

The Seed

A young boy sat quietly in a dark closet corner with a headlight, journal, and a blanket folded over his knees. His dark red hair overgrown and falling into his eyes, he pushed his bangs out of his eyes to continue scribbling in his journal. Every time he moved to a new line, the confetti in the butterfly charm on top of his pen rattled quietly. Quietly enough that V couldn't hear. But loud enough that he could enjoy it.

Shaking the pen just to hear the rattle, he dramatically dropped his head against the closet's wall, the light shining brightly towards the hangers on the rod above him. Clicking it off, he closed his eyes. *"I need new material."* He thought to himself, widening his eyes to open them suddenly.

Slowly looking back down to his notebook, he nodded affirmatively to himself and stood quietly, softly pushing the door open with his knuckles. Peeking around it slowly, he stared at the man disguised underneath multiple covers on the bed, backing towards the door while watching him.

Once he felt his sock hit the stairs, he spun around and lightly thudded down them, sliding around the corner of the hallway. Placing his hand on the basement door, he hesitated, leaning back to see up the stairs. Nada.

Twisting the knob, he pulled the door open, quietly slipping in and shutting it behind him. Clicking the button on his headlight once for a dim light, he slowly started to head towards the bars in the middle of the room, looking through them to find the boy they imprisoned.

Spotting dark red hair, the boy narrowed his eyes and turned his headlight up another click, bright enough to view the other teen with him but avoid waking him up.

The teen in front of him lay on the floor in a ripped shirt, tattered shorts, and bare feet, his upper half curling in himself. On his head were two dark red felted horns which curved inward towards him, the occasional sparks of light coming from the two.

Leaning closer to the bars, he slowly slid to a sitting position, starting to write furiously in his notebook.

'I've known he was down here for a very long time...but I don't know why...I don't think I've ever seen Vaughn go down here....' He stopped his pen abruptly, biting down on the top of it to stare at the other boy for a moment longer. As he chewed on the top, the chain connecting the butterfly charm snapped apart under the pressure, and the little trinket fell to the floor.

The boy watched as it slid under the bars and towards the other teen, gasping softly. Covering his mouth, he waited for it to stop its movement, eyes darting between it and the teen on the floor. Bad pen to bring to an area he shouldn't be on. If Vaughn did happen to go downstairs, he would immediately spot the pink

butterfly charm. Which, based on the surroundings of the area, the other boy probably wouldn't be allowed to have.

Placing his notebook to the side cautiously and laying his pen on top, he leaned down to peek at the space underneath the gate. He reached his arm under to check its height, finding himself a little stuck upon pulling his hand back. So crawling underneath wasn't feasible.

Yanking his arm out, the chain links and gate on the confinement rattled loudly. He scrambled to his feet to back away as the teenager stirred, finding himself pressed into the wall. Frantically, he grabbed his headlight off of his head, turning the three clicks for the brightest light to turn to darkness.

"Hello...?" The raspy but soft voice of the teen could be heard from the bars. "Is someone here?"

Sinking down against the wall, the boy closed his eyes, mouthing, 'Please don't see me, please don't see me...' He squeezed his hands tightly together, shaking his head.

A few seconds later, he could hear the bars clatter and the teenager's hand feel around on the floor as if he was still looking for the culprit.

"I know someone's out here, man..."

Considering slipping to the door and running out, the boy felt himself to see if he had everything on him to leave, his heart sinking upon realizing what he was missing. Trying to crawl forward quietly, he made his way toward where he thought his notebook was, pausing upon hearing the other's hand in the same area.

Counting down in his head, he swiftly went for his notebook, feeling the teenager's hand land on it at the exact same time. Before he could pull his hand away, he could feel the other teenager wrap his hand around his wrist, feeling a quick volt of electricity go up his hand and through his body.

Eyes widening at the sudden burst of electricity, he whimpered in pain, attempting to tear himself away from the teen's grip. In another quick moment, he felt himself get yanked into the bars hard, a hoarse yelp escaping his throat.

"Don't run away. Who are you?" The teen spoke firmly to him, his voice low.

Still trying to escape from his grasp frantically, the boy let out a fearful whine, squeezing his eyes shut.

"Hey, hey! Just tell me who you are, and I'll let you go."

"Let me go..." He whispered in a scratchy voice.

"You're...you're not a guard, are you? Shit." He slowly let go of him, backing away from the gate slightly.

Trying to find his headlight, the boy turned it on and shined it at the teenager, backed up from the gate a couple of feet now.

Squinting his eyes, he blocked the light with his hand, looking down at the notebook and pushing it forward. He watched as the pen fell towards him, slowly grabbing it and holding it out. "Here..."

The boy set his headlight down, facing upwards, the surrounding area mostly lit by it now. Hesitantly reaching to take the pen, he wrapped his hand around it, pulling it out of the other's hand.

"What are you doing down here?" The teen asked with a scoff, shaking his head. "Who are you?"

Placing his pen in his hoodie pocket, he tapped his fingers on the ground, signaling behind him to the charm on the floor.

"I...what?" He spun around fully, looking around his cell space. "I don't see anything...I-I know you heard me ask you those questions." He turned back towards him, a confused expression on his face.

Grabbing his headlight, he shined it towards the charm on the floor, pointing to it as well.

"Oh...that?" The teen stood slowly, walking over to the plastic butterfly. Crouching, he stared at it with a curious face, humming with a shrug before swiping it off the ground.

The boy held his hand out to the gate, his other hand twirling his hoodie strings anxiously. He watched as the teen came back to the bars.

"Why are you here?" He sat down across from him, setting the pen trinket just out of reach from him.

Eyes darting around nervously, the boy gaped at the ground in thought, trying to figure out how to communicate with this mysterious stranger. He glanced at him, doing his best to avoid his expectant eyes. He closed his eyes to avoid the others, pulling his hand away from the gate and placing it in his pocket. His pocket.

Pulling the pen out, he flipped to an empty page in the back, scribbling down his words hurriedly. He spun it towards him, shining the light onto the paper.

'I didn't mean to wake you. I came down here to write.'

"You came down here to write...? What, do you live here?"

'Upstairs.'

"And you...write down here?"

'Not always. I just wanted to come down here because I knew you were down here. I needed new writing inspiration.'

"So you came to write about a prisoner?" The teen raised his eyebrow, crossing his arms.

'I didn't want to write about a prisoner. I never get to go anywhere. I just wanted to see something new. I'm sorry.'

The teen stared at the three lines of handwriting, biting his lip in thought. Tapping his fingers on the bars, he shook his head. "Don't be sorry. You must be a prisoner, too."

'No...at least, I don't think so. I stay with a man upstairs. He's kinda like my dad. He doesn't let me go anywhere, but he says it's to protect me.'

"Yeah, right. There's a reason why. It's probably because he doesn't want you to run away." He scoffed. "Why can't you talk? What's your name?"

'My name is Bojing Zhuo. I can't talk because I made a mistake, and he took away my voice.'

"What does 'took away your voice' mean?"

Bojing hesitated as he pulled the notebook back, writing a set of words and quickly scratching them out.

"What'd you write?" The other teen uncrossed his arms, reaching for his notebook.

Shaking his head rapidly, he slid it back over after writing a new sentence, tucking his hands into his lap.

~~*'He grabbed me by the throat and held me in the air... He pinned me to the wall by my throat. I messed up pretty badly, though...'*~~

"That's not an excuse."

Tapping his pen against the notebook, the boy glanced toward the basement door, watching it cautiously.

"It's not. No one should be hitting you."

'What's your name? How old are you?'

"Tatsuo Sato. I'm 16...how old are you?"

'I'm 14 now, but I'll be 15 in November.'

"You're young." Tatsuo leaned back against the bars, reaching his arm through them. "Your butterfly charm."

Bojing placed his hand under his hand, clutching it tightly once it was dropped. He shined his light toward it as he tried to reattach the inch's worth of chain to the charm, pinching his finger and cringing in pain. He continued in a process of attempting, failing, and occasionally wincing at the tiny red marks.

"Need help?"

The boy flinched in surprise, almost forgetting he was there. Pausing, he considered it momentarily, passing the pen back to him along with the charm.

"I don't bite." He chuckled to himself, starting to put the pen back together. Fusing the chain with a couple of tiny sparks of electricity, he handed him the pen back. "Is that how it's supposed to go?"

Bojing bobbed the pen, nodding as the butterfly rattled. As he started to write, this time, the confetti inside the charm clinked quietly. Loud enough to hear it. Quiet enough for Vaughn to not hear.

'Why are you down here?'

"Oh. They're taking my powers." Tatsuo pointed towards a dark corner of the room. "Check that out."

Grabbing two of the bars to lean forward, he pointed his light in the direction he'd directed, eyes narrowing at what seemed to be a concrete operating table. On the sides were four sets of chained cuffs and multiple leather straps alongside the bottoms.

"That's where they have me during the day. They extract my power with this..." Tatsuo pulled the chain of an amulet from under his tattered shirt, showing him the red charm dangling off of it.

'Why can't you pull it off?'

"I don't know why exactly, but it hurts me even to touch the gem."

'Why are they taking your powers? Did you do something wrong?'

"I'm a powerful witch. It's actually how I electrocuted you earlier.....sorry about that." He gave him an apologetic expression. "They're trying to take all of my power and give it to someone else."

'Why would they do that? That's so cruel. To strip you of your power and part of what makes you who you are.'

Tatsuo stared at the notebook, a smile creeping onto his face. "You talk like a poet. Honestly though. I don't know, either. They just do whatever they'd like. Eventually, they'll completely strip me of my power and kill me. This is where my life ends."

Bojing gazed at him for what felt like an eternity, immediately going to write furiously.

"Lord have mercy."

'Not if I can help it. How can I help? What can I do? Do you need food? Medicine?'

"You can't help me, Bojing."

The boy stood abruptly and nodded fervidly, snatching his notebook from the ground and using the wall as a writing surface.

The teenager sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose, only looking up when the sheets of paper were placed in front of him.

'What do you need? Just tell me, and I can help.'

"I really don't think you can."

Ignoring him momentarily, he reached through the bars, grabbing the amulet for a split second. Rubbing his finger over the gem, he yelped as he felt a sharp bolt of pain and pressure through his head, pulling his arm back through as fast as he could.

"I...did that hurt you?" Tatsuo's eyes widened, and he grabbed the two bars, looking down at the ground. "Do you know what that means, Bojing?"

The red-headed boy shook his head, holding it with one hand.

"It means you're a witch. You're a witch like me." His face lit up, and he reached his hand out to him. "Come here, come here." He waved for him to come closer.

Slowly, Bojing returned to his feet, walking over to the bars. He leaned his head down as the teen motioned for him to do so, looking up at him with his eyes only as his hair was ruffled.

"No growths yet. You are young." Once he saw the younger's confused expression, he snapped his fingers. "More powerful witches, like me, have these growths like my ram horns. You...you wanna touch them?"

The boy nodded enthusiastically, reaching up and running his hands over them gently.

"You're a witch...." He muttered as he continued, shaking his head. "We need to get out of here. You could be next. Okay. Okay. I need you to try to figure out what your power is, okay? And I need food, Bojing. Anytime after 8:30 pm and before 6 am will work. Do you think you can do that?"

Bojing nodded enthusiastically, grabbing his notebook from the floor and preparing to write into it.

"The day after tomorrow?" He held his hand out to him.

'Does this mean we're friends now?'

Tatsuo stared at the message, chuckling and grabbing his hand. "More. Even best friends. I can get us out of here."

The red-headed boy squeezed the teenager's hand, letting go of it slowly. He placed his hand on the door handle, looking back at Tatsuo hesitantly.

"It'll be okay. You stay safe. I'll be okay down here." He nodded reassuringly with a small smile.

Bojing clicked his headlight off, pulling it off his head and tucking it into his pocket. Exiting the basement, he closed the door behind him quietly.

Inhaling and exhaling deeply, he bit back the bright smile he wanted to show so badly, tiptoeing his way up the stairs. Reentering the room, he set his notebook, headlight, and pen under his pillow, laying beside Vaughn with a bated breath. Upon lack of a reaction, he relaxed fully and turned over, his thoughts consumed with the other witch.