

Those eyes

Chapter 1 : Remember me?

Dear Lilian,

I hope this letter finds you in the best of spirits. Since our last catch up in prison 10 years ago, we haven't been able to keep in touch. Pleased to meet you again.

So let me ask a question I've been dying to ask for ages. Remember me?

Oh! Probably not, but don't worry. It's a huge game of chess that's being played.

You are still confused, aren't you? You have no idea what's about to happen. The moment of truth is yet to come.

Love, XOXO.

It was 17 minutes before 6 AM. A peculiar envelope slit from the front door. From its cover, it seemed like someone had written a love letter because it had red hearts all over the place. I do not understand love. I think love is overrated : it can create an unhealthy fear in those who are around you. For instance, my mom claims to love dad, and vice versa, but they always argue about something.

My name is Lilian. I know all species of tigers in the world and I love carrots. I also love math, physics and neurology.

Before I start writing about the murder mystery I am solving, I need to explain some facts.

1 Neurology is the study of the nervous system of the human brain. I love neurology because you get to find diagnosing problems that are evident. Neurology is always straight forward. There is no confusion. With the knowledge you have, you either find a disease in the brain or you don't. It's fairly easy to understand.

2 I do not like talking to people. In fact, I cannot talk to people. I cannot find the words to say when I'm in a conversation. Humans are complicated, we never know what they actually want because they always twist their words. That's why I love science. I still have some friends though.

17 I am writing a mystery novel because something petrifying has happened to one of my friends. I am trying to solve the mystery myself because I like my friend.

13 Let's go back to this morning.

Chapter 2 : Tea and Blood

This morning, 3 hours after 6 AM, I was at a friend's house for a birthday party. And yes I do have 1 friend. We were all in the living room. My friend's mom was bringing us some tea and biscuits. While all the others were talking to each other, laughing and having a good time, I sat in the corner of the room, all alone. I don't like when there are too many people, especially people who I am not comfortable with.

Suddenly, we heard a thunderous noise from the kitchen.

We all rushed to the kitchen to see what was happening. Arriving at the scene, there was total chaos. Screaming filled our ears, with red and blue flashing in front of our eyes. The room was splattered with crimson, red streaking down the walls and pools of metallic liquid on the floor. There lay the birthday girl, my only friend. I was dumbfounded by this because surprisingly, I found the same letter I got this morning beside her. Frightened, I quickly slid the letter in my pocket. Then I dashed back home.

Chapter 3 : Detective in disguise

I ran as fast as I could. My heart was making lub-dub sounds. I couldn't breathe. A heartbeat is a two-part pumping activity that lasts approximately one second. When blood accumulates in the upper chambers (the right and left atria), the heart's natural pacemaker (the SA node) delivers an electrical signal, causing the atria to constrict. I know this because I am into neurology. And when you are interested in one particular medical field, it becomes inevitable for you to be interested in other medical fields. That is how I know exactly how the heart beats.

As I was distracted by my heart beat, a stranger walked past me. She was a relatively typical teenage girl. She had black curly hair, with hazel eyes. I felt uncomfortable because she was staring at me. I remembered about my tiger dolly in my pocket. I took it out as I was rushing towards the door. When I reached my door, simultaneously, the stranger cleared her voice.

"Hey", she asked.

I did not reply. I usually do not reply to strangers nor do I talk to them. However, she insisted on her words and asked once more, but, this time with a louder voice.

"HELLO?"

I had no other choice but to reply.

"Hi. I don't talk to strangers by the way", I responded.

"That's okay. I was just here to say hello because I moved into this apartment today!", she affirmed excitedly.

I ignored her and walked past her, still holding tight onto my tiger dolly. There are nine subspecies or types of tigers such as the Bengal, Indo-Chinese, South China, Amur, and Sumatran tigers. I love tigers. Some of them are in extinction now which is really sad. Tigers help me calm down as much as math, science and neurology do.

The next day, I woke up with a strange feeling. I got out of bed and decided to go out for some fresh air. I put on my favorite pair of sneakers with tiger printings and I opened the door. Right in front of me, was standing, the exact same teenage girl that had talked to me yesterday. I was petrified.

Chapter 4 : Fake Crime

Another letter.

Dear Lilian,

I hope you are doing well. It's now time to unwrap the promises we have buried in the abandoned past 15 years ago. I'm sure you understand what I'm talking about. Now keep your words.

Best Regards, XOXO.

Chapter 5 : Partners in crime

I know I stopped at the teenage girl in front of my door and jumped right into the letters. But it's to show how important the letters are. To recap a bit on what's been happening, I, surprisingly, became friends with the teenage girl. Turns out she has a lot of similarities with my dead friend. I could go on and explain how I became friends with her when I usually don't talk to strangers, but that's not important. All you need to know is that now I'm friends with her, her name is Umbra, I told her about my friend's mysterious death, I still get eerie letters and Umbra is willing to help me find out who the letters are from and what the letters are about.

On Thursday, at about 6 in the morning, Umbra and I went through all the letters. We found out 3 things in common :

- 1 All the letters are written in black
- 3 All the letters finish by an "XOXO"
- 5 All the letters have a tiger drawing on the envelope

At first, we didn't know what that meant. But Umbra started to search "tiger logos" on Google. Astonishingly, she found the same tiger drawing in a yearbook of a school called "Lisha highschool". I was in awe because how could Umbra find the tiger logo right away within a minute? How was that possible? Before I could even question myself, Umbra interrupted me.

"OMG Lilian. LOOK! You have the yearbook in your room. You've never told me you went to Lisha highschool", cried Umbra.

"I don't. What are you talking about? I'm so confused. For some reason Lisha highschool seems familiar... OH WAIT. That's my mother's highschool. What is this all about?", I answered.

"I don't know. Let's find out", she responded.

Umbra and I went up on my bed and opened the yearbook. Suddenly, an image of a letter flashed in my brain.

"Umbra, I feel like I have forgotten something. It was something about the day we first met. The day you were a creep trying to talk to me. What can it be?", I asked.

"Maybe something about the letter?", she replied.

"YES. I saw the exact same letter besides my dead friend the other day. It was super weird because I got my first letter that same morning. I never opened that letter. We should take a look at it first", I said.

I reached out for the letter on my desk, inside my secret box and I opened it.

Dear, Lilian.

I believe it's the second letter you're getting today. What a day! First a letter, second a friend's death then another similar letter? What a coincidence. Well, let me tell you something. Something about your mom. Kennedy innit? Well I was a good friend with Kennedy, she was lovable, adorable and sweet. Might be wondering why I'm talking about her.

Well, you see, maybe everything is intertwined. The crime, this letter, your mother and, indeed, you. The clock is ticking. You must be fast.

XOXO.

Chapter 6 : Eyes' off the scene

Umbra and I went silent for a few minutes. Why was the letter talking about my mom? I had a headache. I knew the letter was about to reveal a dark secret but I didn't know it was about my mom. Going back to the first letter, does that mean my mother went to prison?

Speaking of the devil, my mom came into my room. It happened so fast I didn't have time to hide the letters and her yearbook. Mother came near us. Her facial expression slightly changed. It was as if she was trying to stay calm, but I could tell she was panicking inside.

"What's going on here?", mom asked.

"Nothing.", we both replied.

"Do tell. What are those letters? Why are you guys looking at my yearbook? What's going on? Tell me!", cried mom.

There was no going back. Umbra looked at me, with a worrying face. I gently nodded as a sign of "I can handle this" and handed my mom the letters.

"Mom, I have been receiving anonymous letters. Umbra and I were just trying to figure out what the letter was about. Then, we saw a tiger drawing similar to the one on your yearbook front page.", I explained.

"I don't care about what you guys were trying to do. Promise me you will never open the letters ever again. Next time you get those letters, give them to me. I'm going to burn them. People are fooling with us. It has nothing to do with my highschool, the yearbook and myself. I don't know what the letter is talking about. We shall never let kids' jokes distract us"

"DDDDRRRING"

Promptly, we heard the bell of the front door. Mom put the letters aside and went to the entrance. She opened the door. The police were here.

"Police. Open the door"

Chapter 7 : 3 words : bravery, courage, hope

Mother opened the door and the police barged into the apartment. The police explained that I had to go to the police station because I was a possible suspect for being the murderer of my friend. The police added that the victim, my friend, was found to be choking on water before getting stabbed by someone.

When they investigated the scene, they found peanut oil on the table and in the water, yet, the victim's parents had told them she was allergic to peanuts.

"I am so sorry for the little girl's death on her birthday. In fact, her parents and I were close friends. So were our daughters. But why is my daughter a suspect ?", mother questioned.

"Let us explain. We have found a photo of your daughter holding that same peanut oil on the table. We need to investigate and your daughter has to cooperate", the police answered.

My heart was pounding so fast. Faster than ever. I, once again, hold on tight onto my tiger dolly. I was shaking. Fortunately, Umbrella held my hands and whispered, "three words : bravery, courage and hope is all you need right now. Meet me after the investigation, we can continue talking about the letters and about how you feel. I promise that you will be proven innocent and we will find out the truth about those letters. We will find the murderer ourselves". I nodded and followed the police.

Chapter 8 : Hide and Seek with my nightmares

I was at the police station. One of the police officers came up to me with the peanut oil and sat in front of me. I think he was a profiler. They infer the character or behavior of a criminal by psychologically and statistically analyzing evidence or crime patterns left at the crime scene.

"Are you familiar with this peanut oil? We have a picture of you holding it. Did you put peanut oil in your friend's cup?", interrogated the profiler.

"No.", I replied.

"Oh. So it's just a coincidence how you held the peanut oil and put it back on the table. No one else touched that peanut oil since it was at the exact same location you have put it down. And then there's a murder where the victim has been suffocating then stabbed to death?", affirmed the profiler.

"Yes. I don't know who killed my friend. I was holding that peanut oil because I like peanuts. That was for myself. I put peanut oil in my water to drink it and I never gave my cup to anyone. Then, I put it back on the table.", I responded firmly.

"Young girl. You don't know what you're putting yourself into. We are going to keep an eye on you. You will have to come to the police station to have discussion sessions with me.", said the profiler.

I nodded and went outside. My mom was waiting for me with tears in her eyes. It was a long day for me. I felt like I could faint any second.

Chapter 9 : Crack the codes

Three days had passed since I went to the police station. The investigation was ongoing and I was still a suspect. Umbra was next to me, trying to figure out who was trying to frame me, what the letters were, the connection of the letters and my mom and if this whole thing is a sequence. I mean, so many abnormal things have been happening in the past few days. What if all of this was related?

"Lilian, don't you think we should go ask your mom what all this is about? I mean, it's strange that the letters are pointing to your mom. Plus, her reaction was definitely suspicious. Why would she get mad?

We don't have a choice anymore. Let's go ask for a proper explanation. If we solve this mystery, we might be able to find who the murderer is", said Umbra.

We walked up to my mom's room and knocked on the door.

"Mom", I asked.

"Yes Lilian. Need anything?", she replied.

"We just want to talk. About the letters...", I uttered.

"What did I tell you? No more letters. We're done with that. We need to find a way to prove your innocence. The police think you're the murderer. That's insane", she answered.

"Mom. Listen please. Are you hiding something?", I asked again.

"LILIAN STOP NOW.", she screamed.

"Mom. Please tell us what you know. Maybe all of this is linked. Umbra and I have been talking recently. We think someone is trying to frame me. And that person could possibly be the one sending us letters. Before we can figure out what is going on, I need to know what happened to you in the past and if you have anything to tell us. The letters are clearly addressed to you, directly. The highschool, the tiger logo, maybe you know something? Anything?", I pleaded.

"Lilian, go back to your room. Enough with your detective game. Umbra, you go home as well.", mom refuted.

Unwillingly, Umbra went home and I went to my room. I lay on my bed with my favorite book about tigers. Started to read a couple of pages when my phone started beeping. I grabbed my phone and saw that it was an email. I went to gmail and opened the mail. There, I was stunned by what I was reading.

Chapter 10 : Framed

As I read the mail, my hands were shivering, my eyes were wobbling and I felt sick. I sprinted to Umbra's house to show her what I was looking at.

When I opened the email, there was a video of me quarreling with my friend. The victim of this murder case. In the next email, there was a photo of me putting peanut oil into my friend's cake. To clear things out, I did once, come to blows with my friend, but that was a long time ago and it was for a group project that she had not done. However, the photo of me putting peanut oil into my friend's cake seemed edited. I knew it was edited because I never put peanut oil into anyone's cake.

I was having a mental breakdown since that gave me enough motive to be seen as the murderer. I knew what was coming. Before I could even take a breath, I heard the police siren from afar. I knew they were looking for me. I had to hide.

Chapter 11 : Chest of lies

“Here comes the police Umbra, what do I do? I’m not the murderer. You believe me right. I didn’t kill my friend. I have to admit, I did not enjoy the party, but, I would never kill my friend, my only friend”, I cried.

“Lilian, relax. I believe you. We should go hide. I know a place”, Umbra assured me.

We both sprinted to the safe place Umbra was talking about. I felt thankful to Umbra because she was here the whole time. I would never be able to handle this on my own. My instincts knew my mom was looking for me. But I decided to not let anyone know where I was hiding. Not even my mom. We stayed there all night, hoping the police wouldn’t find us.

The next morning, when I opened my eyes, I saw a letter laying next to me.

Dear Lilian,

I hope you are doing well. I’m guessing you saw all the mess you have made. I realized your mom didn’t tell you about what happened to her 15 years ago.

15 years ago, I was best friends with your mom. We were always together, always caring for each other just like you and I right now. When we were in Lisha highschool, as you guessed, we did many naughty things together. Long story short, we ended up going to jail together. I still don’t know why we ended up in jail because all we did was play around to be honest.

Anyways, after we went to jail, your mom and I made a promise to always be there for each other. One day, we decided to break out of jail. We started making plans just like in Prison Break. When we were finally ready to escape. Your mom betrayed me. We were supposed to leave secretly during the cleaning sessions in jail, but she didn’t. (Of course it’s not as easy as it seems) When we promised to do that together, your mom betrayed me and did not leave prison.

I ended up getting caught (obviously, thinking about it now, I was dumb, young and broke which is kind of funny). Therefore I ended up staying 15 years more in jail and your mom left jail 15 years earlier than me.

You must be wondering why I’m telling you about this aren’t you. I’m sure you won’t believe me but let me tell you something interesting. I killed your friend. Why? I wanted to take revenge on your mother for breaking faith with me and acting like an innocent b**. So I chose to frame you in a murder case because I know that would break all your mother’s faith and spirit, to see you go to prison and ruin your life, just like hers.

Oh, and don’t try to prove yourself innocent. Everything is under control. You will soon go to jail just like your mother. You will follow her dirty path.

XOXO, much love.

Chapter 12 : Loving someone means

After reading this, I was so frightened, I couldn’t even move. I didn’t know what to do. I decided to wake Umbra up.

“UMBRA WAKE UP. LOOK WHAT I FOUND”, I sobbed.

“What again Lilian?”, she asked.

“Have a look at this letter.”, I told her.

I couldn’t read Umbra’s facial expressions. She didn’t seem surprised at all. Then, a bright light flashed into my eyes. My phone was buzzing again.

“Your phone.”, said Umbra.

I unlocked my phone and checked what caused the buzzing. Then, I noticed a news article “A murderer, a woman with a 10 years jail experience has confessed her crimes”. There was a photo of a lady on the front page. She seemed familiar.

“Lilian HAHA that’s your mother. What is she doing here HAHA. So funny.” laughed Umbra.

It was at this moment, I realized the article was about my mother, who confessed to have killed my friend at the birthday party. My heart dropped. What was all of this about? What was going on? Did my mom take my place as the “murderer” to protect me? What is “10 years jail experience”? So is the letter telling the truth? Questions altered my brain but it was already overloaded with all the stress and confusion. I stopped working, just like a robot out of battery. And I fainted.

Chapter 13 : Blurred friends

When I opened my eyes, I was locked in a dark room. I couldn’t move my body because I was tied against a chair. In front of me was Umbra and another woman, smirking at me.

“Umbra, are you okay? Are your hurt?”, I asked.

Umbra didn’t respond, instead, she burst into laughter. I was bewildered. I felt even more sick. I didn’t have my tiger dolly or my science book with me. I couldn’t stay calm. I couldn’t breathe.

“Umbra, why are you laughing? Where are we?”, I asked again.

“Lilian, you clearly don’t know what’s going on. Think again. Am I your friend or just a creep? In fact, I am a creep.”, she answered.

“I’m not your friend Lilian. This whole time, I was trying to set you up to help my mom take revenge on her filthy friend”, she continued.

“How do you think I right away knew the tiger logo was on your mom’s highschool yearbook? You think I’m a genius do you? Oh, and how do you think you got the letter the day we hid from the police? How do you think I knew the exact same place to hide you from the police? Why do you think I helped you all along this journey? It was a frame you Lilian.”, she asserted.

“Oh, poor Lilian. You feel betrayed don’t you. Oh and little update on your mom, she’s in jail, for the rest of her life. It’s disappointing how you didn’t end up in jail. I would’ve loved to see that happen.”

Then, Umbra walked past me and reached for a knife on the table. She took the knife and smiled at me. I didn’t know what to do. At this point, I gave up. I stayed still.

“Lilian, scream. You’re not fun.”, she said. “I WILL END YOU”.

Umbra, the friend who was with me all this time. The innocent teenage girl who wanted to become friends with me was gone. She approached me, with her little knife still smiling at me. Simultaneously, I heard a loud noise from the door.

“BOOM”

“Police are here. Stop the movement.”

15 police officers were pointing guns at Umbra and the other woman. They quickly handcuffed both of them and let me free.

“Young lady. Your mother has told us everything. During the last investigation, our profiler thought it was bizarre for her to be the murderer. No evidence was pointing to her. So we had to check again and investigate again. After listening to your mom’s story, we have come to the conclusion that your mother and you are innocent.” the police said.

I was still shaking, trembling and panicking. Nothing made sense anymore. I closed my eyes and went to sleep.

Chapter 14 : Life is a big joke

When I woke up, I was at the hospital. My mom was next to me, looking after me with a worrying look on her face.

“Lilian, sleep more. You must be tired. War is over”, she said.

I felt a strange feeling just like the day I first met Umbra. I don’t know why but I felt like I had to check under the pillow. There lay a letter, a familiar yet horrifying letter. From its cover, it seemed like someone had written a love letter because it had red hearts all over the place.

Dear Lilian.

I hope you are doing well. This is Umbra. I am currently writing this letter before I go to jail. I know you might wonder why I’m writing to you again. I know you don’t have a good memory with letters and hearts. But I want you to know that even though I was helping my mom, I really appreciated the times we spent as friends. I know this may sound funny to you but I really did enjoy spending time with you.

But, forget about it. I know I messed up. I regret a lot. I’m not asking you for forgiveness. I just wanted to let you know. I will take responsibility for all my actions and spend time in jail praying forgiveness to you even though you will not and should not forgive me. Who knows, maybe you will and we can be friends again?

Even though I messed up, I want to make 1 thing clear. I hope you become a neurologist or a zoologist because really, I think you’re brilliant. You’re incredibly smart. So smart that I struggled lying in front of your face and struggled trying to frame you. Come visit me one day if you feel like it. Not forcing you of course.

XOXO.

My life is a big joke. I don't know what will happen now. But all I know is that life is back to normal again and that it will go on and on.

THE END