

Maddie sighed, her breath fogging in the Alaskan air. She stared at the setting sun, the last for the next few months. To Maddie, every sunset was magical, every star a hole in a black velvet sky. The sky always bewildered Maddie. It seemed that if you could touch something, anything in the sky, you would be transported to a different world, a better one. One that Maddie would love to go to. As Maddie looked up at the sky, a voice called out, penetrating her thoughts,

“Maddie! Maddie, where are you? Come home, it’s getting cold!”

Maddie wilted, her thoughts chased away by the thought of going home to a hot-headed mother, and a father who never cared about anything but her grades and his work.

“Maddie! Home now!!”

Called a gruffer voice. Maddie picked up her boots and slowly walked back home.

*Goodbye Sun, see you again several months later*

Maddie whispered as she trudged up the hill, back to the family who never cared for her.

“Maddie! How many times must we tell you to stop staring up at the sky and get home! You have homework and you can spend the better part of your life doing it.”

Maddie grumbled, eyes trained on the floor as she walked into the house.

"Maddie,MADDIE. Don't ignore me! Maddie, MADDIE!!

Brian, her father, called after her.

Maddie said nothing as she trudged up the stairs to her room. She threw the door open then banged the door shut. She threw herself on her bed and cried. At school, she was alone with no friends and people bullied her. At home, her family didn’t care about her feelings, only wanting her to do good in school. Maddie knew that it wasn’t their fault. They had told her over and over again

that they had wanted a boy, but instead got a girl who couldn't do anything. Maddie was alone in this world, like the lonely moon among the stars that seemed to laugh at the moon.

The next morning was a day of terror. The bullies were meaner and even took her out of school and shoved her against the wall. Maddie coughed, blood trickled out of her nose from where she broke it. Slowly, painfully, Maddie drew her knees around her and cried her heart out. Here she was alone again, but..... not alone only alone, but beaten because she looked different. Her eyes were a strange sea blue, her hair an auburn color with hints of silver and her skin an olive tone. She tried telling the teachers about it, but they never listened. They just smiled their fake smiles and said to sit down.

As she thought about her sad life, she heard a chirp. She looked up, her eyes bloodshot from crying. A little green parakeet sat in a cage next to her. A label on it said

“Take her if you want. Her name is Grace.”

Maddie reached out. Grace chirped again. Maddie opened the door and coaxed Grace onto her finger. Grace hopped up her arm and stared at her with eyes that seemed to say she understood her pain and felt it too. On that day, Maddie finally found a friend.

Grace followed Maddie everywhere and her parents, though glared at Grace, allowed Maddie to take care of her. She fed the food that she bought with her allowance and allowed Grace to go wherever she wished because Maddie wanted her to have her freedom. After all, Grace always came back.

One day, Maddie was walking home from school, Grace chirping and flying around her head when the bullies came.

"Hey ugly, seems that you're now a little birdie lover eh? Little birdie baby," the leader said as his gang pushed her down. He stepped on her head, crushing her face into the concrete sidewalk.

"Time to get a little beating little birdies baby"

he said. That's when Grace screeched and rushed at him, pecking at his head.

"Eh? Hey, stop it you little birdie! Stop it, stop it!"

he howled, swatting at Grace. Eventually, Grace chased all the bullies away.

"Thank you Grace."

Maddie whispered as Grace chirped around her head before landing on her shoulder. Neither of them noticed the blue eyes flashing in the darkness behind them.

When Maddie arrived home, her parents yelled at her about her poor grades and how 95 was unacceptable, but Maddie just ignored them. She trudged up the stairs to her bedroom and opened the door to find a letter on her bed. She opened the letter and it said:

To the girl with Grace,

I hope that you are happy with Grace and can promise her a good home. I just ask that on the next full moon, you let Grace out to fly off. Don't worry, she will come back. I just needed to make sure that she hasn't been hurt yet.

Thank you for understanding,

Girl in the Shadows

Maggie read the letter, then read the letter again.

*Strange request*

She thought

*Well, might as well follow it.*

Maddie hid the letter underneath her bed.

When the full moon came, Maddie let Grace go. When the next day came, Grace didn't come back. Maddie waited and waited, and as she waited, she began to fight back against the bullies just like Grace did for her. Maddie was determined to keep the memory of Grace alive and fought the bullies every day just to do it.

Years later, a woman was arriving home, tired after that day's movie taping. They had redone the same scene over and over again. The woman unlocked the door and went inside. A few minutes later, a little chirping sound came from the window. The woman opened the window and in flew a little green parakeet, quite dirty. The woman gasped as the little parakeet hopped up her arm and faced her.

*"Grace!!"*