

T MINUS 7

written by

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BLACK SCREEN

The heartbeat sounds of Cara's heart is slowly pulsing. Eventually stopping.

The first minute starts. Cara's heart has stopped. Her neocortex and the limbic system lights up.

INT. CARA'S ROOM - DAWN (MINUTE 1)

The soft sun rays shines through Cara's thin curtains, illuminating her room.

CARA, a 6 year old girl, springs out of her bed the moment she wakes. She runs towards her calendar that is hung on her wall.

A date circled with red marker with a note saying "MY 6TH BIRTHDAY!" A smile spreading across her face.

Beneath her bed, a brightly wrapped present is poking out and catches her eye. She pulls it out eagerly, the wrapping all crooked and crumpled.

She tears the wrapping paper, revealing a Barbie doll.

CARA
(whispering to herself,
delighted)
She's perfect.

Cara hugs the doll tightly, her eyes sparkling. She sees a little note that was included in the present. "By Mum & Dad, Happy Birthday!" written in her own handwriting.

She giggles and stands up in excitement. She heads to the living room to show her parents.

INT. - LIVING ROOM

Cara softly runs up to the living room, she stops in her tracks, her smile fading.

The room is cluttered with empty alcohol bottles, crumpled cigarette packs and discarded trash everywhere. The smell of beer and smoke lingers in the air.

CARA'S PARENTS are seen passed out on the couch, their bodies slack and lifeless.

Cara clutches her doll close to her chest. After a moment, she quietly moves towards the couch. She picks up a blanket that was draped over a chair and gently covers her parents.

INT. KITCHEN

Cara stands on a stool by the counter, carefully pouring pancake batter into a sizzling pan.

She sets three plates, each with a oddly shaped, slightly burnt pancake. She places a fork and knife by each plate and adjusts the chairs.

Cara sits at her spot, placing a candle into her pancake. She lights it, the small flame flickering unsteadily.

Cara hugs her doll and clasps her hands together, closing her eyes tightly. She whispers her wish.

CARA
(whispering)
I wish to be happy all the time.

She smiles and blows out the candle.

The room is silent. Just the clock ticking can be heard.

Cara looks around the empty table, her smile slowly dissolving.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (MINUTE 2)

Cara, now in the dining room lit only by a singular candle and dim cool lighting, is holding her doll tightly and is visibly stressed. The two parents are heard fighting off screen.

Cara then slides out of her bed reluctantly, taking her time and stopping whenever her father shouts louder than usual.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

After peaking out her room, she steps forward closer to the argument and speaks out in a naive tone with childlike innocence.

CARA
Please-

She gets her father's attention, head snapping too quickly in anger. Her mother, however, begins to look down at the floor

CARA (CONT'D)
(Now terrified from her
father's gaze)
Please... stop. Stop fighting.

Her father leans forward with rage apparent in his face.

FATHER
(With spite)
Shut- up-! This is none your
business.

Cara stops and holds her breath, afraid to make any noise. His eyes narrow into the doll she's holding in her arms, a small smirk growing in mockery.

FATHER (CONT'D)
Still with that useless thing?

He scoffs, now looking back at his wife who is looking far away from the scene in front of her; the shame and guilt in her face growing each second.

FATHER (CONT'D)
(Mocking, disgust)
Just like your bitch of a mother.
What a dissapointment... if only
she had given birth to a boy
instead of you.

He looks back at Cara and lunges forward to snatch the doll. Cara struggles to hold on before he manages to take it, walk towards the kitchen, and hurl it into the trash. He mutters just loud enough for both Cara and her mother to hear before stepping in to his bedroom.

FATHER (CONT'D)
(sigh)
I don't need any more
dissapointment in this house...

Cara looks heartbroken. She looks for her mother expecting any response, but she too has been silenced. Her mother is wide-eyed, shaking, and does nothing but stand there with regret and fear.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

It's late and silent, her parents have presumably fallen asleep. The moon is the only thing illuminating Cara's surroundings.

She peaks through her bedroom door and tiptoes out towards the kitchen trash bin.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She reaches into the bin with focus, her face determining whether or not she finds her doll. Her face brightens a bit signifying the doll has been found, right before she grows wary of some faint footsteps approaching the kitchen.

She looks up, some of her tension disappears; her mother sits down and pulls Cara into a hug.

MOTHER

Oh... my baby. I'm so sorry.

Her mother's tears fall onto her head; she then buries her head onto her mother's chest. Her face starts mirroring her own mother's.

INT. CARA'S ROOM - MORNING (MINUTE 3)

The shrill sound of an alarm fills the air. Cara opens her eyes, staring blankly at the ceiling for just a moment. She reaches over and silences it.

She sits up slowly, her movements almost robotic as she puts on her school uniform.

She pauses, glancing down at her arms. Carefully, she puts on a jacket to cover over fresh cuts that run along her forearms.

Cara reaches out to her phone on the bedside table. She picks it up and stares at the screen. No notifications. Just an empty screen. She sighs and puts it in her jacket as she walks out of her room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Cara steps into the living room. The mess amplified of what it used to be years ago. Discarded cans, dirty plates and a broken clock on the wall.

Her gaze lingers on the clock. Its hands are stuck, frozen in time.

She takes it down, her fingers brushing over the cracked glass. With a small sigh, she sets it aside and walks to the cluttered cabinet, searching for batteries.

Her hands freeze mid-rummage. Among the clutter, she finds a small bag of white crystals.

Her breath catches.

INT. HALLWAY

Cara storms down the hallway, the bag clutched tightly in her hand. Her steps quick and loudly stomping, her breathing unsteady.

INT. FATHER'S BEDROOM

Cara bursts into her father's room. Her father lies sprawled on the bed, surrounded by empty beer cans and bottles.

CARA
(voice trembling)
What the hell is this?

She thrusts the bag in his face.

Cara's father sits, groggy and disoriented. His eyes squint and then sharpen when he sees the bag. He snatches it from her hand, his expression darkening.

FATHER
(growls)
That's none of your god damn business.

CARA
(scoff, building up anger)
None of my business? You're ruining yourself!

Her voice cracks, but her anger builds.

CARA (CONT'D)
You're insane! You're destroying your life with this— how can you even look at me?

Her father stands up, towering over her like he has always done. His face twisting with fury.

FATHER
(loud)
You. Don't get to judge me. I mean look at you.

He grabs Cara's arm, yanking her sleeve up exposing the angry red cuts beneath. For a moment, his breath hitches, just a flicker of something in his eyes. But then, his anger surges back.

FATHER (CONT'D)
(shouting, voice shaking)
Who the hell do you think you are
huh? You think you're better than
me? You, calling me crazy? At least
I'm not hiding this. I should've
sent you to IMH the first time I
saw this crap.

Cara's tears spill over, her chests heaving but her eyes ablaze with pain and anger.

FATHER (CONT'D)
You're just like your whore mother.
A burden.

Cara pulls her arm free.

CARA
I'm like this because of you!

Her voice breaking, raw with pain.

CARA (CONT'D)
I wish you'd be a father for once
in your damn life. You hurt
yourself with drugs so what's the
difference if I hurt myself too?

She sobs, her voice cracking further.

CARA (CONT'D)
(almost child-like)
Why can't you just love me?

Cara steps back, unable to look at her father.

She rushes out of his room, she paces down the hallway, her vision blurred with tears as she grabs her school bag.

The weight of her father's words presses down, suffocating. A sob escapes as she runs out of house, not looking back.

Her father stands in the doorway, staring after her. His face pales, his anger fading into regret.

He clutches the bag of crystals tightly, his hand trembling.

It's too late.

It has always been too late.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING (MINUTE 4)

Cara is visually a lot older now. She stares out the window deep in thought before faint footsteps capture her attention.

Her father stumbles into the kitchen with a plate, a pancake, and a single cheap candle. On his other hand is a small hastily wrapped gift, wrapped in some torn newspaper and some sort of twine.

He sets the pancake onto the table and leaves his other gift-handling hand outstretched for her.

FATHER
(Avoidant, monotone)
Here. Happy birthday.

Cara looks at him, then to the plate, then to the gift. She hesitantly grabs onto the gift right before her father jerks his hand back like he's been stung.

Slowly and with anticipation, she unwraps the gift. The disappointment on her face is apparent when a small tarnished bracelet is revealed. She tries to fit her hand through it but to no avail.

CARA
I...

Her father looks at her, mildly annoyed.

CARA (CONT'D)
(whisper)
I didn't ask for you to-

FATHER
(Offended and defensive)
You think I don't care is it? You think I've never done anything for you? That I didn't work hard for you? Huh?

Cara stands up with some defiance and pent up anger flickering through.

CARA
(As calm as she can manage)
You haven't. Not at all- you've been drunk or high every year of my life. You don't even know me.

Her father's face twists into a familiar scowl. He shuts his eyes and scoffs.

FATHER

You've been such a disappointment.
If you were a boy, you-

He stops himself from saying anything further. Cara scoffs off screen which gets his attention.

She is trying to fight back her tears, her voice is now shaking and she can't bring herself to look at him.

CARA

Then go.
(A beat)
If I'm such a disappointment, then
leave. Just like mum did.

The father is in shock, his face softening into something that looks like guilt and panic.

He goes closer to Cara- just a bit- and she in turn shifts away from him.

FATHER

Don't do that.

She just stares at him in silence.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Don't be like this, you are still
my child. My daughter.

Her eyebrows furrow as she keeps her eyes on her father. Noticing her resolve, he resigns and sighs heavily.

He drinks what's left on his glass and slams it onto the table and walks away to the door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

FATHER

(annoyed)

Fine. I'm done with you anyways.

He opens the door and looks back at her.

FATHER (CONT'D)

And f.y.i, that bracelet belonged
to your mum.

He slams the door hard that the walls shake. And just like that, he's completely gone.

Cara stands still not knowing what to do. She slowly walks towards the door and looks out the window, he's nowhere to be seen. He really is gone.

She looks back at the pancake, her breath getting heavier each second that passes. She starts to fall onto the floor, tears struggling to stay in. A cry wants to escape her mouth but her throat wouldn't let her. Her hands trail up her head and clutches on to her hair. She truly is alone.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (MINUTE 5)

The house is eerily quiet, the silence pressing down like a weight.

Cara moves through the mess, each step slow and heavy. The remnants of her father's departure are scattered everywhere.

Empty bottles, discarded trash and shattered glass that glints in the dim light.

Her gaze falls to the floor, she kneels beside a cluttered mess. Her hands tremble as she brushes aside broken pieces of a family photo. Beneath it, something catches her eye- a small packet of white crystals.

She hesitates for a moment and picks it up. Her breath hitches as she stares at it.

Her heart pounds in her chests. She reaches out to her phone in her pocket and paces around the room looking for a number. She hesitates before dialing.

FRANCES (V.O.)

Cara?

Cara's voice cracks when she speaks.

CARA

Can you come over? Please.

LATER

The door creaks open and FRANCES steps inside. Her face weary, her shoulders hunched under the weight of her own struggles. She spots Cara on the couch.

Frances sits beside her without a word. The bag of crystals lying between them.

Frances gazes at the bag, then Cara.

FRANCES

(softly)

Are you sure? This could destroy
your life. You've seen what it
does... We both have.

Cara doesn't respond. She picks up the bag and places it in Frances's hands. Her eyes are hollow, devoid of hope.

Frances exhales shakily. She hesitates, her fingers tightening around the bag. Reluctantly, she pulls out a spoon and lighter from her pocket.

Her hands move with practised precision, though they tremble slightly.

Frances looks over at Cara one more time, her eyes begging her not to do this.

Cara just stares ahead, her silence heavy.

Frances looks back at the spoon and lights the bottom, the small flame flickering in the dim room.

FATHER (V.O.)

You are still my child.

As Cara breathes in, her father's voice still echo faintly in her mind but fades as the numbness takes over.

Cara leans back, her eyes fluttering closed as she exhales. The world around her blurs, her thoughts dissolving into a dull void.

Frances watches her, her own face unreadable. She sets the spoon aside and shifts closer, wrapping her arms around Cara and pulling her into a tight embrace.

FRANCES

(whispers)

Hey, I'm here. I'm not leaving.

You're okay now.

Her voice cracks slightly, the promise fragile.

Cara leans into her, her body limp and her breathing slow. The emptiness wraps around her like a blanket.

Frances strokes Cara's hair, her fingers slightly trembling. Her eyes drift to the scattered remnants of the house, her mind spiraling into its own abyss.

FRANCES (V.O.)
How much longer can I do this?

Her grip on Cara tightens but her gaze is vacant, lost in the cracks that have been widening between them for years.

The two girls sit together, fragile and broken, holding onto each other as the darkness looms.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING (MINUTE 6)

There's another pancake on the table with a cheap birthday candle. She stares at the empty plate, the candle illuminating her glassy eyes. Frances is right beside her but her face looks so hollow. The both of them are trying their hardest not to stare at the bag of white crystals in front of them, just beside the pancake.

Frances sighs hard, her shoulders slouch forward and her legs start to bounce a bit.

FRANCES
(shaky)
I can't do this anymore Cara. This
isn't healthy for either of us.

Cara starts smiling, panic and hysteria breaking the facade she paints on her face. The tiredness in her eyes more visible as she raises her head to look at Frances.

CARA
(She laughs in a tired
manner)
So what, you're leaving me too?
You're gonna abandon me like
everyone else?

Frances's tears start to fall.

FRANCES
I'm not abandoning you.
(a beat)
I'm doing this for me. I've
tried...
(now a whisper)
I've tried so hard to help you
but... you don't even try!

Cara's face sours. Her eyes start to water, both searching Frances's for any sign she might stay. Her voice starts to tremble in a pleading tone akin to a child.

CARA
You can't leave me. Please,
Frances, you're all I have. Please
don't leave me!

She grabs onto Frances before her hands are pushed away.
Frances's eyes dart to the table, sad and broken.

FRANCES
(A quiet cry)
I tried to help, Cara. I really
did. But I'm losing myself. You...

The camera shifts onto the white crystals, revealing what
Frances has been looking at.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
You've been destroying yourself for
years, you've chosen this over
everything!

CARA
(cracking)
I'll stop. I'll change. Please
don't leave me. Please, Frances,
I... need you. I can't do this
without you.

Cara moves closer to Frances, hoping she looks back at her.

CARA (CONT'D)
You were right, this-

She picks up the bag of white crystals.

CARA (CONT'D)
(Teary-eyed)
This destroys lives. I understand
it now. I promise, I'll stop-
please... don't go!

Frances backs away and shakes her head, still choosing not to
look at Cara. She walks toward the door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She opens the door, stops, and looks behind her. Cara hasn't
moved, but her eyes are pleading.

FRANCES
I can't stay, not like this. I love
you, I do, but I can't just watch
you destroy yourself anymore.
(MORE)

FRANCES (CONT'D)
I've tried to support you all these
years, but it's time for me to
support myself.

She steps out the door.

FRANCES (CONT'D)
You should too.

And just like that, the door closes behind her softly.

Cara bursts into tears, and it turns into an ugly sob. She screams and starts kicking the furniture around her.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Cara, in her fit of pain and rage, starts screaming at her own reflection and punching the wall.

CARA
You really fucking did it this
time. You just HAD to. Fuck you-
YOU JUST HAD TO!

After hitting her head a few times, her sobs turn quiet.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

She steps out and looks at the bag on the table, calling for her. She walks towards it and hesitantly grabs the bag.

CARA
(whispers to herself)
I'm sorry Frances. I'm sorry.

She opens the bag and closes her eyes.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT (MINUTE 7)

Cara is sitting there in front of the table, once again facing the candle on her birthday pancake. No tears escape her, she is empty. Seconds pass as she simply stares at the flame, barely blinking.

Her phone buzzes, and she gives it a glance after a few seconds. She takes her time unlocking it with trembling fingers.

It's a new message- from her father no less. In it are the words, "I'm sorry. I know that I've hurt you. I know I'm wrong now. Please forgive me."

She furrows her brows. A multitude of emotions pass by-anger, confusion, sadness, fear, and for a moment, hope.

She opens the message and types ahead; "Please come home. I need help." She moves her thumb to press Send but hesitates. A deep breath... and a sigh. She quickly moves her thumb to delete the message.

She drops the phone on the floor, less of a slip and more of a throw.

She looks onto the bag of crystals and reaches for it. She doesn't hesitate, her moves too smooth, too robotic to be humane.

She picks her phone up and presses Frances's contact, not even focusing on what's on screen. "I'm sorry. You deserve better. Please forget me." She stares at the screen, presses Send, and all life in her eyes disappear.

Cara moves to get the spoon, the lighter, and the needle. She knows this is too much, and that is exactly why she is doing this. Her body betrays her, shaking as her resolve clashes with her instinct. She puts the crystals onto the spoon and burns the bottom. She then takes the liquid and loads it up onto the syringe. She flicks the needle, once, twice, and aims it to her arm- already tied.

She blinks, her sweat beads up on her forehead, she breathes in deep... then pushes it in.

The room begins to spin, her heart going overdrive, her eyes widen a bit. Then silence.

There's peaceful nothingness. Just black, just nothing, a hum of emptiness.

Then a shock of electricity, a sound of the defibrillator, and a singular heart beat.