

## The Promise of the Red Blankets

Amélie sat on her bed, shaking uncontrollably as the chilly air hit her bare skin. The atmosphere felt thick with tension as she sat there in shock. Amélie's stepfather Michael lay sprawled out on the couch drunk. Her pyjamas were ripped and scattered on the floor; the slight taste of alcohol mixed with tears left a bitter taste in her mouth. Her ankles and wrists were stinging as large bruises burned into her skin. Amélie's head felt like a whirlwind of emotions, distress, disbelief, *shame*. The wet blood painted all over her thighs and bedsheets felt cold, a stark reminder of the events that had unfolded. The blood seeped into the bedsheets, staining the pure sheets and turning them into a canvas of her despair.

Amélie hugged her knees tightly to her chest, her cold legs pressing against her bare chest sent shivers through her body as haunting whispers of her stepfather rang through her head. She squeezed her eyes shut, hoping to envision a world beyond these walls, one with sunlight and warmth, away from all this darkness.



The sound of the blaring alarm on Amélie's phone rang through her room as she slowly stirred, her body still sore. She dragged herself into the bathroom and got ready for school. Her back ached as she got ready, putting on her uniform and leaving quietly. As she walked down the hallway, Amélie's mother, Monica, came out of her bedroom, giving her a nasty look. Her hair a mess, and her clothes stained with coffee, she reeked of alcohol.

“You. You nasty bitch, you thought I wouldn’t see your period-stained bedsheets!” She blurted out her speech slurred as she threw a half empty bottle of cheap gin, the liquid spattered over Amalie’s uniform.

“Ugh I’ll clean them up when I get back.” Amélie replied. Her voice laced with distain, yet it held a slight tremble. She quickly went downstairs and out the front door, her mom yelling in the back.

“Get back here! Get back here and clean up my sheets!”

The sun slowly began to rise as Amélie sat in class, her teacher had not arrived yet, but the class was always left unlocked. She held her head in her hands as she thought about what Micheal had done to her. She tried to keep herself together as her teacher will arrive any time. As each minute passed, dread filled her as the thought of going back to that house haunted her. She felt safer in her empty English classroom rather than her own house, but she knew she can’t stay there forever, the lack of sleep soon caught up to her as she dozed off.

The sound of the door opening followed by quiet footsteps woke Amélie up, she looked up to see her English teacher Mr. Anders standing at his desk putting his things away.

“Morning Amélie.”



The class was quiet as Mr. Anders went on about Shakespeare, Amélie stared at the papers in front of her, her eyes holding a vacant stare. Time slowly passed, the class was working on their seat work when Mr. Anders suddenly approached Amélie, a worried look on his face.

“Amélie? Could I see you outside for a bit?” He gave her a small smile, she nodded and stood up, following him outside. He closed the door behind him and looked down at Amélie, crossing his arms.

“Amélie, is everything okay? You seem distracted during class. If something’s bothering you, you can tell me you know?”

“Nothing’s wrong sir. I’m tired that’s all...”

He paused for a bit, a look of concern forming on his face as his eyes trailed her expression and body language.

“What happened to your neck?”

“What?”

“That mark, it looks like a bruise- “

“I burnt myself with a straightener.”

“Amélie? That doesn’t look like a burn. Is something going on at home? I’m your teacher, you can tell me- “

“It’s nothing! Just leave me alone.” Tears pricked the corners of her eyes.

“Amélie, what’s going on?”

“Nothing I’m just tired...I didn’t sleep well last night.” She started crying.

“Amélie...it’s okay. Whatever it is going on you can tell me.”

“I don’t want to...”

“I- that’s okay. Just know that I’m here if you need to talk, okay? Now go wash your face.”



As Amélie entered her house, the place was eerily quiet. She slowly opened the door to find her mother standing in the living room holding her phone to her ear.

“I see...I’ll talk to her now. Thank you.” Amélie’s mother hung the phone up.

“Your teacher called me.” Amélie’s mother suddenly charged towards her, grabbing her hair, she started slapping her left and right, leaving burning red marks on her skin.

“What kind of act is this you’re putting on huh? Trying to make me look like a bad mother?! First you don’t clean your shit and now you’re yelling at you’re acting all depressed?! What will they think of me! “

“Stop it! I hate you! Get away from me!” Amélie yelled back, trying to get out of her mother’s grip but to no avail.

“I hate you! You’re a pathetic piece of shit!” She yelled, pushing her towards the hallway.

“Get out of my fucking face! I don’t want to see you!”

Amélie ran down the hallway towards her room, her face red and snot mixed with blood dripped down her nose and face as tears stung her raw skin. She slammed the door and fell on to her knees.

“What did I do to deserve this? I hate her. I hate him. I hate everything! Please God save me...what have I done God? What have I done to deserve this? Does God even

love me? Who am I kidding...what kind of God would put someone through this? Is he even real?" She spoke between sobs, reaching under her pillow and taking out a small kitchen knife she had stolen.

Amélie ran the knife against her thighs. The blood running down her legs felt warm, the only type of warmth she felt in a long time. She dreamt of a happy place, away from all of this. By the time she realized what she had done she froze, looking down at the fresh scars against the old ones on her legs.



Amélie laid there, her body felt like lead. Her shorts rubbing against the fresh cuts stung like snake bites. Amélie's stomach growled loudly, filling the eerie silence of the room. She sucked in her stomach to try to suppress the overwhelming feeling of hunger, not wanting to leave, knowing that her demon was right outside her door.

The soft creaks of the worn floorboards snapped Amélie back into reality as the sounds slowly crept towards her door. No...not him, please anyone but him! Her heart was pounding, and her lips quivered. Her throat felt like it was closing. She quickly sat up, trying to catch her breath. Her door slowly opened, and Micheal stood there, staring at her with a grin. Despite his disheveled appearance, he seemed sober this time, making him even more terrifying. Amélie wrapped her blanket around herself tightly as if trying to shield herself from him.

“Hey kiddo, your mother told me you’ve been giving her a hard time recently.” His voice was gentle; it sent shivers through her body. He crept closer into her room, closing the door behind him and sitting on her bed, Amélie at once moved away from him, a look of defiance on her face.

“What do you want? Get out of my room- “

Micheal slapped Amélie hard across the face, leaving a large red mark on her cheek. Before she could react, Micheal had grabbed her arm in a tight grip, pulling her towards him. Amélie’s blanket; her only source of comfort, was ripped away from her. Now she sat there in her pyjamas, the cool air hitting her skin, Micheal looked down at her with a smirk, he brought his hand up to touch her hair, carding his large hands through her soft black locks.

“Don’t ever yell at me again, you know I don’t like it.” He spoke to her softly, his eyes roaming over her body. Her cheek burned as the salty tears stung her raw skin.

“You know, you’re growing into a beautiful young woman, I bet you have boys drooling over you...”

“No don’t touch me! Get out of my room- “

Amélie's voice cut off as Micheal pushed her down on to the bed and threw himself on top of her, firmly covering her mouth with his hand. Amélie struggled under his grip, flailing her arms in a desperate attempt to get away.

"Shut the fuck up! Don't you ever tell me no!" Micheal's eerily gentle façade, now replaced by an aggressive and forceful tone, he held her down, his hand slowly creeping into her shorts.

Amélie shrieked under his touch and with every cry led a slap on the face, Amélie kept swinging her arms around, trying to defend herself. Her throat began to close, and she started hyperventilating.

Calm down, calm down. *It'll be over soon*, it happened before. It's not gonna hurt if I move...

An overwhelming feeling of rage coursed through Amélie. I can't keep doing this. I want it to stop.

"I can't do this anymore," she seethed, the words barely a breath. "It's not fair."

Amélie kneed him in the crotch, Micheal fell forward, letting out a loud groan. Amélie squirmed freely out from under him and ran out of the room, crying loudly.

“What the hell is going on?!” Monica yelled, walking out of her bedroom and looking at Amélie. She stayed silent for a moment, taking in the state her daughter was in. Amélie had a look of desperation, hoping and praying that just maybe her mother would help her. Micheal quietly walked out of Amélie’s room a few minutes later. Looking over at Monica. Monica’s gaze switched between the two.

“What happened!? Speak up one of you- “

“Mom, he keeps coming in my room!” Amélie spoke between sobs, her voice filled with panic and anger.

“Your daughter kicked me! I was trying to see if she was okay!” Micheal’s aggressive tone had at once vanished, his eyes softened, and his body relaxed.

“He’s lying mom! He tried to touch me- “

“Amélie! Why would you say something like that! He’s your stepfather! Micheal is only trying to be a father to you!” Monica yelled, her eyebrows furrowed, her gaze hardened, and her breathing was heavy.

Micheal smirked, Amélie stood there, her heart shattered, what did she expect? Did she really think her mother was going to believe her?

“But mom- “

“Enough! Go back to your room!” Monica turned and went back into her room, Micheal followed behind.



Amélie didn't go back to her room. She couldn't. Her body felt stiff, and her feet felt heavy. Instead, she scrambled into the living room, grabbing a small, heavy ceramic vase from a side table. Her hands shook, but a desperate energy coursed through her body as she sat on the couch, holding up the vase and looking at Micheal's room, then at the front door, the only way out of this dark abyss. But where would she go? It was dark, cold, and she had no food or money, no one to help her out.

The muffled sounds of her mother and Michael's voices drifted from the bedroom, a low murmur that fuelled Amélie's terror. She could almost hear her mother dismissing her cries.

“Why is she so jealous to see me happy? She's trying to get in the way of our relationship.”

“She's been disrespectful ever since I moved in. I'm trying to be a father to her, but she just won't listen.”

“*Sigh*, I've raised a disrespectful kid.”

A bitter, burning rage sparked within her. They wouldn't help her. No one would. She was on her own. She wasn't going to let him touch her again, not now, not ever. That was a promise.



The sun slowly rose and illuminated the dark classroom. She was early yet again, waiting for her teacher to arrive, her hands were shaking as the pain from last night's bruises throbbed. Each wave of pain made her head spin and her vision blurry. Amélie wasn't sure if she felt drowsy because of the lack of sleep, hunger, or both. But whatever it was, she wanted it to stop.

Just as she was about to nod off, Mr. Anders entered, greeting the girl.

“Amélie, could you do me a favour and place a paper on everyone's desk?” Mr. Anders spoke gently, his gaze soft and his voice quiet as not to disturb the peaceful air of the classroom. Amélie nodded and stood up, slowly walking towards the desk and picking up the stack of papers, the coarse texture of the stack grated against her sore palms.

The air in the room suddenly felt heavy. Mr. Anders' easy demeanour hardened at once at the sight of bruised grip marks peeking out of the poorly wrapped bandages on his student's wrists.

“Amélie stop. What is this?” Mr. Anders’ piercing eyes roamed over the girl’s wrist as she shakily held the stack of papers. He reached out for a moment to grab her wrist but stopped himself, a hint of anger was in his voice, though it wasn’t directed at her.

“It’s nothing, I fell that’s all.”

“Don’t lie to me. I’m your teacher. Something is going on and you need to tell me. I promise you aren’t in trouble.”

“It’s nothing! I’m not lying!”



As Amélie walked home, an unfamiliar car was in the driveway, she stopped walking when she saw two people, an older man and woman, dressed professionally in suits holding notebooks. They got in the car and drove away. Amélie stood there at the sidewalk, her heart pounding and her breathing getting heavy. What did you do Mr. Anders...? Once the car was out of sight, she slowly walked towards the house, entering quietly. The place looked clean for once, and the smell of alcohol was gone. As Amélie walked through the house towards her room, she stayed on guard, clenching her keys in her hand and keeping an eye out for Micheal. Just as she entered her room, she

heard someone follow behind and close the door. Immediately turning around, she was standing face to face with her demon. *Smack!* Amélie dropped her things and fell back on to the floor, standing over her was Micheal. He slowly bent down and wrapped his hands around her neck.

“Guess who paid a visit. CPS. What the fuck are you doing Amélie? Telling everyone our secret?” He tightened his grip, his expression soft, his voice low and gentle.

“You know I’m doing it to protect you, right?”

Amélie struggled to get his hands off her neck, her face was going red. She clawed at his fingers and wrists, trying to pry his hands off. He applied enough pressure to make it hard for her to move but not enough to kill her. An overwhelming amount of rage coursed through Amélie. She promised she was going to get out of this; she wasn’t going to let herself down. And she was going to do it one way or the other. Nothing else mattered more than her escape.



Each slap, each muffled cry shattered the suffocating silence. Sitting on the bed, the clammy sheets clung to her bare skin, a stark contrast to the sticky warmth flowing beneath her as her blood seeped into the fabric. The nauseating sent of alcohol was no

longer overpowering, now replaced by the sharp, metallic scent of her own blood, thick and coppery in the air. Goosebumps pricked her arms and legs as the cool air pricked her skin, making the entire scene feel dreamlike. Amélie stared at what once was her uniform, now laying on the floor, defiled and in shreds. Her eyes drifted towards Micheal, sprawled on her bed, his face holding a gentle and innocent expression while he slept, one arm possessively over her legs, the other clutched a pillow. Each bruise on her body, a painful snakebite left by the very hands that now, in a perverse twist, held her gently, tenderly, in his sleep. It was unfair. After everything, he got to sleep, unbothered, with that stupid look on his face.

A whisper, barely audible, escaped her lips, "I hate it. It's not fair, why do you get to sleep peacefully, and I don't?" Her hand unconsciously found the forgotten knife under her pillow. The first plunge into his back was clumsy, fuelled by a mix of rage and disbelief. Then, slowly, her moves became frantic, then slow, each thrust desperate to sever whatever tie there was bounding her to him. Back, neck, arms—whatever her hands found. She left the knife in him, a grotesque trophy. His blood surprisingly warm, gave her comfort and ease, knowing now that she was in control, and he couldn't touch her anymore. Amélie looked towards the door, she wanted to leave, everything inside her was telling her she was free, that the warm world, full of sunlight and happiness, everything she longed for was right outside her door, her demon won't be able to get her anymore. But she couldn't. *She was free, wasn't she?* Something was stopping her, physically and mentally.

Micheal's rough hand was still on her legs, his large, calloused hands against her soft skin felt like sandpaper. She stared at the hand, the instrument of her pain, the very thing that started all of this. An overwhelming feeling of compulsiveness washed over her as she slowly reached to trace his knuckles, cold now, lifeless, yet still holding her captive.



The piercing wail of sirens ripped through the air, quickly followed by Amélie's mother's gut-wrenching screams that echoed across the neighbourhood. Police cars and an ambulance swarmed their driveway. Amélie, silent, lay on the gurney as they wheeled her into the ambulance. She had kept her promise: he would never touch her again. Not now. Not ever.