to prick at the edges of her eyes.

"Grandpops dead?" She questioned hesitantly, Grandfather's health had been steadily declining, however, doctors told them they would have longer with the man. Hot tears began to fall down her cheeks, an uncomfortable wetness piercing her clothing as they fell from her face.

"Yes, we are moving to Grandmother's house next month to help care for her." He quietly walked up to Fawn, enveloping her in a tight hug. Snot and tears marked his sweater as she buried her distress in his clothing.

"I thought-" a guttural sob choked off her sentence.

"I thought we would have more time." she breathed out as sobbing overtook her body. Shaking as she gripped her father in a hug. Small tears pricked at her father's eyes as well, his expression turning solemn as he pulled her closer, pushing hair out of her face.

"I'm sorry Fawn. I'm sorry."

In early July, they had Grandfather's funeral after moving in with Grandmother. The service had been quiet. It felt as if everybody held their breath, afraid a singular noise would break the carefully crafted peace that overtook the ceremony.

Grandmother lived about two hours from their old apartment, Fawn's grandparent's house was a lot more glamorous than the two-bedroom apartment she had resided in before. Two stories tall, paired with four bedrooms and three bathrooms. It felt empty.

Whenever Fawn visited in the past her grandfather paraded her around the house, twisting stories of each of the rooms and the ghosts that haunted them. He filled the space with his gravelly voice, making the house feel lived in.

Fawn's summer was now spent mostly alone. Her only interactions consisted of whispered conversations with her father when he returned home late into the night from work or crocheting quietly with her grandmother on their back porch, the only conversation passing between the two to ask the other for yarn or Fawn needing help with a certain stitch.

Except for her family, Fawn spent her time solitarily, painting in her room, dozens of canvases littered her new bedroom, containing portraits of the ghosts her grandfather had told stories about. With each year older Fawn's beliefs in these stories shifted, her most recent response usually consisted of an eye roll along with an "I'm too old for fairy tales Grandpop."

Her favorite story Grandfather would tell described the life of a lumber-jane character, piquing her interest as bright eyes widened in excitement as she hung onto each word he uttered.

"Green eyes, a strong jaw, and a face of determination" he'd tell. "A blouse the color of a robin's egg, trousers not unlike mine, only covered with mud, torn and ragged from years of use."

He named her Valeria, telling Fawn the name expressed the ghoul's strength, a strength too alien to be alive, able to chop down a tree within a minute building a log cabin with only a forest and her bare hands in less than an hour. Valeria would roam the forest settled behind their house, wandering to find a worthy component, one that could keep up with her quick-willed nature.

At the end of July, the moon shone brighter than ever before. Taking over the sky, glowing and glinting upon every surface its hue approached. Fawn sat at the back porch, paints and brushes strewn across a small table as an easel stood in front of her.

Her canvas had already begun to fill with color, a picture that caught the glory of Valeria, the only detail missing was the face.

Each stroke felt like a connection, a thin thread that connected Fawn to Grandfather. A thread that pulled too tight on his death day, breaking bits off as it strained. Every mark caused it to be pulled less taut as she brushed along the ridges of the cotton.

Fawn suddenly dropped the paintbrush she held onto, disturbed by a loud rustling coming from the depth of the forest, an eerie sound that was far too loud to only be the squirrels that roamed the forest.

Squinting her eyes to focus on the night Fawn made out a flash of blue clothing as it darted around the forest.

*What if?* Fawn thought deeply, *what if it's her?*

Before she even knew what she was doing Fawn was on her feet rapidly approaching the edge of the woods. Leaves crunching beneath her sandals as her breath seemed to shallow.

“Valeria?” Fawn questioned as she entered the forest, voice tinged with hesitancy as the reality of her craziness dawned on her, running into a forest in the dead of the night, thinking she’d find a story tale ghost who didn’t even exist.

Shaking her head to rattle out her thoughts she turned back to the house, moonlight glinting off the satellite dish perched on the roof. Her steps slowed as she began to leave the forest.

Her heart suddenly stopped, skin tingling with alertness as a cold hand placed itself on her shoulder. Face paling, Fawn turned back to come face to face with a woman she’d painted countless times.

Grandfather had gotten one detail wrong, her eyes were a clouded blue, the color of dark moonlight.