

**NOW
THAT
I'VE
FOUND
YOU**

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**ACADEMY AWARD-NOMINATED EVELYN
CONAWAY TO RECEIVE FILM CRITICS CIRCLE
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

The Film Critics Circle just announced this year's nominations, and while some actors and films were snubbed, and others were nominated as suspected, the biggest surprise is that Evelyn Conaway will be honored with the esteemed lifetime achievement award. Conaway's career skyrocketed in 1970, when she starred in *Every Time We Meet* as the wealthy and doe-eyed Diane Tyler opposite leading man James Jenkins, who played Henry, a boy from the wrong side of the tracks. The film won an Academy Award for Best Picture and scored Conaway a nomination for Best Actress. It is arguably the greatest romantic film of the twentieth century.

Conaway quickly became a household name. For years, you couldn't go anywhere without seeing her face on a billboard or magazine cover. She and Jenkins would go on to star in five films together and were known for their dynamic chemistry on- and off-screen. They were married in 1970 and divorced after only two years before marrying again in 1974. After their second divorce in 1979, Conaway married movie producer Freddy Stevens, who died of lung cancer in 1988. In 1990, Conaway and Jenkins rekindled

their romance and married a third time, only to divorce once again in 2012.

Many believe the incident at the 2012 FCCs was to blame for their last divorce. That year, Jenkins was set to receive the very same lifetime achievement award, and by then, he'd had a number of tumultuous years behind him. In the late '80s and early '90s, he struggled with drug addiction and had multiple stints in rehab, but by 2012, he was slowly putting his career back together.

The night of the ceremony, Conaway, who was still his wife at the time, made one of the most memorable speeches in Film Critics Circle history. Instead of praising Jenkins for his career accomplishments, she called him a liar and said he didn't deserve the award. And then, to everyone's astonishment, she walked off-stage with his award in hand. She agreed to return it only after security chased her down. Jenkins's stunned face splashed across the theater's screens.

To this day, we don't know why Conaway reacted so strongly. She refused to give any interviews, remaining tight-lipped. She moved out of her Beverly Hills home and, essentially, dropped off the face of the earth. This year's FCCs will be the first time she's made a public appearance since that night. Meanwhile, Jenkins did, in fact, manage to turn his career around. He's now known to the younger generation as the beloved grandfather in the *Aliens Attack Earth* movie franchise.

In related news, this August also marks the fiftieth anniversary of *Every Time We Meet*, the film that shot both Conaway and Jenkins

to stardom. There has been talk of a remake, and lately many have petitioned for Conaway's granddaughter, Evie Jones, to star as this generation's Diane.

Jones has been in the spotlight recently, as she was just cast as the lead in legendary director Paul Christopher's newest psychological thriller, *Deep Within*. She was only a week shy of graduating from Los Angeles's prestigious Mildred McKibben Performing Arts Academy when the casting announcement was made, and this will be her second feature film. Last fall, she had a minor role in Paul Christopher's *Mind Games*, playing Alanna Thomas, who was killed off early on but quickly became a fan favorite.

If we want Jones to play Diane in an *Every Time We Meet* remake, then who should play Henry? He'd have to be just as charismatic as Jenkins. Can we all agree that there is nothing more swoon-worthy than the final scene, when Henry says to Diane, "Well, darling, I'm sure glad you showed up"?

We here at Film Buzz are waiting in eager anticipation for Conaway to receive her award at the FCCs and for Jones's star to rise.

When asked about the recent developments in her burgeoning career, Jones stated, "I'm incredibly lucky to be in this position, and I'm grateful for all the support I've received."

Conaway could not be reached for comment.

Chapter One

FRIDAY, MAY 15

“Ms. Jones, how does it feel to have such a breakout role so early on in your career?”

This is asked by a press reporter who stands in a sea of other reporters, photographers, and fans. They stare at us eagerly, stare at *me*. I’m sitting onstage at the Los Angeles Palooza Film Festival on a panel with the legendary Paul Christopher to talk about his new movie, *Deep Within*. We start filming in a few weeks.

“It’s *surreal*,” I say with a small laugh. I swallow and remind myself to smile brighter. I cross my legs and will my heartbeat to slow down. I just want everyone to like me.

“I can’t believe this is my life right now,” I say. “When I got the call that Paul wanted me to audition for this movie, I almost fell out.”

Everyone laughs at this, and I unclench a little. *Be cool*, I

think to myself. *Be charming. Be the best that you can be!* God, I sound like an after-school special.

“Evie is one of the most talented students I’ve witnessed come out of Mildred McKibben,” Paul Christopher says in his elegant British accent. He turns to me and smiles, adjusting the brim of his gray newsboy cap. His white hair is pulled back in a ponytail at the nape of his neck. “She really understands character in a way I haven’t seen from someone so young. We’ve already done great work together on *Mind Games*, and I’m looking forward to working with her on *Deep Within*.”

I smile and try my best to pretend that I’m not completely freaking out at his praise. Paul Christopher is in his midsixties, not that much younger than my grandmother, and he’s been making twisty, critically acclaimed thrillers for decades. I’ve sat at home on my living room floor, watching his movies on a loop, my bowl of popcorn sitting untouched because I was so engrossed in the story.

Now maybe someone will stop eating popcorn in order to watch me.

People in the room are recording us on their phones, and I’m once again thankful to my agent, Kerri, who hooked me up with a stylist last week. In my opinion, I’ve always had good fashion sense. I mean, that’s what happens when your grandmother is Evelyn Conaway. (Yeah, *that* Evelyn Conaway. Basically the biggest movie star ever.) But the bright-orange

Carolina Herrera minidress and white Christian Louboutin pumps I have on today is maybe the best outfit I've ever worn.

I imagine the number of times I'll be tagged in videos and posts on Instagram and sit up a little straighter. I'll have a lot of DMs to respond to tonight.

I turn to Kerri now, who is standing off to the side. She gives me a subtle thumbs-up, and I nod. As thrilling as this is, having her here makes me feel less alone, less like I'm in a fishbowl.

"Ms. Jones, you have quite the family legacy," another reporter says. "Do you feel any pressure now that you are following in the footsteps of your grandmother, specifically?"

"Of course," I say, answering honestly. "But I've wanted this my whole life, so I feel ready. I've been waiting for a really long time."

A really long time meaning basically since birth. I grew up watching my grandmother's movies. My parents wanted me to have a "normal" childhood, so the plan was that I couldn't go on auditions until after I graduated high school. But then Paul Christopher came to our spring showcase last year and was so impressed with my performance, he offered me a role in *Mind Games* on the spot. Technically I didn't break Mom and Dad's rule because I didn't have to audition. And then they couldn't really say no when I was invited to audition for *Deep Within* after the senior showcase a few months ago.

"It was just announced that Evelyn Conaway will receive

the lifetime achievement award at the FCCs this year,” a third reporter says. “Do you have any thoughts about the stir she caused at the FCCs eight years ago, when James Jenkins received the same honor?”

I blink and glance at Kerri, who glares at the reporter. She looks at me and tightly shakes her head. That’s our sign for *no comment*. But I do have a comment about this.

“My grandmother is one of the most talented actresses of all time,” I say. “She couldn’t be more deserving of this award. If it were up to me, she’d have received it in 2012, every year before that, and every year after.”

There’s a collective “aww” from the crowd. I’m glad they find my honesty so endearing. I shoot another glance at Kerri. She gives another thumbs-up, and I relax again.

Thankfully, the rest of the questions are directed at Paul Christopher. Then the panel ends, and I’m ushered offstage toward Kerri.

“You are a rock star,” she says, grinning at me like she might burst from excitement. Kerri looks more like a fashion model than an agent, tall and slim with flawless dark-brown skin and long, sleek extensions in her hair. She’s only twenty-two and fresh out of college. Paul Christopher cast me in his movie before I had an agent, so I had to act fast. Kerri was referred to me by my school advisor. And I’m glad I went with her, because she’s a shark. In one month alone, she’s secured a stylist, hairstylist, makeup artist, and two endorsement deals.

She talks a mile a minute as we walk, her heels clicking with each step. “I would have never believed that was your first panel. You were so well spoken, and you didn’t get off topic. And you—”

I turn to her when she abruptly stops, and that’s when I realize Paul Christopher has appeared on my other side.

“I’ll see you in a few weeks, Evie,” he says. “Take care.” He tips his cap in goodbye and walks away, surrounded by his team.

Paul Christopher just tipped his hat to me. He told me to *take care*. What is life, even?

Said life gets even more exciting as we make our way outside and are hit with a wall of sound.

“Evie! Evie! Evie!”

Fans and paparazzi always wait outside the festival to see their favorite stars, and I can’t believe that some of them are waiting out here for *me*. Mostly it’s because Paul Christopher has a cult following. Ever since my role in *Mind Games* last year, I’ve gained hundreds of thousands of followers on social media and people recognize me at the most basic places, like Target and McDonald’s. Two girls even recognized me once while I was waiting in line at the DMV.

“Hi, everyone!” I wave enthusiastically, and a security guard appears to escort Kerri and me, whisking us away into a black Expedition. My best friend, Simone, is waiting inside.

She was in the audience at the panel, and now she stares at the crowd with wide eyes as we drive off.

“That was nuts!” she shouts, grabbing my hands. Her thick box braids are pulled back and wrapped in a tight bun at the top of her head, and her bun wobbles as she scoots toward me. “Oh my God, Evie.”

“*I know.*” I give her hands a squeeze and match her wide grin.

She continues to stare at the crowd in wonder until we can’t see it anymore. We’ve been best friends since our freshman year at McKibben, and we used to sit at lunch, dreaming about the day we’d experience what’s happening right now. I’m so glad she’s here to witness all of this with me.

Our hands are still clutched together when Kerri, who has been busy clicking away on her phone answering emails, suddenly shouts, “YES!”

“What?” I say, spinning to face her.

She turns her phone so that I can see the email she just received. “Guess who has just been asked to be the face of Beautiful You’s newest campaign?”

Beautiful You is the number one Black hair-care company in the country. I’ve only been using their products for, I don’t know, my whole life?

I blink at Kerri. “*Me?*”

“Yes, you!”

The three of us squeal so loudly the driver swerves in shock.

“But, I mean, of course they want you,” Kerri says. “Your hair is already amazing.” She nods at my curly hair, which frames my face and head like a cloud, then adds, “Oh, and someone from James Jenkins’s team reached out again for another meeting. I said you weren’t available.”

“Good.” I frown. “I don’t know why they’re trying to get in contact, but he is *persona non grata* in the Jones/Conaway household.”

Kerri nods. “I know. I basically told them as much.”

“Thanks, Kerri. For everything.” I hug her, and she stiffens for a second because she thinks physical contact is unprofessional. But she eventually relaxes; I’m starting to wear her down.

I lean back in my seat, grinning. I can’t believe this is all happening. I know it sounds cheesy, but dreams really do come true.

After Kerri and I go over plans for the next few weeks, I’m finally off the hook. Simone and I are dropped off at my house in Malibu, where I live with my parents.

It’s empty once we walk inside, of course. My parents, Andrew and Marie Jones, indie darlings of the documentary genre, are hardly ever here. Right now they’re working on a

new doc about the horrors of elephant poaching in Botswana. They'll be back in August for Gigi's FCC ceremony. Their long absence is nothing new, really. And they trust that I won't do anything out of control while they're gone.

"I'm heading out to the deck," Simone says, grabbing a can of soda from the fridge and opening the patio door.

Simone basically lives here. The guest bedroom is filled with all of her things. She has free rein of the house, just like me.

I nod and say, "I'm gonna call Gigi. I'll be out in a few minutes."

"Okay," she says over her shoulder.

I take off my heels as I walk upstairs to my room and close the door behind me. I sit on my bed and dial Gigi's number, glancing at the framed photograph of the two of us on my nightstand. It was taken the day I was born. Gigi is holding me, and I'm wearing one of those little pink hospital hats, and she's dressed glamorously in a white wrap dress. Her hair wasn't so gray then, but it was still curled the same way she wears it now.

Gigi lives in New York City. I used to see her every day when I was younger, back before she divorced James Jenkins and moved out of Beverly Hills. Now she never comes out to LA. She never leaves New York, actually. For almost a decade,

I've had to settle for phone calls to keep in touch, only seeing her in person when I visit. Most recently, that was last Christmas.

The phone rings one more time before someone finally picks up.

"Hello?" A boy's voice.

I frown and pull my phone away from my ear. Did I call the wrong number? No . . . this is Gigi's number. The same number I dialed just two days ago.

"Um, who is this?" I say slowly.

"Milo . . .," he answers. His voice is deep and melodic. "Who is this?"

"*Milo?*" I repeat, bewildered. "This is Evie. I'm calling for Evelyn Conaway? I'm her granddaughter."

"Oh, Evie! What's up?" His voice immediately brightens. "How's it going?"

How's it going? Who is this guy? Has some mad fan broken into Gigi's house and taken her hostage?

"Um . . . where is my grandmother?" I ask, growing frantic.

"She's in the sitting room," he says calmly. It sounds like he's moving pots and pans around in the background. "I'm answering phones for her. She said you might call."

"Oh, you're her new assistant," I say, relieved. This all makes sense now, and I stop thinking about calling the cops. "Wait, what happened to Esther?" Esther has been Gigi's

personal assistant for as long as I can remember, since the '70s or something.

"She retired." He laughs a little and adds, "And I'm not your grandma's assistant, just a friend."

"A friend?" Now I'm wondering if Gigi has turned into some kind of Manhattan sugar mama. Or worse, is this guy trying to take advantage of her somehow? Horror stories of old ladies giving strangers their Social Security numbers flash through my mind.

But no, Gigi is smart. She wouldn't let something like that happen . . . would she?

Before I can really start to freak out again, Milo says, "And I deliver her groceries. That's why I'm here right now. Just dropping some stuff off."

"Oh." But I'm still feeling a little suspicious. "Can you put her on, please?"

"Of course. And hey, congrats on the Paul Christopher movie. Great stuff."

"Thanks so much," I say. *Odd, so odd.* I can hear the sound of him walking through the house and carrying the phone to Gigi.

"Hello, Evie Marie, my love," she says, her voice husky and velvety. Gigi and my parents are the only ones who call me Evie Marie, my first and middle names. Evie is for Evelyn. Marie is for my mom. "How was the film festival?"

“Oh, it was amazing, Gigi,” I say, flopping backward onto my bed.

“You deserve it, baby. You’ve worked really hard at that school. I’m proud of you.”

Hearing those words means so much coming from her. Especially because Gigi never wanted me to get into acting. She thinks everyone in the film industry is untrustworthy and that my grandfather Freddy was the only person she could depend on.

“A reporter asked me about the FCCs, and I told them you should’ve received the award years ago,” I say.

Gigi sucks her teeth. “I wish everyone would just be quiet about this ceremony. You should’ve told them to mind their business.”

I laugh. “I’ll make sure to say that next time.”

I don’t bother telling Gigi that James Jenkins has been trying to get in touch with me. It would only upset her. I’m not sure why she hates him so much or what he did to make her blow up at him on live television. I just know it’s bad, so bad that she still refuses to talk about it eight years later. I don’t even know what he wants, but I have no interest in finding out. My loyalty is to Gigi. James might have been like a grandfather to me the first few years of my life, but I haven’t seen him since they divorced when I was ten. He’s a stranger now.

In the background, I can hear Milo say something to Gigi.

She mumbles in response. Then, “Evie Marie, my love, I have to go. It’s time to cook dinner.”

“*Cook?* You?” I’ve never known Gigi to even boil ramen noodles.

“You can learn new things, even in old age!”

I laugh again. “Okay, Gigi. I’ll talk to you soon. I love you.”

“I love you too.” She sounds distracted for a moment, the sound of Milo’s voice getting louder. But then she’s back. “I’m so proud of you, baby.”

When the line goes dead, I remind myself to ask for more information about this Milo kid the next time I call her. Gigi is smart and a great judge of character, but we all have our lapses. I’d hate it if he were some gold-digging boy looking for a handout. But I’ll think about that tomorrow. Today is meant for celebrating.

Simone is slouching in a deck chair when I finally make it outside. I’ve changed out of my dress and put on a T-shirt and cutoffs. LA is the best city in the world, especially during summer, and we have an awesome view of the ocean from the patio. The perks of living in Malibu. I take a deep whiff of the salty air and plop into the seat next to Simone.

I check my Instagram, and like I guessed, I have thousands of tags and DMs from today’s panel. Everyone loved the outfit and my hair. Lots of people want to know when I’ll be in their cities next or when I’ll start filming *Deep Within*.

I post a selfie that I took with Paul Christopher right

before the panel started, and within five minutes I have over two thousand likes.

All the love is making my heart grow ten sizes. It's wonderfully overwhelming, like a rush. All these people—strangers—who are invested in me, people who take time out of their day to say the nicest things. Their support makes me feel so worthy of the roles that have come my way.

"I could get used to this," I say to Simone, showing her the post of Paul Christopher and me. The likes keep ticking up and up.

She smiles a little and looks down at her own phone.

I wait for her inevitable wisecrack about how I always hold the camera too close to my face when I take selfies, but she's staring off into space, unusually quiet.

"Hey," I say, waving to get her attention. "Everything okay?"

She pulls her legs up onto the chair and wraps her arms around her knees. "I'm just wondering when all of these great things are going to happen for me too."

I wince and look down at my toes. Simone and I were in the same play during the senior showcase. After watching in the audience, Paul Christopher asked a handful of us to audition for *Deep Within*. Simone and I both auditioned for the lead role of Shay, a girl who investigates a classmate's murder at her ritzy New England boarding school. But Paul Christopher chose me. It was a little weird between us at first, but that went away eventually. I didn't know she was still upset.

“Your big break is coming,” I say. “I just know it. You’re way too talented.”

And I mean that wholeheartedly. Simone was one of the best actresses in our senior class. Hell, even at all of McKibben.

“Sometimes I just feel like you get everything so easily,” she says, still not looking at me.

Her words are like a punch to the gut. That’s what everyone at McKibben used to say, that every lead role I got came down to nepotism because of my parents and Gigi. No one thought about how I had to audition just like everybody else or how hard I worked to prove I wasn’t some legacy with a name. It’s why I don’t have any friends, except for Simone. She never seemed to care about any of that.

Except maybe she did.

“You know that isn’t true,” I say quietly.

She glances at me and shakes her head. “Never mind, don’t listen to me. I’m just being stupid.” She jumps up out of her chair, a mischievous look on her face. “This is a cause for celebration! I’ll be right back.”

The tension in my stomach recedes as I watch her skip back inside.

I take a deep breath and wait for my heartbeat to slow down.

Gigi is all the way in New York, and my parents are never around. Simone has been my family since our freshman year.

Our white classmates at McKibben thought we actually were related, even though we look nothing alike and all we have in common is our light-brown complexions. After a while, we began tricking people into believing that we were sisters.

If I lost Simone, I don't know what I would do.

When she returns, she's carrying a bottle of champagne from my parents' bar, which is strictly *off-limits*. But they're never here, and Simone is grinning, so I reach for the champagne flute she hands me. With a flourish, she pulls the cork, and it shoots out with a loud *pop*. We both jump back in surprise and laugh.

Simone pours the bubbly champagne into both of our glasses. "To your much-deserved success," she says, holding up her flute in cheers.

I don't usually drink, because I hate the taste of alcohol. But I'm so happy, and I do deserve a little celebration.

"Cheers," I say, knocking my flute into hers.

We sit back down, and I pull up a playlist to match our good mood. Every time one of our glasses is close to empty, Simone quickly fills it to the top. The warm summer air feels amazing on my skin, and I take a deep breath every time a breeze blows. I feel myself swaying in time to the rhythm of the ocean waves, and that's when I realize I'm buzzed. I'm such a lightweight.

We're both humming along to Janelle Monáe when Simone

suddenly smiles and says, “Hey, do that Paul Christopher impression.”

“No,” I say, laughing. “It’s *so* bad, and it does him no justice. I don’t sound nearly as dignified.”

“Oh, come on!” Now she’s laughing too. “Your British accent is so good.”

“*No.*” I shake my head, laughing even harder. “I did it that one time because I thought I could pull it off! I won’t embarrass myself again.”

“Do it, do it, do it,” she chants.

I easily give in to the peer pressure. “Okay, okay.” I stand up and push my thick curls away from my face, pulling them into a ponytail just like Paul Christopher’s. In my best British accent, I say, “The psychological-thriller genre continues to grow more and more each year. You’d better bet your fannies that *Deep Within* will be my greatest work yet. Better than anything you’ve seen thus far, because I am better than every other director there is, and you’d be a fool to think otherwise.”

Simone giggles, whispering “fannies” to herself. She pulls out her phone to record me. She hiccups and says, “Keep going.”

I start laughing again but force myself to stop, schooling my face into seriousness. I sit up straight and look down my nose at Simone. “Everyone is always going on and on about the awards I’ve won, but is it real talent on my end? Or have I

just hypnotized you all with my posh accent?” I say, giggling. “Oh, who am I kidding? Of course it’s talent! Tarantino who? Christopher Nolan? Please. Scorsese? Not bloody likely. I’m leagues better than the rest of these sorry chaps. Cheeky bum, bloody numpty, knickers, knickers, loo.”

As my performance devolves, we laugh so loudly I’m nervous the neighbors might hear us. All the tension and awkwardness from a few moments ago slide away, and what’s left is a feeling of extreme contentment.

“Okay, that’s enough,” I say, flopping back down in my chair. “Paul Christopher is one of my heroes, and I hope he never hears my terrible impression.”

Simone stops recording and puts her phone away. She wiggles her eyebrows at me. “I don’t know, that accent is pretty great. Maybe he’ll cast you in the next movie he films in the UK.”

I snort. “Yeah, right.”

I lean my head on Simone’s shoulder. After a moment, I say, “Thanks for being here for me. I’ll be right there with you when it’s your turn.”

She doesn’t say anything in response, just wraps her arm around me and gives me a sideways hug.

As I watch the sunset in my backyard, I figure today has probably been the best day of my life.

Article from TMZ.com—May 16, 2020, 11:45 A.M. PST

EVIE JONES, WOULD-BE HOLLYWOOD STARLET, HIRED THEN FIRED!!!

Just a month ago, it was announced that **Evie Jones**, granddaughter of the great Evelyn Conaway, would star in the next **Paul Christopher** thriller, *Deep Within*, alongside a slew of other A-list actors. But that excitement was short-lived to say the least. This morning, footage leaked of Evie mocking Paul himself!

In the video, she's visibly drunk, swaying side to side as she makes fun of Paul's accent in a surprisingly good impression.

Apparently, Paul was so offended by the video, he fired her on the spot! He's already hired another newbie, **Simone Davis**, as Evie's replacement. And get this, Simone went to the same high school as Evie. Apparently they were best friends. Can you say *awkward*? We doubt that friendship is gonna last . . .

A petition (most likely created by Paul Christopher superfans) went around online, begging directors and producers not to work with Evie. Our sources tell us that some big-deal people in Hollywood are already way ahead of them and Evie's name has made it onto a blacklist.

Evie has yet to make a statement, and she hasn't been seen out in public. Sounds like a certain grandmother of hers . . .

AUGUST

Chapter Two

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12

This has been the worst summer of my life.

I think it's safe to say that this has been the worst summer of my parents' lives too. Because here they are back at home, nowhere near Botswana, their film nowhere near finished. And it's all my fault.

They sit across from me at the dining room table, silently watching as I push scrambled eggs around my plate. My mom went through the trouble of cooking breakfast this morning. She clears her throat, and I glance up, but she doesn't say anything. I look at my dad and wonder if I'm the reason he has new gray hairs sprouting in his low-cut afro. He takes a sip of his orange juice and steepled his fingers, like he's thinking hard about a way to start conversation. But he doesn't say anything either. Instead, they both look at me with matching

frowns—a mixture of disappointment and confusion. This is how it's been between us all summer.

“Kerri will be here soon,” I say, breaking the silence.

My mom nods, rubbing her eyes. Her usual light-brown skin is a few shades darker from all the time she's spent in Botswana. “Are you all packed?” she asks. I nod. “Well, you should finish your food before Kerri gets here.”

I look down at my eggs, which have gone cold. It's weird to try to eat food with actual protein or vitamins. For weeks I've survived on nothing but Cheetos and Sour Patch Kids as I lay in bed, bingeing cartoon shows from my childhood. *Total Drama Island* was the only thing that could keep my mind off the disaster that is my life. “I'm not that hungry.”

Dad gets up and starts stacking plates. “Do you need help bringing down your luggage?”

“No, I've got it.” I take this as an out to excuse myself from the table. “I'll be back down in a few minutes.”

My parents share a look and only nod in response.

They came back from Botswana the day after the video leaked. All it took was my life blowing up for them to finally come home. First, there was a lot of yelling. *What were you thinking, sneaking into our bar and drinking? Didn't we teach you better than that?*

After the anger, there was embarrassment. Not that they'd say so. But I could tell. Usually, when my parents get back from a documentary trip, our house is bustling with their friends

who haven't seen them in so long. This summer, the house has been a dead zone. It's just been me wandering to the bathroom at 2:00 A.M. while my parents act like I killed their real daughter along with my career.

Now they're just coming to terms with the fact that I'm not as exemplary as they thought I was. My mom wanted to send me to rehab. She thought I'd been sneaking into their bar behind their backs for months. Gigi is the one who persuaded her not to go through with it.

Gigi, who I haven't spoken to since the night before the video leaked.

She's called, but I've been too ashamed to speak to her. I deleted all of her voice mails except for the last one from a few weeks ago. "I know what this is like, Evie Marie, I do," she says. "If there was anything I could do to help you through this, baby, you know I would. I *hope* you know I would." She heaves a sigh, and there's a long silence before she hangs up. I've listened to it so many times that I have it memorized.

We communicate through my mom, mostly. Meaning my mom tells Gigi that I'm still alive, and Gigi tells my mom that she loves me and hopes to see me soon.

Well, I'm going to see her now, and she won't like why I'm coming.

On my way to my room, I pass the guest room, where Simone used to sleep. It was once filled with her things, and now it's empty, save for the neatly made bed and unused dresser.

The morning after we recorded the video, I woke up with a killer headache. I shuffled down to Simone's room, and she was in the middle of packing her things.

"Just taking my winter and spring clothes home," she said when I asked what she was doing. She turned around and flashed a bright smile. "I'll come back with my summer things tomorrow."

I said okay and even helped her finish packing. I should have paid attention to how she barely spoke to me. How she couldn't get out of my house fast enough.

Later that morning, when the video leaked, my phone was buzzing like crazy with alerts. Texts from classmates (who never talked to me otherwise) and Instagram DMs and tags. I rewatched the video a dozen times in complete horror. I kept trying to get ahold of Simone, because I was convinced that there was some mistake. Did someone hack into her phone? Did she accidentally send it to someone else and then they leaked it? She couldn't have done this on purpose. But I couldn't get in touch with her. She'd blocked my number and blocked me on social media.

Paul Christopher's fans flocked to my comments and said I was ungrateful and spoiled. How could I make fun of him after what he'd done for my career? They called me names that I don't even want to repeat. All that love turned so easily to hate. It's a little baffling when I think about it now.

I grab my suitcases out of my room as the doorbell rings

downstairs. And then there's the sound of Kerri's bright and firm voice.

"Good morning, Mr. Jones," she says to my dad.

I hustle to carry my luggage down the steps, eager to see her.

She walks into the living room, dressed in an all-black suit and pointy black pumps. She gives me a reassuring smile. "There's our girl," she says, sitting down on the couch. I quickly plop right beside her. I just saw her last week, but I've also been alone with my distant parents for days on end. Kerri is like a breath of fresh air.

"How are you?" she asks, quiet enough that only I can hear, as my parents sit down on the love seat across from us.

I shrug. "The same." Meaning *terrible*.

Her smile is a mix of softness and sympathy. "Don't worry. It's going to change soon. That's why we're doing this. It's going to work out." She turns to face my parents. "Do either of you have questions before I take Evie to the airport?"

Mom's full lips are set in a thin line. "Are you sure you don't want us to come with you now?" she asks me.

"I'll be fine, Mom," I insist. "I want to spend some time with Gigi, just the two of us."

She doesn't look comfortable with this, but she doesn't push it either. She's never tried to put herself between Gigi and me.

I'm flying to New York tonight for two reasons. The first

is that the FCC committee has asked me to present Gigi with her lifetime achievement award during Sunday's ceremony. After everything that's happened, I have no idea why they want me to be there. Before, the thought of getting up in front of all those people would have thrilled me, but now I'm just terrified.

The second reason is because I have to tell Gigi about a deal I've made, one that I hope will save my career. One that I hope won't make her hate me. This is my second chance, and my stomach churns at the thought of everything slipping through my fingers again.

"I know it's been a hard couple of months, but things are looking up for us," Kerri says confidently. "What happened in May was unfortunate, but we have to keep going, full speed ahead." She turns to my parents. "We'll fly into New York on Sunday before the ceremony like we planned." She looks at me. "You just worry about talking to your grandmother."

My mom's pinched expression still hasn't eased. My dad glances at his watch. "Well, I guess you'd better get going."

I stand and cross the room to hug them. Stiffly, my mom wraps her arms around me. The hug lasts a millisecond. Dad follows up with a similar hug, but he includes a shoulder pat.

"Be careful," he says sternly.

"Call us as soon as you get to Gigi's," Mom says. "And we'll see you on Sunday."

"I will," I promise.

Kerri and I go outside, where a car is waiting to take us to the airport. Once we're in the back seat, she reaches into her huge purse and hands me a plain black baseball cap and black cat-eye sunglasses. Last, she hands me a wig cap and a black wig. It's a French bob with bangs.

"It's a lace front, like we talked about," she says. "Human hair, so it looks real."

"Thanks," I mumble.

Last month, between cartoon episodes, I cut off all my hair. I'm not even sure why. I just know that one day, I was staring at myself in the bathroom mirror, thinking that I didn't recognize the person staring back at me. The next thing I knew, I was holding scissors and the bathroom tiles were covered with curls. I had shorn my hair so close to my head it gave not recognizing myself a whole new meaning. Then, naturally, I screamed. When my mom ran into the bathroom, she screamed too.

My Beautiful You campaign was officially out the window, right along with my career.

I haven't really been out in public since the video leaked. I went to In-N-Out once, but the paparazzi chased me down and I almost crashed my car. We decided for this New York trip, it would be best if I go incognito. I don't want anyone to know where I am or what I'm doing until the FCCs. It's possible that people won't recognize me without the wig

anyway, since my hair is so short, but it's better to be safe than sorry.

"It's cute," I say, examining the wig. I just wish I were wearing it for a different reason.

"Of course it's cute," Kerri says. "I wouldn't have you out here looking a mess. You know me better than that."

She winks and smiles. To be honest, I don't understand Kerri's unending optimism or why she hasn't just quit yet. She's anchored herself to a sinking ship, and for some reason, she's decided not to abandon me.

The morning that the video leaked, Kerri practically flew to my house to do damage control, but by that point it was already too late. Someone from Paul Christopher's team called and dropped the news that I was fired. Paul didn't want to work with someone who had so little respect for him. I tried to explain that it was just a joke. I respected Paul more than anyone. But it didn't matter. The video was already out, and the media was running with it.

Kerri camped out at my house and decided that the best thing would be to issue a statement with a public apology. She wanted to get the right terminology, to make sure that my words couldn't be misconstrued. She wanted to wait at least a day in case things blew over. But Kerri wasn't the one getting all of the hateful messages. *I* was. While she was busy thinking of the best way to release a statement, I locked myself in my

room and recorded an apology video. Tearfully, I looked into the front-facing camera and told everyone how sorry I was.

“I have deep respect for Paul Christopher,” I said. “It was just a joke. Please, you have to understand.”

But the video just made things worse. The next thing I knew, people were re-creating it and mocking me. It was like revenge for mocking Paul Christopher. Someone even turned my apology video into a GIF, and it exploded all over Twitter. The jokes went on and on, and I read every single one.

I deleted all of my social media after that. We decided the best course of action would be no more public statements. I'd already apologized to Paul and his team, and I'd put out a video, even if it was a bad idea. I just needed to lie low for a few weeks until things died down. It soon became very clear that no one else in Hollywood would want to work with me. We couldn't get any meetings, and no one would send Kerri scripts for me to read. The endorsement deals I had fell through. It was a nightmare.

Now it seems like we might be coming out on the other side, but I won't know if that's true until I talk to Gigi.

Kerri helps me put on the wig cap and wig. I run my fingers through the wig until the hair falls smooth and straight, and I slide on the sunglasses and baseball cap. The cap does not go with the black-and-white Peter Pan-collar dress that I'm wearing, but I can't bring myself to care.

“Gigi used to do this,” I suddenly say, looking at my reflection in my front-facing camera.

Kerri tilts her head. “Used to do what?”

“She would wear disguises when we went out together because she didn’t want to be recognized. One time, when she was still living in LA, she took me to the drive-in movie theater, and she wore this long platinum wig and a huge beach hat. I mean, in all honesty, it made people look at her even more. But they never would have guessed that she was Evelyn Conaway behind the disguise.”

I laugh a little to myself at the memory. It’s ironic, really. I’ve always wanted to be more like Gigi, and this is the way in which I’m like her.

“She sounds wonderful.” Kerri’s smile is sad. “I can’t wait to meet her.”

The rest of the ride to LAX is quiet. When Kerri and I get out of the car, the paparazzi waiting outside glance at us but look away, uninterested.

“That’s good,” Kerri mumbles. “They have no idea who you are.”

She walks with me to security and stops because she can’t go any farther. I turn to her to say goodbye, and I’m surprised when she reaches out and hugs me. Kerri, who finds physical contact to be highly unprofessional. Her hug is so warm and tight, unlike the hugs I received from my parents.

“You’ve got this,” she whispers fiercely. She pulls away and stares me dead in the eyes. “Look at me. You’ve got this.”

I start sniffing and wipe my face as tears run down my cheeks.

“Thanks, Kerri.” I take a deep breath and force myself to stop crying. She gives my shoulder a tight squeeze and waits to leave until I pass through security. I turn around and wave at her. She smiles and gives a thumbs-up.

I wish I could be as positive as her. But I *don't* have this. I have nothing. No fans. No career. No friends. My *best friend* was the one who did this to me. Looking back, maybe I should have seen it coming. The signs were all there. I was just willfully oblivious.

That might be the worst part about all of this. That, or the news I’m bringing to Gigi’s doorstep. I just hope she understands. My entire career is on the line.

I’ve survived the world hating me, but I couldn’t take it if Gigi hated me too.