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DIVERGENT TOXINS: LEGAL AND MORAL CONFLICT TACKLED THROUGH
CREATIVE FICTION

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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University Honors

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ABSTRACT

Divergent Toxins is a short story following Jamina Sierra, a young woman gathering evidence against her own family's company, Sierra Pharmaceuticals, due to an impending toxic tort case. The case in question involved a pill containing an endocrine disrupting drug diethylstilbestrol (DES), produced and distributed over twenty years prior and later revealed to have caused severe reproductive issues for women whose mothers took the drug while pregnant with them with the intended use being prevention of miscarriages. Meanwhile, her twin brother Oscar introduces her to his fiancée Julia, who ends up finding out that she, too, is affected by the drug after her first prenatal check-up. The story addresses legal issues of liability, causation, and compensation while other key themes include parent-child relationships and related impacts, as well as trust and betrayal.

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COMMENTARY

I had a strange feeling the first time I saw the scars on my mother's stomach, ones left behind from the three c-sections she's had. The bump on the back of her heel made me feel the same way, though she claimed it never bothered her. After noticing them, rather than appreciating the sacrifice it took to bring me into this world, I questioned whether she would have been better off without those scars, without me. She gets angry when I think these kinds of thoughts, telling me I'd understand one day. It's so common and natural that we take it for granted. I mean, people are born every day. But how is it that so many women are able to get through it? And more impressively, despite all their suffering, they are able to love and accept their children wholeheartedly, wanting only the best for them. I wanted to preface this project by saying that I love my mother, and although I'd never want her to read this, I am dedicating my first short story to her.

The main narrative, while mostly revolving around the family dynamics, still involves external issues that unfold due to the consequences brought on by the drug Diethylstilbestrol (DES). This happens in two different ways. The first followed an ongoing investigation for a toxic tort case, while the second was the horrifying aftermath of a tubal pregnancy. I first encountered this drug via the Supreme Court case *Sindell v. Abbott Labs* while taking the Law and Society 100 course. This was a class action lawsuit in which various DES daughters, aka women whose mothers took DES while in utero, sued Abbott Labs, as well as other manufacturers, due to the development of cancers and other reproductive abnormalities (Cranor

206). They claimed that the manufacturers could be held accountable and strictly liable together, as they all had a part in the marketing and distribution of the drug. Although Sindell could not identify the particular tortfeasor because the companies had all produced the same drug, the case set a precedent for using market share liability to hold them accountable and compensate the victims (*Sindell v. Abbott Laboratories, 1980*). Other legal references include applying the tort law, a part of the legal system that seeks to compensate for injuries suffered, to cases regarding toxic substances, hence the term “toxic torts”, the case *Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals* (509 U.S. 579), also involving birth defects, and videos explaining the legal processes and requirements for general tort cases (Learn About Law 00:01:43).

The aforementioned Diethylstilbestrol was an orally active, nonsteroidal synthetic estrogen first produced in 1938 and approved by the FDA in 1941 to treat menopausal symptoms, atrophic vaginitis, etc. It instead became increasingly prescribed to pregnant women at risk of complications. A team at Harvard began a clinical trial that concluded it was helpful in preventing miscarriages and premature deliveries, and was approved by the FDA in 1947 for this purpose, while readily gaining popularity in the following years. It was more likely than not that the effectiveness of the drug was not as it was cut out to be, and meanwhile, the dosages given to pregnant women at the time varied throughout hospitals. Later, a different study published in the early 50s instead concluded, having every right to be initially skeptical, that it was indeed not effective at reducing miscarriages, and caused a decrease in its usage in the US. However, companies still promoted the use of DES throughout the 60s until it was banned by the FDA in 1971 (Laronda et al. 253). But, of course, the damage was already done, having impacted millions of women.

My research for this paper consisted primarily of understanding the possible risks exposure to DES had caused to women unaware of its effect, such as cancerous vaginal and cervical growths, higher rates of adenocarcinoma, structural changes of the cervix, upper vagina, vaginal epithelial changes consisting of adenosis, infertility, and more. Not only were the daughters of these women subject to these risks, but male children of DES mothers also faced their own set of reproductive defects. Additionally, the third-generation, or DES granddaughters, also faced potential carryover effects. For instance, one study published in 2018 found a higher rate of ADHD diagnosis, although other studies did not necessarily prove a higher likelihood of structural changes in this third generation (Kaufman et al. 198). Although I have done research on a multitude of topics, including DES exposure, toxic tort cases, pregnancy, writing methods (e.g., Antonya Nelson's 9-step framework for writing short stories), and more, there is still a chance for error in the facts of my story. For instance, although the previously mentioned study did not conclude the likelihood of structural changes in DES granddaughters, Julia still exhibits those abnormalities through her ectopic pregnancy, a tubal pregnancy to be more specific. According to a 2011 study, it is true that the risk of ectopic pregnancy is 15% compared to 3% in non-exposed women ("Diethylbestrol (DES) Exposure and Cancer"). So, perhaps with Julia, we can leave being an outlier, or an exaggeration for the sake of a fictional plot, especially since her ectopic pregnancy was not caught earlier, although there is still a possibility of this happening. Additionally, realistically, Samantha and Jamina's case might face many more attempts at discrediting their evidence, and may not so much as think to take it all the way to court, especially if it really was true that their evidence was obtained illegally. Furthermore, I'd like to mention that the risk of clear cell adenocarcinoma, which Samantha Wong has, is the highest in Asian populations at 11.1% ("Clear cell carcinoma").

As for the writing, I included parallels, repetition and cliches since these are recurring elements typically found within short stories, especially those I enjoy (Myszor 83). It also gives the reader a sense that maybe these characters aren't so different after all. I mainly focused on writing that's interesting and aims to convey a message, while remaining somewhat lighthearted or satirical. Jamina's character in particular was a tricky one for me. You get the feeling that she's always watching and judging everyone. While writing, I thought of this as a coping mechanism as she had always observed how her mother would silently watch her father say and do anything without expressing her own opinions or objections. She remains a bystander. While Jamina may share that trait sometimes, she still attempts to take action. Although where she draws the line appears to be hypocritical and selfish. She talks about bringing those involved to justice, but is ironically an active member of the company. One subtle moment is near the end, when she finally gathers the evidence she needs, but Julia calls needing desperate help, and she says, "Why now?" even though her goal is to help those impacted by DES, which inherently includes Julia. Jamina is a character that isn't perfect, and she isn't meant to be. She is clearly depicted as flawed from the get-go, with a stuck-up, stubborn personality, but we see her complex moments of vulnerability. For instance, when she notices Julia ordering the lemonade, and realizes that this girl remembered a trivial thing she said in passing. This small act is what makes her agree to go with Julia to her appointments, and is where she starts to care for her. Another prime example is the part when she confronts her mother, and they both end up crying. It's really hard for Jamina to truly hate her parents, more specifically her mother, despite her childhood trauma and perpetuating a situation where their company's product has seriously harmed others, changing the course of their lives forever. It goes to show that some situations are out of our control or the consequences that befall when we remain bystanders. I also purposely

made Julia and Jamina's names similar, in that they both start with J. Each woman carries an immense burden and heartache from their loved ones. Jamina and Oscar, who are twins, contrast one another, even though they grew up in the same household, under the same parents.

To end, I'd like to mention several other inspirations behind this story. The first includes Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in which his need to enact justice on behalf of his poisoned father, his contemplations of suicide, the characters' frequent eavesdropping, and his anger at his mother for choosing his "stepfather" in order to keep her place at the throne were all interpretations reflected mainly in Jamina's actions. One particular example of this is the flashback she has while traveling to her childhood home. The beginning was loosely modeled after Laurence Olivier's 1948 version of Hamlet's soliloquy, where he points a dagger towards his chest but drops it into the raging sea (Movie Passion 00:01:09). Another inspiration that has stuck with me for over a year, despite hating the main protagonist, was the ending of Albert Camus's *The Stranger*. Essentially, although he contemplates various methods of escaping his death sentence, claiming he'd do anything to get out alive, he is given a way out by a priest (Camus 175). His ultimatum was either to believe in God and be released right then and there or suffer the death penalty whilst remaining a disbeliever. Yet, almost instantaneously, he chooses to stay a disbeliever and dies. It was just such an engrossing, mind-boggling read for me, and is why I was inspired to write a similarly set-up conflict for my own characters. Julia gives her husband an ultimatum after discovering what she deems an irredeemable betrayal. He must either choose the company or her. And despite claiming to need her and would do anything to keep her by his side, his actions show otherwise, and he eventually chooses the company. One last real-world inspiration was a DES Action Documentary produced in Australia, bringing awareness to the situation and encouraging activism to secure proper closure and compensation for the victims

("DES Mothers and Daughters" 00:18:57). It also describes the DES mothers' intense guilt for unknowingly causing such horrible outcomes in their children.

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DIVERGENT TOXINS

I

He introduced her to Jamina in mid-April, three days before the pre-trial conference. It was raining heavily that day, spring showers in full force, yet the plaza was as lively as ever. Many local shop owners kept their businesses open during these months, even as foot traffic slowed and niche attractions closed down, only to reopen in the fall. Like moths to a lamp, the strings of Christmas lights attract unassuming customers all year round. Several young women huddle nearby, seeking shelter beneath the various overhangs, rubbing their gloved hands together in hopes of finding some warmth. Despite everything, they smile and share the treasures and trinkets they've purchased during their outing together. Then, slowly and unwillingly, each one bids the rest of the group farewell. Among them, a mother and her young daughter, hand in hand, run past a coffee shop, unaware that they are being closely watched by her jealous eyes.

Sitting alone near the floor-to-ceiling windows, Jamina enjoyed the calming sounds of pouring rain as she continued to overlook the familiar cobblestone plaza. Attempting to gain some semblance of productivity, she sipped on an unsweetened jasmine tea while on call.

“Okay, and the documents I’ve sent you? Are they enough to – hold on, I’ll call you back.”

The resonant jingling of the entryway bells overpowered by the sound of their laughter, their slow gait, and linked arms enough to catch Jamina’s attention. She observes as they shake the

droplets off their overcoats at the welcome mat and shut their large, blue umbrella. The man says something, and his partner, covering her giggling lips, lightly shoves him. He chuckles as well before they carry on. As they look around the quaint cafe, the woman locks eyes with Jamina, seemingly recognizing her. Leaving his side in a near-jog, she rushes to her table, immediately pulling out a chair on the opposite side. Jamina, confused and startled, stands up out of courtesy. This woman was much shorter than she had envisioned, with blonde, blunt-cut hair to her shoulders, and tanned skin littered with beauty marks of varying sizes. Her round, hazel eyes beamed as she smiled. It was similar to the smile she had flashed at the man, youthful and bright; a genuine smile. Well, she was meeting the family of the love of her life, after all. What reason could she have not to smile? The young man took his time in joining them.

Her name was Julia Alonso. Jamina could not recall much of their conversation after the initial introduction. What she did notice, however, was how well Julia and the man seemed to get along. They bounced from one conversation to another, over everything from music and hobbies to what they would eat for dinner tomorrow. She learned that this woman had moved across the country for him, for they had first met in grad school. After he left, she claimed she was so heartbroken and wanted to see him just one more time. This side of him felt foreign to Jamina. It had been years since he'd opened up to her about matters outside of work, let alone his love life. For a moment, she questioned whether or not it really was her twin brother seated before her.

“So, what was it that you wanted to tell me, Oscar?” Jamina spoke after a while, her tea cup nearly empty.

“Well...” he glanced at Julia, their expressions fluctuating between awkward and hesitant smiles.

“I’m not really sure how to say this...”

“We’re getting married!” sprang Julia, slamming her palms on the already rickety table, unable to contain her excitement. A few customers turned to look at her, murmuring about the random outburst.

“Congrats, hon’, hope he’s a keeper!” an elderly woman shouts out, snickering along with the rest of her company. Each woman’s hair gradually lighter in color, and placed before each a steaming mug of hot cocoa.

She shifted her focus back and saw Julia, whose face was turning redder by the minute, sink back down into her chair. Oscar threw his arm over her and pulled her closer, shielding her face from the few remaining onlookers. Jamina was dumbfounded at the sudden confession, even more so by his overly chivalrous gesture. Yet, before she had a chance to voice her sisterly disgust, Jamina heard her phone ring. Rummaging through her messy bag, she picked up the buzzing object; the screen lit up with an unsaved, but recognizable, number.

“Oscar, if you want to invite me to the wedding, I’ll come.” She said, getting up slowly. “Just send me an invitation. You remember my address, right?” she continued, not bothering to wait for a response, “ I have to get going now.” Approaching Julia, she took her small, fragile hand and shook it.

“It was nice meeting you.” She managed to say with a smile. And with another glimpse, she left them still wrapped up in each other's arms.

II

As she pulled up to her apartment, she peered over at the dashboard clock. 5:14pm. A third call pierced the silence in her car, exactly one hour after the second. How punctual.

“Hello? Yes, this is she. Yes...Charlie, any updates? I’m sorry about earlier.”

“Good Afternoon, Ms. Sierra. No worries at all, these things happen. And yes, I have a few. Unfortunately, the company is claiming that the evidence was obtained illegally.”

“How– What–ha...What now? I work there, Charlie. What do they mean?”

“I understand that. However, since our case was submitted by the plaintiff, Samantha Wong, they are claiming that she came into possession of these records illegally. We may potentially face consequences for breaching the company’s confidentiality policies, as well as the company filing a motion to suppress, preventing these particular files from being used as evidence. I apologize, but I am uncertain whether we can utilize it.” There was a pause. “But, it would still be possible to move forward with this case, provided the evidence of the plaintiff and her mother's medical records is still intact.”

Jamina was silent – long enough for Charlie to think the call disconnected. Dozens of thoughts whirled through her already anxious mind.

“Damn it!” she thought. “Okay, it’s okay. Charlie, I’ll call you back. Thank you.”

“Understood, I hope to hear from you soon”.

Opening the front door, she immediately dropped all of her belongings in the entryway, practically dragging herself inside. She was exhausted. It had been several weeks since she’d slept properly, and the events of that day sent her over the edge. This case had been wearing her out more than she anticipated. So much evidence was needed to prove the causal relationship, and it had been over a year before they even reached the pre-trial conference stage. She felt her efforts would be in vain, likely ending in a settlement to keep Samantha quiet. But even that was wishful thinking, as now they were claiming the illicit records were impermissible in court. Letting out a sigh, she lay down on her couch, scanning the dark and empty apartment. Her unfolded laundry piling up on the desk chair was the sole sign of life in that desolate room. Ignoring it, she suddenly sprang up, afraid she’d fall asleep if she stayed still any longer. Instead, grabbing her laptop, she moved to the dining table, propping up her legs up on the chair, and leaning against her knee. The files sent to her lawyer, Charlie, were all accessed through the company’s shared files, but where the research on the drugs’ effectiveness was stored remained a mystery. The oldest files had been digitized only a few years back. “Anything that would prove Sierra Pharmaceuticals’ involvement was physical”, she thought, “it had to be”.

Four years ago, while she was still a graduate student researcher, Jamina had met a victim of the company's malfeasance, a DES daughter, for the first time. Forty-six-year-old Samantha Wong's mother had taken diethylstilbestrol tablets while pregnant after being encouraged by her gynecologist about its benefits. Although she was worried, the fear of miscarriage after losing her first child in a spontaneous abortion made the tablets seem easy enough. And for a while, it seemed to work; her beautiful, healthy baby girl was born. Shortly after reaching adulthood, Samantha underwent a routine check-up, then an onslaught of follow-ups and testing throughout her early twenties. Doctors diagnosed Samantha with ovarian clear cell adenocarcinoma, a rare cancer, epithelial-cell-derived and characterized by clear cells. "I was told I needed surgery, chemo, and spent so much time monitoring", she had explained to Jamina, "It was horrible. I...I couldn't move forward with my life. All because of some stupid drug my mom took decades ago". Bitter with this knowledge and further fueled by the devastation she felt at the recent death of her mother, she sought to expose the industry selling and distributing the drug, starting with Sierra Pharmaceuticals. The company that, she assumed, had the largest market share. In those days, one could see the Sierra labels at every corner pharmacy in almost every city. Jamina's grandfather had made sure of that. Everyone in her family knew the story well. Grandfather's company, on the verge of bankruptcy, hopped on the bandwagon that was DES. Without ever warning their customers of any risks, they rebranded, distributed the tablets, and sold hundreds of thousands, likely millions, in the course of several months. It was a success like no other; he would brag that his decision was the reason Sierra Pharmaceuticals was still around today. In an ironic stroke of fate, the year he passed was the year Samantha and Jamina began their investigation. They had heard of other DES daughters seeking legal action in other states who not only discovered vaginal cancers but suffered a multitude of other issues, and decided to do

the same. But now that she thought about it, the entire situation was strange. How could it be that not a single lawsuit had come up against the company before? Surely there must have been other victims in the city, yet she had never recalled her father ever bringing up something like this. This last thought remained in Jamina's mind even as she, in her cramped, fetal position, finally fell into a deep slumber.

III

Charlie approached the podium on the long-awaited day of their conference.

"Mr. Morgan, what is the status of your client's case?" the judge asked. He was a lopsided man, clean-shaven, and evidently bored out of his mind.

"Your honor," he began, "We are not ready for trial because the tortfeasors continue to discredit the plaintiff's evidence by stating it has been illegally obtained, when there is no definite proof of violations. However, during the discovery process, there is evidence suggesting that clear, indisputable proof, including medical records, linking the tablets Sierra Pharmaceuticals distributed to the plaintiff's mother exist. Furthermore, the statute of limitations is not close to expiration due to the late diagnosis of the plaintiff's cancer. Her medical bills and debilitating mental toll provide enough of a claim to compensation." Though they continued on for some time, Jamina and Samantha had heard all they needed to know. They sat still alongside each other, frozen in awe. It seemed like they had finally been getting somewhere. But it still wasn't

enough for her. She felt she needed to hammer in the last nail into the company's coffin – proof worthy enough to expose them to the trusting public. The research that proved they knew the pills were useless, years before they were banned. She had been patient enough so far, and she could wait for the next pre-trial docket, no matter how long it took.

“That isn't necessary,” Charlie chimed, as if reading her mind, “We do not need to wait too much longer, Ms. Sierra. The judge has reassured us that our demands will be taken into account, and a settlement conference will likely be held sometime in September.” Jamina could not contain the smile forming on her face, and she was unsurprised to find that Charlie and Samantha shared her giddy reaction.

IV

The next time Jamina met Julia and Oscar, it was already August. They had eloped soon after their first meeting, the obvious route in their situation, she supposed, as Oscar hadn't introduced Julia to their parents yet. Not that she knew, at least. But the news of the pregnancy had caught Jamina more off guard than the lack of a wedding party. Somehow, it hadn't even been a possibility in her imagination. She had enough on her plate, especially with the –

“Isn't it wonderful, Jamina!” Julia interrupted, rubbing her stomach despite it still being too early to show. “What do you think about working on the nursery soon, babe! I want to be able to do most of it myself.” The look on her brother's face was not one that shared Julia's eagerness to

help choose the baby's crib and clothes. Jamina was thankful they sat side by side, as Julia remained oblivious to this. Holding back her tongue, she knew it wasn't her place to intervene. But even with her best attempt at congratulating her, Julia's smile faded, instantly recognizing that something was wrong.

Oscar swiftly pulled Jamina aside, seizing her arm and pushing her forward. She broke free from his grip as they stepped out, just barely visible from inside. She was taken aback. Jamina had not recalled ever experiencing such a violent reaction from her brother before. And they had rarely, if ever, fought as children.

"What the hell was that, huh?" he practically screeched, waving his hands around maniacally.

"You know, it wasn't even my idea to meet up with you; it was Julia who begged me to break the news."

She just looked at him, trying to think of the best way to word things, predicting that whatever she said would end up backfiring on her instead. For a moment, Jamina, already drained, became lost in thought. The sun engulfed her in its warmth, making her sleepy; the subtle summer breeze like an irresistible lullaby. Oscar's stressed heaving as he awaited impatiently for a response disgusted her.

"Oscar..." she started, "You can't be serious about this. I cannot believe she's actually pregnant. What are you going to do now? You still rely on our parents for support; you wouldn't even have a job if it weren't for them! On top of that, you haven't even managed to keep up with anything

that's happening at the company. Wait...you...do you even know what's—" Jamina refrained from speaking, having nearly revealed that it was she who was behind the lawsuit.

"Hey, shut up, okay, shut the hell up!" Twice now, Jamina had been interrupted by the couple. Oscar continued: "You think I don't know that, goddamnit, you think you know everything." His retort was so childish that she couldn't help but smirk.

"What the hell are you laughing at, huh? You've always been like this, Jamina, thinking you're absolutely above everyone else. You know, you're just like Mom. I can't believe this. I'll figure things out, so control your damn expressions, yeah?"

"Like Mom? Haa." Jamina could feel herself getting angry now; her entire body was throbbing. Why on earth had she decided to come out? No, Jamina would not let herself get affected by it. She was sick of all of this; she'd say her piece and leave. Leave!

"I will if you do the same, Oscar. And just know this, your place in the company isn't as certain as you'd like to believe. 'Figure things out', like hell you will. You're playing house with some random girl...at such an important time. Quit being so damn pathetic. Either you choose one or the other." Crossing her arms, she stopped and observed her brother as he began pacing around. She knew her reality check would hurt him more than anything else she could say. He was falling deeper into a hole of his own making. All she needed only to sit back and watch as it happened. But even so, it was beyond shocking to Jamina how differently he was acting compared to working hours. They weren't in the same department, but Jamina had heard other employees talk

about him. How well he worked with clients and his rational, professional approach to any issues that arose. Was there something else going on with him? It was a genuine consideration, for she could not see how a person could change so drastically. Moreover, he lost all traces of the kind-hearted brother she once knew. Oscar, who used to cry when she cried. Oscar, who joined theater just because she didn't want to do it alone. Oscar, who held his palms over her ears when their parents fought. Oscar, who helped her pack when she left for college! God, who was this man in front of her?

"If anything, I'll tell her to abort it. I didn't want this damn kid anyway." Jamina felt a chill, goosebumps forming along her arms and legs. She was in utter disbelief at what she heard,

"What?" she yelled, "Are you insane! That's not what I meant!"

"Hey, hey, I don't care what you meant. Like I said, I'll figure things out".

Jamina marched towards him, grabbing his shirt and forcing him to look down at her. "You tell her that, and I'll make sure you won't be able to inherit the company. I'd rather have that place burn to the ground. Got it?" She glanced back inside the cafe. Julia remained seated at their table, looking cluelessly around the cafe. As Jamina let go, she felt him lurch forward, nearly falling to the ground, and took in the faintest scent of alcohol. She returned to the shop once more, a sense of urgency in her steps. She needed to get the hell out of there.

“Ah, I’m so sorry, I thought it would be okay to –” Julia explained the minute Jamina got within speaking range. Disregarding her useless apology, Jamina tried to grab her purse, only for it to get caught on something; Julia was straining to hold on to the edge of her sleeve.

“Let go.”

“Wait, Jamina...I... I have something to ask you...could you come with me to my check in appointments? Please?” She blurted all in one breath.

Jamina was not so generous as to help her without a second thought. But, gazing down past her desperate, anxious face, she noticed Julia had ordered a lavender lemonade. It was a drink recommendation mentioned in passing back when they first met. Jamina’s hand swung back down to her side after Julia’s trembling hand let go. She and her husband sure had a tendency to make Jamina uncomfortable while waiting for a response. As she entertained the thought, she remembered that Julia was technically alone here, having left her family back in Maryland. She wondered if her parents, all the way across the country, even knew their daughter was married, much less pregnant.

Cautiously, she nodded and watched as Julia’s face lit up again, back to the same expression she had earlier. Smiling suited someone like her.

“Thank you so much! I’ll text you the dates!”

“Sure.”

She started towards the door again and saw Julia enthusiastically waving to her. Turning around, she pulled her bag closer to her side.

“Damn, I really liked this coffee shop”. She grumbled, making her way to the parking lot.

V

It had been over a week since Julia and Oscar had spoken to one another. He would make his way back home in the later hours of the night, crawling into bed after Julia was already fast asleep. And on the days he was home, he would lock himself in his office, using the same excuse that he was swamped with work. Getting pregnant seemed to cause a rift between them, but she never had a chance to tell him her true feelings. She wanted to know what exactly was keeping him, especially after his talk with his sister, of which Julia still didn't know what exactly it was they had discussed. She had been too tense and forgot to ask Jamina on the day of her appointment. Despite the positive pregnancy test, they could not see the baby in the ultrasound. The OB-GYN told her, calmly, that she might have ovulated late, and was too early to tell. Before she had a chance to agree, Jamina demanded a second opinion. The extra two hours it cost them in the clinic were nothing compared to what they had instead found out. After asking for her medical history, her records revealed that her mother had been a DES daughter. Jamina

was stunned. The doctor told them not to worry, but not to rule out the increased possibility of an ectopic pregnancy. At the sight of her confused face, he began to explain what this meant.

“I didn’t even know this was possible, doctor...the egg can implant outside of the uterus?”

The unassuming Julia, surprisingly, did not give it much thought after that instance, knowing she’d go in for intensive imaging soon. She instead regretfully focused her energy on the same intrusive thoughts that continued to haunt her mind: had she done something wrong to him? Was she not a trustworthy wife? All she wanted was for him to open up to her, to share things and rely on her the way she did with him. Julia’s hormones were no help either; she was unable to keep up with her own mood swings. One moment, she’d cry over being separated from her mother, blaming her for letting her leave. The next, she’d laugh at something ridiculous, like the neighbor’s dog chasing his own tail. And other times, she was simply in too much pain to feel much else. Many strange sensations would wash over her, causing her to double over, clenching her side in excruciating pain, only to vanish as quickly as it had come. She assumed it was normal pregnancy pains. One more week, she assured herself, one more week until the next appointment. She could wait that long and convinced herself that everything would be fine.

After having woken up in a strangely good mood, Julia decided to surprise Oscar at work. Knowing that he’d most likely go on break soon, she bought lunch from their favorite Mediterranean restaurant. It was one they had frequented one too many times when they first began dating. On the taxi ride there, Julia fantasized how he would react when he saw her, how the nostalgic memories of those days would come flooding back, sparking something within him.

She assured herself that he would remember how much he loved her. He would hold out his arms and hug her, seating her in his desk chair, excitedly showing her around the office. He would forget any worries they had about the future, and wholeheartedly accept her and the baby.

“Maybe he just needed some time to adjust,” she thought, “it must have come as a shock to him.” They’d finish their lunch, and he would promise to be home early that night.

Julia made her way through the company’s revolving door and was met with a large, gleaming front desk. She was led through the lobby to the marketing and business department and was eventually pointed in the direction of *Oscar Sierra’s Private Office*. Nearly missing him, she instead spotted his figure around the corner. A slouchy, older gentleman dressed in a navy, tailored suit approached him before she could. Julia stepped back, far enough so that she wouldn’t be seen, but close enough to hear their conversation.

“Mr. Sierra, you’re here. A pleasure to meet you, sir. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me on such short notice”.

“Of course, Mr. Becker. The pleasure is mine,” he said, firmly shaking his hand. “What seems to be the issue?”

“Well, there’s been some...concerns from the higher-ups that a lawsuit against us is in the making. Our legal team has been discussing options with the litigants for some time now.”

“A lawsuit? What for?”

“It’s a bit difficult to explain now. You see, back when the company was still run by your grandfather, we started producing these diethylstilbestrol tablets.”

“Diethylstilbestrol?”

“Yes, or DES. It had essentially been a synthetic estrogen prescribed to women with pregnancy-related risks. But, there have been many cases against companies that manufactured or sold the drug. Mostly for mislabeling. I mean, they’ve been causing various, ehm, reproductive defects for people. Even causing cancers, sir. Especially in young women.”

“I see.” Oscar said, “That’s quite unfortunate. But, what is it that we have to do now...” Their voices trailed off.

Julia’s heart dropped. What had she just heard? Had she misunderstood? Who was he talking to? A nauseating number of questions made her head buzz; she could not bear to listen any longer. Without realizing, her grip relaxed on the plastic takeout bag, the food had started spilling out all over the carpet, its monochromatic hexagons soaking up olive oil and lemon juice.

This company was responsible for distributing DES. The same medication her mother had taken decades ago. That same DES. “There was no way,” she whispered, instantly covering her mouth.

She was confused; she must have been. Yes, that was it. Julia tried to leave, but it was already too late. They heard the final, loud plop of the styrofoam box hitting the ground, entrapping her in a moat of chicken, rice, and salad.

“Julia? Julia, is that you! What are you doing here?” Oscar hollered.

“It was this company...” Julia mumbled. “This company was the reason for it! Oscar, I’m sick of all of this. Do you even know what’s been happening to me these past few weeks? All because of this stupid drug my mom took. And what, you guys make it?” she shrieked. Was there anything that could save their relationship now? “Not only that, but there are others like me!” She began laughing now, a hysterical, chilling laugh. He would have otherwise never known that she was capable of a sound such as this.

“Babe,” the word lingered in his mouth, suddenly unfamiliar, “you know I’d do anything for you? I’ll buy whatever decorations you want, however many clothes and toys for the baby. Anything! I don’t want to lose you.” Oscar pleaded with her. It was truly a laughable sight. Has it always been this easy for him to switch up? Just several months ago, this man had been her world; her every waking moment was spent alongside him. Countless times, she’d imagined their future together, even when things got tough. Even when he blacked out. How stupid she must have looked in the eyes of Jamina just the other day.

“Anything?”

“Anything.”

Without so much as a second’s hesitation, she said simply, “Then leave this company immediately.” Julia squirmed as she watched his face contort into a horrifying expression, both wide-eyed and dumbstruck. He wouldn’t, why should he? He had been waiting for this moment his entire life. Years of dedication and schooling, far longer than he’d known Julia, had burdened him for so long. Every path leading to his inheritance of the company. He was certain his father would not hesitate to change his mind if he were ever to witness this.

“I can’t, Julia.”

“Can’t?”

“I won’t!”

“Okay.”

She did not tremble, or scream, or cry. His words continued to replay in her mind as she walked away, already feeling an impending painful episode. She had been a fool to think he’d choose her.

Oscar spotted Jamina exiting the lab from where he stood, still in shock at what had just happened, on the verge of regretting his decision, despite knowing it was too late to take back what he said. And worse so, in his mind, a little voice told him that Jamina was mocking him, finding fault in whatever he chose. He stormed up to her, ready for his own confrontation, but

noticed a strange expression on her face. As she made her way to a nearby conference room, he made sure to follow her in.

“You saw everything, right? You’re probably glad it came to this. You’d probably say I deserve it all right. Well, go on then!”

Jamina was startled, not having realized he saw her. She had, in fact, heard their conversation and was sure everyone in the office had. But she didn’t care, it wasn’t her problem anymore. She’d help Julia if she asked, and that was all. The only difference now was that he had some clue about the complications and about the DES connection.

“And so what if I did?” she said, walking around him. He held her arm, stopping her from moving forward.

“Again? Let me go. Is this what you do every time someone doesn’t want to speak with you?”

“Where are you going?” His question surprised her. Rather than starting an argument, he seemed truly curious, desperate even.

“I’m leaving work early today,” she muttered, looking grim but determined. “I’m going to visit Mother and Father,” she confessed, once again breaking free of his grip quite easily. Oscar only looked back at her.

“I want to find out if they knew about everything, Oscar”, she continued, “But, it seems like you don’t give a damn, honestly.” But Jamina was only partly telling the truth. Oscar was still unaware that it was Jamina behind the lawsuit, and the true purpose of her visit, to gather information, was unbeknownst to anyone.

This time, he spoke up, “Are you naive or something? What difference would it make? Whether they knew, whether they approved, knowingly or unknowingly, they had a say in it. Whatever it was, they were involved. Politicians and bureaucrats, whether they like it or not, are directly involved in war. It’s not just a job, Jamina. They don’t get to go home and act like loving mothers and fathers after their 9-to-5s. It’s war, it’s death, it’s suffering.” His sudden philosophical enlightenment threw her for a loop. Where was this coming from?

“Huh? How is that the same thing!? Do you even hear yourself right now Oscar?”

Jamina was sure he knew more about it than she did, that was for sure. This was unexpected given the fact that his responsibilities mainly consisted of desk work. But what was this, was he serious right now?

“No, Jamina, it is. I don’t know what it is you’re trying to prove, but it won’t change anything.” He glanced once more down at his sister, his cadence unbroken. His watering eyes told a clear story: shame. Or maybe she had misunderstood. He marched away from her, out of the conference room, through the lobby, and back towards the office.

VI

Jamina preferred traveling by train, though she had not been there in years. As it sped by, she caught a glimpse of the shimmering ocean, seamlessly meshing into the blue horizon. It was as breathtaking as the first time she'd seen it. A long-forgotten memory suddenly appeared in her mind, one from her youth. She had had enough of her parents' daily fights, lasting years, stopping out of nowhere, only to start up again when the company wasn't doing well. On that day, she was desperate to get away from them, and in her haste, the beach was the only place she could think of. She watched for many hours as, just a few feet away from her weightless, numbing body, the waves came tirelessly crashing down upon jagged rocks. Again and again, with rhythm and poise akin to the most elegant of dancers. Its milky foam clung to every crevice and groove, fizzled out, and returned into the merciless ocean. Somehow, she felt the vibrations deep in her chest, synchronizing with the beats of her own heart. Buried in a shallow hole beside her, she noticed large shards of glass, likely from the groups of drunk teenagers that plagued their shores. Jamina did not know what possessed her to even think of grabbing one. Carefully examining the twinkling shard, her trembling hand held it up, angling it towards her chest and immediately dropping it, watching as it tumbled back down into the hole. Her heartbeat grew much louder with each second now; louder, louder, LOUDER. Her vision began to blur, her ears began to ring, her mind grew fuzzy. Yet somehow, she felt the sensation of the textured sands brush up against her sunburnt cheeks; it scorched her calves and side. Through her flashing vision, flat faces come into view, stepping closer and closer.

The first person Jamina recognized after waking up was Oscar. He sat at the edge of the bed, a damp towel in hand. Even as his head was turned away, she sensed that his attention was elsewhere. After multiple failed attempts at rotating her still-heavy body, she instead tuned in to the murmuring voices just outside their room.

“How could you let her go all the way to the beach on her own? When did she even leave?” their father hissed, “This wouldn't have happened if there was discipline in this household. I leave their care to you, yet you can't handle something as simple as this? Alice, what have you been doing?”

Mother remained silent, unsure where to begin and unable to meet her husband's angry gaze. Hot pink rubber gloves remained wet and clinging to her hands, a dish sponge clenched tight in one of them.

“No response, huh? What was I expecting from someone like you? Get out of my sight, Alice.”

Jamina's final attempt at moving was no longer futile. This time, she gained enough momentum to heave herself into a seated position, the bedsheet surrounding her bunching up beneath her, accompanied by a grunt loud enough to be heard by the family. To her surprise, the first person to check up on her was not Oscar, but her father. “Jamina? Jamina dear, are you awake?” he asked, quickly examining her before stroking her head, his tone wiped of the discontent from the conversation just moments before, his watering eyes filled with genuine concern. His arms

enveloped her in a suffocating embrace. Peeking back at the door, she saw her mother loitering around as if she were a stranger. Jamina did not hug him back.

Nearing the final stop, she took in a deep breath, readying herself for her arrival.

“Dear passengers, we have now reached [***]. Please remain seated until the train has come to a complete stop.” Right on schedule.

VII

The day had gone by smoothly, mostly. Jamina remained bureaucratic, careful not to bring up anything that would irritate her parents. Years of heartache swept up by lighthearted jokes and performative laughter, thoroughly and forcefully shoved beneath the all-encompassing rug that was their reunion dinner. They were good at this. For a brief moment, she forgot the reason she left in the first place, nearly allowing herself to be disillusioned at the prospect of a harmonious family life. But as she lay down in her bed that night, she dared not sleep and instead wandered the place she once called home.

She passed by her mother’s bedroom, the door unusually wide open. Slowly, she inched into it, careful not to step on the clothing scattered across the floor, although it was more so to avoid slipping than making any noises. Jamina did not know why she was drawn to her mother’s room to begin with. Perhaps it had simply been so long since she'd been inside, maybe it was because

she knew her father would not be there alongside her. As she glided past the vanity, glancing up and around the master bedroom, partly reminiscing, what with all the pictures up on the walls, and partly wondering whether she had gotten rid of those dreadful curtains, she hadn't. Finally, she reached the bohemian-style armchairs and matching table in the corner, right beside her cushy king-sized bed. Opening up the windows behind the setup, Jamina felt that she could truly breathe for the first time since that afternoon.

Letting out a sigh, she sat down and observed her mother's peaceful, dreaming body for a while. The rise and fall of her chest and occasional snores, the way her soft curls framed her square, pale face, and the array of darkened freckles scattered across her nose and cheeks, ones she'd never noticed before. They reminded her of her own face. Even her scrunched eyebrows and long eyelashes, and her thin, but cracking, pink lips. It had never occurred to her how beautiful her mother was. Wispy clouds crept through the night sky, revealing a crescent moon shedding an almost iridescent light upon them through the arched panes. The salty sea breeze made it feel as if she, too, were dreaming.

Jamina balled her fists, remembering their conversation earlier that evening. Deep within her, she knew it was the true reason she could not bring herself to fall asleep.

"You know what Oscar's up to, don't you?" her mother probed. "And you know what's been keeping him from us. *That distraction.*"

Jamina touched her ear, lightly massaging it. She traced her finger over the corners, onto the soft lobe, and over her small hoop earring. The sharp metal backing forced an answer out of her.

“No, I’m not sure what you mean”. She said, finally locking eyes with her mother. *She knew.* Jamina did not allow for the panic to settle on her face. “Well, no matter, " she thought, “he said he would take care of it himself”.

“More importantly, Mother, you know about the lawsuit, don’t you?” It was her mother’s turn to be put on the spot. “And grandfather knew the entire time, there wasn’t enough research to start selling the drug. In fact, really, our company’s research showed the opposite; it wasn’t ready to be sold. They knew it was still in the experimental stages, they knew it was dangerous, they knew it!” Her seemingly calm demeanor only confirmed what Jamina knew was true, despite not having anything to prove it. Nothing got past her mother, especially not something that could hurt the company’s reputation. What hurt Jamina the most was that she never did anything about it. “Doesn’t it bother you to know that? It doesn’t keep you awake at night? Thanks to this company, hundreds, if not thousands of people’s lives were ruined. Mom, say something! Please!” Jamina’s chest tightened, and she began to feel lightheaded, the feeling worsened by her quickened, irregular breathing. She tried her best to hold back tears.

Through it all, her mother remained quiet, just as she always did. “Please. Tell me you didn’t know. Everyone knows that Father knew, but I don’t care. Just tell me that you didn’t. Tell me!” she was screaming now. She had escalated the situation; her words and thoughts were all jumbled together. This was not how it was supposed to go, she hadn’t wanted to confront her, not

like this. She told herself she didn't care, that it didn't matter if they knew, just as Oscar said. She would get the evidence and leave, in and out. But she didn't, she couldn't.

"Calm down, Jamina. I'll tell you, I will. Just...just sit down for a second." Jamina reluctantly sat adjacent to her mother. They were alone in the living room, and although it was past sunset now, both disregarded any lamps and fixtures. The only light source was coming from the sandalwood-scented candle placed upon the coffee table.

"We got married too young, Jamina," she began, "I didn't want to get married, but you know how it was back then. And after my injury, I could no longer do anything on my own. I could barely stand and walk, let alone act. My career was over before it even started."

She had already known her mother once dreamt of becoming an actress, only for those dreams to be cut short after a sudden twist of fate: a traumatic leg injury and surgeries took away any opportunities she had. The rising rookie's once heart-wrenching performances were outshone by newer, younger actresses' pretty faces and willingness to do quite literally anything a director demanded of them. What Jamina didn't know was why she suddenly brought it up.

"When your father and I first got together, he kept anything related to the company away from me. For years, I had no idea what even went on. He came home and talked about anything but work. I assumed it was his way of coping. Maybe it was too stressful, too complicated for someone like me to understand. I nodded along to anything he said, my agreement made him happy, and we rarely argued. I thought that was just how it would always be. Well, until I found

those papers while cleaning. Jamina, it wasn't just DES; your grandfather didn't develop that. They simply made and distributed it like all the other companies at that time, and out of sheer luck, their marketing just happened to be more successful. Your father and his researchers tried creating a stronger version, but it was too late. The FDA began informing health care providers of its links to cancer, and they could no longer market it."

For the first time in her life, Jamina witnessed her mother sob like a child, tears continually streaming down her face. Her voice was getting so faint that she could no longer make out the words. She didn't need to continue, but did anyway.

"At that point, it had been a long time since I felt anything towards your father. But what do you know, I was pregnant! Haha. Honestly, Jamina, I thought of leaving, I did. But where would I have gone? I just gave up, I stayed in this house, put up with him all this time."

"Mom..."

"Jamina, I knew..." she sniffled, "...it was my punishment for sitting back and doing nothing. I didn't tell anyone, and acted like I didn't know anything."

Her mother had reached her limit, leaving Jamina as if under a trance. As she wandered away, her candlelight shadow gracefully oscillated on the walls.

Jamina's body shivered ever so slightly, and closing the windows, she sat back down again, wondering whether or not she should just leave. Her mother rustled in her sheets, groaning awake. And as if she had known Jamina was there the entire time, she got up before her daughter could make out what was happening and pulled her into a long hug. Her embrace, as protective and encompassing as it was apologetic. Noticing how thin her mother had become, Jamina felt small tears falling onto her lap. And the mother, pretending she did not hear her daughter's feeble cries, only hugged her tighter. Each woman in unspoken agreement to forgive the other, accepting that neither was at fault. It gave Jamina the strength to do what she knew had to be done, what she had been doing all along.

"All the research, medical records, and photographs are in his office, Jamina," her mother whispered, almost inaudibly. Pulling away from her, she nodded. Her mother kissed her cheek, pulling her into one last hug. "Go on, now".

Jamina neared the room she was never allowed into as a child with mild caution. She first approached the piles upon piles of papers cluttered the wide, cherrywood desk. Newer documents sat at the very top, retaining a crisp feel, while the layers beneath were increasingly more stained and crumpled. The evidence she was looking for wouldn't be among these documents, that was for sure. Crouching down, she instead began inspecting the cabinets, quickly skimming the contents of each separate file, as she did not know when he would return. Her father had a habit of roaming into the room at ungodly hours and returning to sleep on the leather couch, feet away from the wall-to-wall bookshelves.

After searching the last one, still nothing. She refused to leave empty-handed, but the sun was starting to come up now. The likelihood he would enter more than doubled. She had yet to actually check the bookshelves, and lo and behold, in the rightmost corner, what appeared to be an archival collection of all the research the company had done since its founding. Looks like the old man had done all the work for her. She grabbed the ones labeled anywhere between 1953 and 1971, stuffing them into a duffel bag she had brought under the guise of using for gym clothes. This had been easier than she thought, perhaps too easy.

VIII

Making her way towards the train station, Jamina's cold, trembling hands fumbled through her contact list, looking for Samantha Wong's name. She had done it; they'd found enough evidence to get the case to trial. She would never agree to a mere settlement. Those responsible needed to pay, starting with her wretched father...her father? Hm, if only her grandfather could hear her now. "Why, he'd be rolling in his grave!" she laughed. Before she could even call Samantha, her phone rang. It was Julia.

"Hello? Julia, what's wrong? Why are you calling me this early in the morning?"

There was nothing but distant-sounding gasps on the other end of the line. Confused, she just about ended the call when she heard a meek voice.

“Help...me...Jamina” it said in between pants, followed by an abrupt, loud shriek so close to her ear that it echoed.

“Hello? Hello?” Shit, she probably fell or fainted. How the hell would she make it to her in time, and why now, when she was so close? Calling 911, she was glad she remembered the address to Oscar’s place. Who knew if he’d find her and call himself? She didn’t want to take that risk, and it alleviated some of her stress knowing that paramedics were on their way. Jamina rushed into a taxi back to the city.

Julia awoke to being transported across the hospital on a gurney. Beads of sweat formed at the base of her neck and forehead. He was not there to witness the agony she was in, she thought, a pain so intense she felt she could pass out at any moment. He had failed her when she needed him the most. Soon her anger was drowned out by her screams and moans, her vision blurring, a dizziness so disorienting she could not form another thought. The doctors roamed around her, but nothing they said was registering in her mind. This went on for hours. And in the midst of it all, she made out the faint silhouette of Jamina and squeezed her hand. Her pain was so awful she feared her screams would echo throughout the hospital, engraving themselves into the walls forever, alongside the hundreds of women who had gone through the same thing she was. She bit down, hard, onto her own hand to silence herself. Originating in her lower left abdomen, she felt like a current was electrocuting her body, then a singular sharp pain, until she could no longer feel anything past her waist. Julia’s fallopian tube had ruptured and needed emergency laparoscopic surgery. Her baby never stood a chance.

A nurse guided Jamina to the cold, empty waiting room. For hours, she sat rocking back and forth in silence. Almost three hours had passed when Jamina felt a wave of dread wash over her. For the first time since the appointment they had gone to together, Jamina considered the possibility that Julia would not make it. She did not know how much more she could take. The weight of her bag on her shoulder was her only consolation. Around the room, she heard dry, stifled coughs and the occasional vital readings, the tickling of a small, black clock hung on the wall directly across from her. Looking up at it, she noticed the time: 4:39am. “Wait, what?” she thought, “What’s today’s date?” Turning on her phone, she was astonished to see: September 22nd. No...no...the case. The settlement talks! Shit! Could she call Samantha? Would she even answer right now?

Getting up, she bumped into a blue suitcase standing stationary at her side. She hadn’t even noticed the lady beside her, wiping her tears away. The tag on her bag reads *Maryland*. She looked up at her familiar face again. Oh my God, it was her mother.

“Oh my, you must be Jamina! Julia’s told me about you.” She said, making an extra effort to sound chipper. Her eyes and nose were swollen, and still red from crying.

“Yes, I’m sorry you had to find out this way,” she wondered how she found out all.

“Oh my, how polite! A pleasure to meet you,” she spoke with a slight lisp. “I haven’t heard much from Julia after the diagnosis.”

Ah, so she already knew. “I’m so sorry, Mrs. Alonso, I -”

“No need to be sorry dear, it isn’t your fault.” She leans back in the cold metal chair. Sighing while simultaneously folding back in on herself. “Actually, it’s mine.”

Her body stiffened. Jamina knew what she was about to confess. “What do you mean, ma’am?”

“It was so long ago, but I remember it vividly. Back when I was pregnant with Julia, I was so afraid something would happen. I had already lost...two of my babies. I just...” Her voice quivering, it became difficult for her to continue. “I had... that... My gynecologist prescribed some medicine for me to take. I just wanted her to be born...healthy. Haaah.”

Jamina’s eyes widened, alarms setting off in her brain.

“Dr. Hendley,” she resumed, “I knew him well. He treated me when I was pregnant with Elizabeth, my eldest.”

At that point, she started to sob again. Jamina could practically see Mrs. Alonso’s headache forming. Tears welled up in her eyes, dragging her mascara to her cheeks. Her nose and forehead grew redder once more. Grabbing her hair, she leaned forward. “I don’t know how I can live with myself, dear. I mean, all we want as mothers is for our children to grow up healthy and happy. To

think...to think that I was responsible for her suffering! My baby, she's in so much...pain."

Leaning back yet again, her expression now vacant, eating herself up with guilt.

Several days had passed since Julia's surgery, but he had fallen unconscious despite its success. Her mother stopped by to see her, but needed to leave just as soon as she did. Jamina promised her that she'd remain monitoring her daughter. She did nothing but stay by her side, day and night, anxiously caring for her. Some nights she did nothing but stare up from her cot at the room's speckled ceiling – counting 72 tiles each time. Her only form of communication was updates every so often from numerous distressed doctors and nurses regarding Julia's worsening condition. She felt herself marinating in the sterile hospital environment, escaping only for short walks around the healing gardens. Spotting the roaming patients in their hospital gowns was like a wake-up call, shaming her back into the dreary room. She was tidying up the room as usual one afternoon, in the middle of opening the curtains, when she heard a whisper so quiet she thought she had imagined it.

"Jamina...where...ah...where are you?" 11 days had gone by before Julia had awoken. "Yes, yes, I'm here!" she said, almost screaming. Scrambling over, she noticed her small gesture to come closer and leaned over.

"How's the baby?" she breathed, her pale lips curled into a weak smile.

The question in and of itself had paralyzed Jamina. She had no clue how to respond; was she even in the position to do so? What right did she have? She thought back to her mother and how it must have been for her to bear the knowledge that had so long agonized her. Her mother, the beautiful bystander. She wondered how many women could have been warned if she had only spoken up. But...what would have become of her mother then? Would her voice have reached the masses? Or perhaps would she have been silenced by Father? By Grandfather?

She thought of Samantha's missed calls the day Julia collapsed, of her final call after the talks. Furious at first, but she laughed while informing her of the agreements in which they had settled for 1.4 million dollars. She was ultimately satisfied with it all, but it had only infuriated Jamina. The goal she had been working towards for so long, the evidence she risked getting caught for was sidelined the moment Julia needed her. The young woman, now situated before her, continued to stare expectantly. Her hopeful, naive eyes were so painful to look at. Jamina's legs gave out. She hit the ground hard, startling Julia, and began to weep. She clenched her chest, rocking back and forth on the hospital floor, completely and utterly defeated before finally admitting to her sister-in-law that the baby was dead.

