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*245 days to go . . .***Leechwood Lodge Asylum****7:07 am**

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The sound of screaming woke me up with a violent jolt. My hazy nightmare with the white toy dog and the crying baby had blended in with the very real, desperate cries of the people in this place. My dazed confusion lasted only a second before I accepted the equally horrible reality: that I'd been kidnapped and locked up in Leechwood Lodge, a psychiatric institution, inhabited by homicidal maniacs, the mentally insane—and now me.

Just days ago I was hiding out in the quiet little boathouse on the water, slowly making progress. I was actually getting somewhere. But now I was in this high-security psych ward, under a false identity, and everything was lost.

7:10 am

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There was no point in pounding on the door or joining in with the screaming out for help—the orderlies had made that very clear.

I flopped back on the yellowing pillow. Leechwood was the perfect name for this place: it seemed to suck the life out of you. My mood was as heavy as lead as I thought about what had happened to me in the last few days.

Vulkan Sligo had stolen my dad's drawings and the copy of the Ormond Riddle—thanks to the treacherous Winter Frey, who must have tipped him off about my Greenaway Park boat-house hideout. Or had she? I'd been so angry with her earlier, but I was no longer sure why. She had seemed pretty determined to protect me from the black Subaru when it showed up at Memorial Park, to stop whoever was in it from coming for me. She put herself on the line to distract them and get them off my trail . . . but then someone trashed the boathouse and grabbed me anyway.

A sick taste filled my mouth as I thought of all the things I'd worked so hard to discover and decipher that were now gone. The past four months of hell had all been for nothing! Everything I'd uncovered, while having to live on the streets and be constantly on the run, had been

served on a silver platter to Vulkan Sligo or Oriana de la Force, or whoever was responsible for trapping me in this place. Dad's drawings and the Ormond Riddle were gone. I had done all that work only to help those thieves!

Locked in here I was useless—I couldn't do anything about it. I rolled over and buried my face in the pillow. Everything hurt. My neck ached from the tranquilliser dart, which seemed to have also done something to flare up the dull pain in my right shoulder again. At least I wasn't in the straitjacket anymore—one of the orderlies removed it during the night when I had to go to the bathroom, warning me that if I wasn't on my best behaviour, it would go right back on again.

I didn't want to be here—I didn't want to be who I was—it was all too hard. I wished I could just go home and be with Mum and Gabbi, so we could learn to be a family again. We needed a chance to get used to the idea of Dad being gone. Why did it have to be like this?

The screams were suddenly taken over by an ominous silence. I sat up, my feet hanging down, skimming the cold floor. I was miserable and it wasn't just being locked up in this place that was doing it. I'd had a fight with Boges, my best friend, and I couldn't blame him if he just

gave up on me. I had no idea about Winter. I felt I didn't have a friend in the world. Mum thought I was nuts and Uncle Rafe was too caught up worrying about the estate and the practical side of things. The only glimmer of hope right now was Gabbi. I knew she'd be behind me. Instinctively, my fingers went to twist the Celtic ring she'd given me, but of course it was no longer there. I'd slipped it on her finger at the hospital. The thought of her eyelids flickering and her gradual recovery was the only good thing that had come out of the last four months.

And now this.

How the hell was I going to get out?

7:17 am

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The screaming started up again, closer than before.

"I'll kill him!" a man's voice shrieked. "He's an impostor! A replacement! I'll kill him! Where is he? Where is the real Dr Snudgeglasser?"

Footsteps pounded down the corridor. Heavy doors opened and closed with urgency. I had the sense that the staff at the asylum were racing around the place trying to control someone.

The voice of whoever wanted to kill Dr Snudgeglasser was muffled, then fell silent once more.

Dr Snudgeglasser's name was on my chart as being my psychiatrist. Who was he? I wondered, and what was all that about his replacement? And what kind of madman was it out there who wanted to kill him?

In the stillness that followed the outburst, a scratch at the window made me turn around. A tiny, brown bird was sitting on the window sill and, as I watched, it flew up into the eaves and disappeared from view. Immediately, I thought of Winter's small bird tattoo on her wrist, and the "Little Bird" inscription on the back of her locket. Frustration rose up my spine. I'd been so close to finally making some sense out of everything and now I was a prisoner in this place, with no prospect of escape. I was trapped. Hopeless. Useless.

7:20 am

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I turned my attention to the notes on the chart at the bottom of my bed. According to these, I was extremely dangerous. I didn't know what "Level 5 Restraints" were, but I didn't like the sound of them.

An overwhelming feeling of claustrophobia came over me and I ran to the door. Shivering in the hospital pyjamas, I grabbed the handle and twisted it with both hands—but of course it was

locked and wouldn't budge. I shuffled away to the other side of the dingy, high-ceilinged room, near the window, and kicked the wall in frustration.

I stared back at the door. Anger surged through my body and I took a running jump at it, throwing my body against it. I hit it hard and fell back onto the floor like a rag doll. After a few seconds I crawled back up to my feet and started banging.

But no one came. Just like that orderly had said: you can scream all you like—nobody cares. After I'd exhausted myself, I stopped. Strait-jacket, I remembered.

7:26 am

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Tired and cold, I pulled the blanket off the bed and wrapped it around me. I needed to clear my head and shake off the building anger. This sort of mindless fury was not helpful. I remembered Repro's warning about irrational people making fatal errors. I thought of him in his secret lair behind the filing cabinets—he'd made a secure little home for himself and I envied him.

I shuffled to the window once more and peered up through the glass beyond the bars. That's when I noticed a tiny mud nest attached to the eaves. I could just make out the shapes of baby birds with their beaks wide open as the

mother bird arrived and perched on the edge of the nest.

Crazy as it sounds, I even resented those little birds. They had a home—they were safe.

I looked down into the dim garden, deserted now at this early hour, desolate and forbidding in the grey light. Standing by the window, I felt the full force of my loss. I'd even been deprived of stuff like my phone, my clothes, the guardian angel pin that Repro had given me. I didn't have the little Celtic ring anymore, but at least that was with Gab.

On top of all that, my identity had been stripped from me. The chart said I was supposed to be 'Ben Galloway.'

The muffled chirping of the little birds took my attention again. Diamond-shaped beaks greedily gaped wide, as each one tried to push the others away in an effort to get to their mother's food first.

The sight of the littlest one barging in from the back of the nest, shoving past his much bigger brothers suddenly changed my mood and I switched my way of thinking. He was the smallest, but his determination took him to the front.

Right now I didn't have a plan—I didn't have a clue how I was going to get out—but I owed it to

my family not to crash into despair. I was going to fight. I sure wasn't going to make it easy for my enemies by giving up. From now on, I promised myself, I'd be always on the lookout for a gap in security.

I threw myself back on the bed. The lump on the back of my shoulder seemed to be getting bigger and was quite painful. But I had other things to worry about.

Think, Cal, *think*.

I desperately needed a plan.

**8:23 am**

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I jumped at the sound of the door being opened. Someone in hospital greens shoved a tray through the door.

I went over to inspect breakfast—a blob of yellow and white that was supposed to be scrambled eggs, two leathery slices of toast and a cup of something like coffee. It all looked worse than army rations, but it was food, and I was starving. I grabbed the plastic spoon and tucked in.

**9:03 am**

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The door to my room flew open and Musclehead, the big psych nurse—shaven head, a silver-lined hole in his earlobe—strode into my room.

“OK, son,” he said, “put your clothes on. Dr Snudgeglasser will see you now.”

The nurse threw my clothes at me and waited while I pulled them on.

It felt really good to be wearing my own clothes again, and I was relieved they hadn't thrown them in an incinerator. Putting on my jeans, T-shirt, hoodie and sneakers—even without the shoe laces—made me feel more human, more myself.

So, I thought, I'm going to find out who Dr Snudgeglasser is. Maybe this doctor would be able to help me—if I could just convince him that I wasn't Ben Galloway.

**9:07 am**

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Musclehead kept a firm grip on my arm while he led me downstairs and along a corridor of doors that were the same as the one on my room—heavy and bolted. All the time my eyes were scanning, looking for a chance to escape. At the end of the corridor were glass double doors, with people coming in and out. I knew if I got a chance I'd bust through those doors and be on my way to freedom.

**9:10 am**

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We stopped in front of a door that stood out from

the others. It was wooden and unnumbered, and didn't have the thick you're-never-getting-out-of-here bolt locking it. Musclehead knocked and then pushed me through, closing the door once more behind me.

I looked around. I was in a cosy, sun-filled office with cream-coloured walls, tall and bulging bookshelves and a big desk near a wide window. Framed qualifications hung in the spaces that were not covered by shelving.

I noticed that there were papers on the desk weighed down by a small brass moulding of a brain.

On my side of the desk was a small, straight-backed chair, while behind it, and turned away from me, on an elaborate leather armchair, was a broad-shouldered figure.

"Hello?" I said.

The figure swung round—a man in a tweed sports jacket, with bushy eyebrows, black-rimmed spectacles and a stern expression in his dark eyes.

So this was the doctor that one of the other patients had been threatening this morning. I stood in front of him, feeling as if I'd been called to the principal's office.

"I'm Dr Snudgeglasser," he said. "Please sit down."

He gestured to the chair in front of me, before picking up the brain paperweight and leaning back in his armchair. I sat down and checked out the row of funny little spiky cactus plants on his desk.

There was a silence until Dr Snudgeglasser put down the brain he'd been toying with and looked over the tops of his glasses at me.

"You know why we're here."

"Actually, I don't," I said.

He picked the brain up once more and rolled it around in his hand.

"I've been kidnapped," I said. "Someone stuck a tranquillising dart in my neck and the next thing I know I'm here. Locked in a cell."

Dr Snudgeglasser wrote something down before looking up again. "The patient's quarters are certainly not cells," he said. "That's a very dramatic narrative, Benjamin."

*Benjamin.* This stranger's name made me feel really uneasy, but I ignored it. "Dramatic or not, it's what happened."

"I see," he said, in a way that sounded like he didn't see at all.

I watched him twist the brain in his fingers. I gripped the arms of the chair that I sat on, trying to stay cool. It didn't seem like there was any hope of escaping Dr Snudgeglasser's

room. His window wasn't covered by bars, but it was sealed the whole way around. He had a button on his desk, too, which I'm sure meant he could call for help or assistance when faced with a particularly difficult patient.

Dr Snudgeglasser sighed.

"Ben," he started.

"My name is not Ben."

He ignored my interruption.

"Ben, I'm a psychiatrist. You have already been assessed. I have all your details, and I'm here to help you. We both need to be honest with each other. I can't do my job, and *help* you, unless you admit to me who you really are. Mr Sligo wants you to be helped, but I can't work with someone in denial."

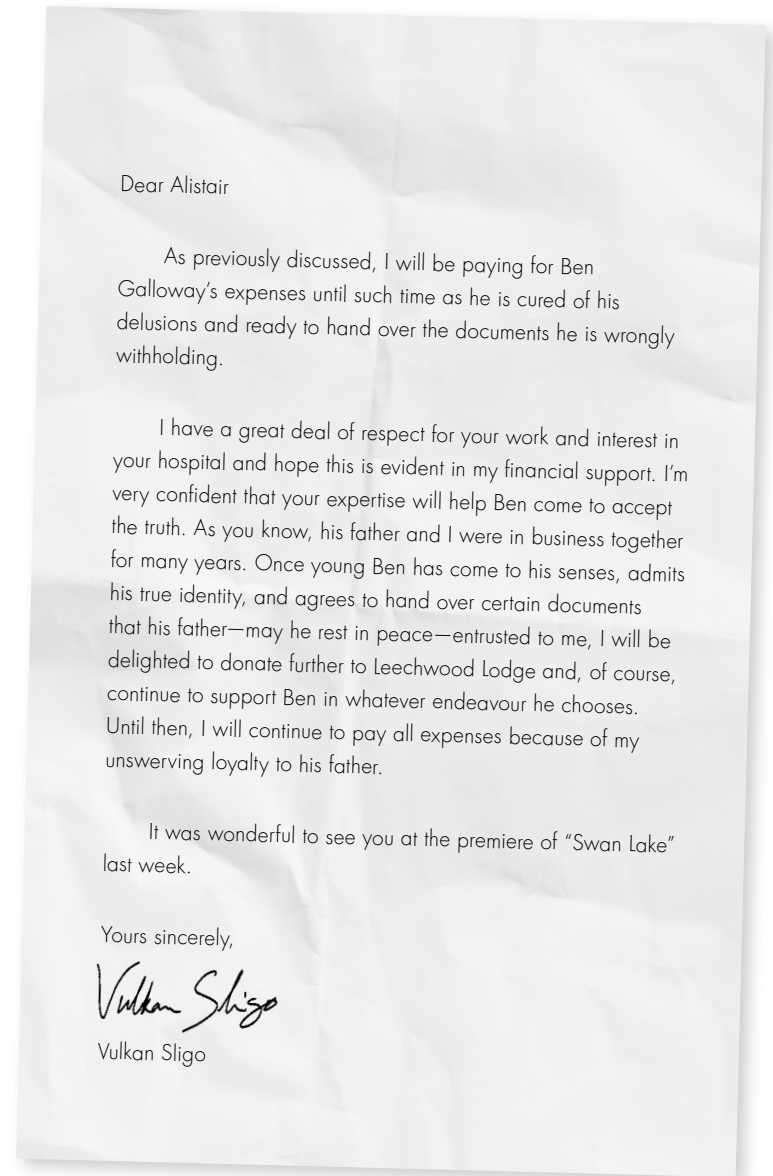
*Sligo*. I gritted my teeth, trying to hide my fury.

"I need to relate to the real *you*," Snudgeglasser continued, "otherwise I'm just joining you in your delusion. Do you understand?"

I didn't, but I thought it better not to say so.

"Maybe you should read Mr Sligo's letter. It was given to me when you were admitted here two days ago. It might help you come to terms with your position."

The doctor tilted his head like he was trying to read me. He handed over the letter.



Dear Alistair

As previously discussed, I will be paying for Ben Galloway's expenses until such time as he is cured of his delusions and ready to hand over the documents he is wrongly withholding.

I have a great deal of respect for your work and interest in your hospital and hope this is evident in my financial support. I'm very confident that your expertise will help Ben come to accept the truth. As you know, his father and I were in business together for many years. Once young Ben has come to his senses, admits his true identity, and agrees to hand over certain documents that his father—may he rest in peace—entrusted to me, I will be delighted to donate further to Leechwood Lodge and, of course, continue to support Ben in whatever endeavour he chooses. Until then, I will continue to pay all expenses because of my unswerving loyalty to his father.

It was wonderful to see you at the premiere of "Swan Lake" last week.

Yours sincerely,

*Vulkan Sligo*

Vulkan Sligo