Everything depended on the moment when Ruby's project turned on to impress the judges. But that moment never came. There was so much on the line: endless weeks of hard work, her pride, and most importantly to Ruby, a scholarship. All of it crumbled away because of a mistake of another girl, who won even though she wasn't supposed to.

Ruby was confident that she would win, heck, she *knew* that she was going to win. Everyone else seemed to think so too. Ruby's project was on a completely different level. So, when she stood on that stage and when her project failed to work, she wasn't the only one who was confused. She tried to fix it, but *it was too late.*

Ruby wasn't supposed to find out, either. It happened by pure coincidence; after failing to win and deciding to hide her tears in the confines of a washroom stall, she overheard it. "I don't deserve this!" A voice Ruby recognized as belonging to her academic rival, Melody, yelled.

"Melody, dear, of course you do." An older, female voice replied to Melody calmly, though there was a hint of impatience to her voice. "How could you say that, mother, when you sabotaged Ruby's project? Everyone knew she was going to win!" Melody retorted. Ruby's heart dropped.

"How could she ever win a competition you were in? My perfect daughter, you will always be the winner. *Always.*" Melody's mother spat out the last part aggressively, as if to emphasize it as a fact. "No… this isn't fair! If you're not going to tell the judges, I will." As Melody moved to exit the washroom, her mother grabbed her wrist, hissing, "It's too late now. You should be *grateful*, if not for me, you never would have won. I would

have *killed* to be in your position, to be number one. Now, we're going home, be prepared to study."

Ruby had believed that Melody would always play by the rules, but perhaps she trusted in her character a tad too much. Ruby hated Melody for not stopping her mother when she knew of her plans, but she witnessed firsthand how Melody was treated by her mother, and that made it difficult for Ruby to hate her as much as she wanted to.

That day, Ruby went home without the trophy she had expected to bring home. Instead, she lugged her broken beyond repair project into her house, and remembering how much work she had put into it just for it to be destroyed, she sobbed. She thought of the unfairness of it all, and since she couldn't hate her, she would never forgive Melody.

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A month had passed. As the weekend came, Ruby decided that she would visit the library in search of a history book that would help her with studying for the history test she knew she would be having the next week. Luckily, the library was close to her home, so it would only be a quick walk.

Before leaving, Ruby made sure to put on a coat. It was beginning to get chilly. She admired the warm colours of red, orange, yellow, and brown leaves scattered across the ground and on the trees as she walked. She said hello to the elderly lady who lived next door and was also on a walk. She watched as the children played in the fallen leaves, remembering when she had once done so as well.

Before she knew it, Ruby had arrived at the library. She quickly started searching for her book, and found it in almost no time. As she went to check out her book, she saw Maisie, Melody's twin sister, standing at a window. With the sunlight illuminating her coffee-coloured locks and catching Ruby's attention, Ruby noticed yet again how Maisie was a spitting image of Melody.

Maisie must have felt Ruby's stare, because she turned around, said, "Hello Ruby," trying to sound cheerful, with the same fake smile as always that she directed at almost everyone, the teachers, their classmates. It was something that Melody had always done as well. It seemed that Ruby was the only one who noticed how much they forced themselves to form and maintain those perfect smiles. This time though, Ruby noticed something else beneath that smile. She thought she saw a flash of pain, and could tell how much difficulty Maisie was having keeping the corners of her lips up.

Without thinking, Ruby blurted out, "Are… Are you okay?" There were no hidden intentions behind her words, only genuine concern. She could tell Maisie wasn't feeling well. After all, she had spent so much time watching Melody, who was so similar to Maisie. Maybe it was because Ruby was the first or *only* person who cared enough to ask Maisie such a question that she broke down. Her perfectly polished smile slipped. Tears began falling from her eyes. "My sister… she…"

Ruby immediately sat her down at a table, taking the seat beside her. She grabbed tissues from her bag and handed them to Maisie. She was ready to listen, ready to be there for her. Right now, they weren't rivals. "They… they found her corpse on Friday. She was dead for a month before they found her… they say she was murdered. We thought she just ran away. My mother, being as overprotective as she

was, had a tracker on her phone, and it said she was near our grandparents' house. And… though they have some clues, they still haven't found out who did it. I came to this library because it's close to our grandparents' house, I wanted to find clues." Ruby was frozen with horror; a tissue fell from her hand and slowly drifted to the ground. Melody had been absent from school for almost a month, which Ruby without a doubt had noticed.

Ruby couldn't even imagine how Maisie felt, and as she heard her sobs, she decided to offer her more than just an "I'm sorry." She wrapped her arms around Maisie, who let her. "I'm scared," Maisie whispered, her voice trembling. Ruby squeezed her tighter and said, "You're going to be okay." Though, even she doubted her own words.

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It was a gloomy Monday; fog covered the streets and clouds drifted across the grey sky. Ruby could see her breath as she walked to school. She took the city bus to school, but even then, she still had to walk the distances between stops and her destinations. Ruby always made sure to be early or on time. If she couldn't be on time, she would rather be early. Never late.

That day, Ruby arrived just on time. Though she left home early, the traffic caused her to arrive later than she expected. At least she wasn't late. Ruby slid into her seat, preparing everything she would need for her first class of the morning, math. She took out the homework she had completed over the weekend, her notebook, pencil and eraser. Looking up, she was surprised to see that Maisie had chosen to attend school despite what had happened.

Even though it was unlikely for people to have many classes together, Ruby and Maisie had all the same classes with the exception of one. During the fourth period, their history class, Maisie was tasked with handing out the tests. As Maisie placed down Ruby's test and walked away, Ruby noticed a folded piece of paper peeking out underneath her test. She stuffed it into her pocket.

Ruby handed her test in, with Maisie handing hers in right after. Maisie was smart, but was always compared to her genius sister. Sitting back down at her desk, Ruby took the paper from her pocket and unfolded it, revealing a note written with pen in Maisie's neat handwriting.

Ruby, meet me in the school library when school ends today. I have something to tell you. – Maisie

Ruby folded the note again and put it back into her pocket, wondering what Maisie could have to say to her.

<p align="center">***</p>

Ruby stepped into the library and looked around before she spotted Maisie waiting for her. Seeming to be lost in her thoughts, Maisie did not notice when Ruby walked up to her. It was when Ruby asked, "Maisie? Why did you call me here?" that Maisie snapped back to reality. "O-Oh yes! I'd like your help with something." Maisie unzipped her bag and pulled out a notebook, placing it on the table in front of Ruby. "These are notes I made after digging around about my sister's murder. Please, read it."

Ruby opened the notebook, and was not surprised to see that its contents were organized, colour-coded, and overall very easy to read. It included a list of suspects,

information and details on the murder, possible scenarios, and missing information that Maisie would need to gather. Ruby read through it quickly; Maisie hadn't used all of its pages. "Your mother… why is she a suspect?" Ruby hesitated before asking the question. She hoped she wasn't asking a question that was too sensitive.

However, Maisie answered calmly. "Our mom always compared Melody—my sister—to others. She compared her to herself, to other kids her age who did better, asking her why she wasn't better. She pushed Melody, she pushed her *so hard,* to be the best. And Melody was amazing. But I think it was too much for her. Sometimes I was scared that she would end her suffering herself. I never would have thought her death would be at the hands of another. She was the kindest person I knew."

Maisie took a breath "I… I want to show you something. It's my sister's room. Everything's been left untouched. We can go and maybe find some clues or evidence. Oh, and don't worry. The only people there will be my aunt, who's looking after my mom in her room. She's been in there for days. After all… she's lost her perfect daughter." The last part was said somewhat bitterly, as even Ruby knew that Melody was always the one who received the most attention.

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As the door creaked open, Ruby took a quick look at the room. As Maisie had said, the room *looked* like it was in use, a cluttered desk with papers all over and stacked books, awards, trophies, plaques on display, but it had an eerie atmosphere to it.

Maisie stepped into the room, with Ruby following after her. "You can look around. It's okay if you touch stuff too, just put them back when you're done." Maisie had said with her back to Ruby, looking through her sister's desk. Ruby decided to take a look at the bookshelf, which was very packed with books. At the bottom of the shelf, she saw a plastic bin, which she carefully took out. Opening the lid, she saw that inside were meticulously organized stacks of cassette tapes.

Maisie, seeming to have found nothing helpful, had turned around to see what Ruby was doing. "Melody always loved music. She liked listening to and making music. And she really took a liking to cassettes, collecting pre-recorded tapes and recording her own. You can listen to some if you'd like."

Ruby looked through the bin, before saying, "I don't see a cassette player in here." Confused, Maisie came closer and moved some tapes aside. "That's strange, she would have put it in that exact corner in this bin when she wasn't using it. I know because she told me herself, in case I ever wanted to use it."

Ruby pondered for a moment, then she said, "Where did she usually bring it? Maybe if you look there, you might find it." Suddenly, Maisie stood up and began pacing around the room. "That cassette player was really special to her. It may have even been her most prized possession, she worked so hard to save up for it. She never brought it outside the house…" A pause. "Follow me," Maisie walked out of the room, with Ruby behind her.

They spent about an hour thoroughly inspecting each room. Then, they only had one room left. The guest room. The room which Maisie's aunt was staying in. "Are you

sure it's okay for us to go in without asking?" Ruby was sceptical about intruding into another person's room, especially without their consent. Maisie replied with a response that was quite out of character, "It's okay, she won't know." Then, she opened the door, and stepped in. Ruby, with not much of a choice, followed Maisie in.

The room didn't have much, besides a plain bed with a folded comforter, a nightstand with a lamp, a closet, and a large plant beside the door. A thick beam of sunlight from the window streamed onto the bed. Maisie went straight to the nightstand, which on the surface had only her aunt's personal belongings which were a wallet and a purse. Maisie pulled open the drawers, which were revealed to be empty.

Ruby, though she looked uncomfortable doing so, carefully looked through the closet. Maisie paced the room, deep in thought. She thought she heard Ruby muttering something like, "You both have similar habits," but she pushed that thought aside. Then, she paused. There was one spot she hadn't checked. The plant next to the door.

She marched up to it, peered in, and sure enough, she recognized her sister's beloved cassette player hidden out of sight, under the leaves of the plant. "Ruby! I found it!" Maisie was elated. After an hour of searching, they had found it. Ruby stopped what she was doing, and sighed, "That's great. I had thought we wouldn't be able to find it."

Maisie kept looking at the cassette player. "Wait," she said suddenly, "there's a tape in here!" Ruby looked over at the cassette player, noticing that there *was* a tape inside. "If you want to listen to it, let's get out of here first. Your aunt's not supposed to know we were here, right?" After agreeing, Maisie led Ruby back to Melody's room to listen to the tape.

They sat on the carpeted ground, and Maisie, knowing how a cassette player works, quickly got it working. They both flinched when a voice, coming from the cassette player, yelled, "I told you I was sorry! I never, ever, wanted that to happen, and you know that!" Maisie tensed, having recognized her sister's voice.

Then, another voice came, vaguely familiar, but Maisie couldn't put a finger to it. "No number of apologies can make up for what you've done, do you even *know* what you've taken away from me?!" Then, they heard a scream, Melody's scream, followed by, "Please don't do this…" However, Melody's plea was ignored, confirmed by the ripping sound of a knife being plunged into her flesh. "I'm sorry… I always wanted to be friends with you… Ruby…" The tape cut off.