"The Photographer"

September 3rd, 2024

Today is the first day of the school year and already something big has happened. That big, is Amber Fierce. She's a foreign exchange student from France. Where in France, couldn't say. She never offered to tell us what city or her former school's name. But forget that. Can we talk about how **ridiculously** gorgeous this girl is? I didn't exactly get a gook look at her when she entered the room, as I was busy doing... well... nothing really. School isn't my favorite place to be. It never has been. The only thing that makes my days there worthwhile is Dejah.

Dejah hadn't arrived yet and I was waiting for her to come through the door, so imagine my shock when I dared to glance up and saw a completely different person whose beauty rivaled Dejah's and every girl in the classroom. I quickly looked back down at my desk and occupied myself with my camera. The lens was dirty and I needed to turn the dial so it would change the aperture and shutter speed. While everyone was starring and ogling Amber, I was cleaning my camera lens and making proper adjustments.

I may not have been looking right at here, but I could hear what was going around me. The excited whispers of the boys, who were already betting to see who could score with her. The impressed and jealous sighs from the preps, like Rivera. Keeping my head down and gaze on my camera, I could tell just by the way I heard Rivera's pointed manicured nails tap slowly on the wooden surface of her desk, she was not happy with Amber or how Amber managed to wow the entire class by simply entering the room and introducing herself.

I was so absorbed in what I was doing that, I didn't realize that Rivera was trying to get my attention. She called to me a little louder, snapping me out of my trance and I glanced up and asked her what she wanted. She was sitting across from me in her desk and seemed... angry at me for some reason. What did I do now? And why did it always seem like I was the only person in our class that provoked her?

"Maxine, for the third time, put the camera down and look at me." She spoke to me softly, so she wouldn't draw the teacher's attention to our conversation.

I sighed and didn't bother to apologize for my lack of awareness. What was the point? Rivera would still find a way to be mad at me. I gently scooted my camera off to the side, folded my arms on top the desk and gave her my full attention, something I rarely ever do, but considering that I didn't want have anything to do with Amber and the hype going on at the moment, Rivera was truly the better option. Now that she wasn't being ignored, Rivera asked me something

I never would have anticipated in a lifetime. Rivera Chance, asked me if we could be friends and then wanted to know if she had permission to add me as friend on Facebook. I blinked rapidly, unsure of what to say to her request, but once I recovered from the initial shock over what Rivera did, I cleared my throat and nodded timidly to indicate that it was fine.

However, I didn't have Facebook. Too much toxicity and drama. I never intended to get a Facebook and I told Rivera that. She shrugged and moved on to the next social app that's been taking the internet over lately. TikTok. I shook my head, saying TikTok was loud, silly and overrun by influences or bias, racist influencers and I didn't want to deal with either. She rolled her eyes and muttered,

"Do you have Telegram, at least?"

Now that I did have. We took out our phones and connected on Telegram, then quickly put our phones away so Mr. Noble didn't jump on us for using them during school hours. Yeah, our school actually doesn't tolerate students being on their phones and some teachers require students to put their phones in a box until the end of the class period. Thankfully Mr. Noble didn't make us do that—not yet. Then again, we didn't give Mr. Noble a reason to be that strict. Right after Rivera and I turned around in her seats, Amber was still standing up front beside Mr. Noble, just standing there and scoping out the seas of faces before her.

I noticed that she tried to make eye contact with me, but I wasn't going to look at her, so I instantly bent my head and began to put my camera away in its bag, when I heard Dejah approaching. Rivera muttered behind her hand to me,

"Hey Maxine. Your beloved is here."

I knew how Rivera meant that and it wasn't playful or wholesome at all. Almost everyone who knew me and Dejah in this town assumed Dejah and I were homosexuals, but they were wrong. My church family knew we weren't, but it wasn't like anyone in the church was rushing to defend out sexuality when it was questioned, which I found odd and cowardly of them to be honest. I learned a while ago to ignore the staring from onlookers and blatant lies from the bullies. Ever since I broke down and cried over being severely bullied for showing Dejah basic affection last year for once at school, those bullies have oddly backed off.

When I see some of the bullies, like Greg Winters, the Lumberjack quarter back of our football team in the hallway with his back pressed against his locker with his bros, he pales and quickly looks in the opposite direction. Not just him. The entire football team that mocked me and said terrible things about me and Dejah turned their heads or bent them down, almost as if they were ashamed. Another time Dejah and I were spending the night at the treehouse at

Purity Falls, I was nursing a bruise on my face and arm with icy hot patch and an ice pack.

Amy Smith, the cheer leader captain, approached me in the locker room after P.E. and basically pressured me until I confessed, I was closet lesbian and Dejah was my... um... I'm not going to say it. As a Christian, I shouldn't use profane language and even though I know the b word represents a female dog, it won't sit right knowing how much people have abused that word so I won't write it.

Anyway, Amy grabbed my wrist, dug her nails into my skin until I bled and I jerked my wrist out of her iron grip, only for her squamate to come up and ram me into the wall of the shower. Amy wanted me to admit it so and was recording me, half naked in the shower, being held against my will.

I um... didn't do anything. I didn't fight them, I didn't defend my innocence because I was so tired of explaining that Dejah was a platonic soulmate and that our affection wasn't sexual. Amy wasn't going to believe the truth if it was staring her in the face.

I dipped my head and turned it head to the side to avoid looking at her and she used that moment to lower her phone and use it as a brunt weapon on my face. She struck me so hard with the side of the phone's case, I cried out from the pain and my eyes swelled with tears. She would have done more to me I think, but the bell rang and our P.E. teacher, Mrs. Dawson came into the locker room looking for Amy. Amy and her lacky bolted from the shower area and out to meet her.

Dejah wasn't school that day. She and her mother were out of town at a doctor's appointment and Dejah warned me that she wouldn't be at school, but would meet up with me at the treehouse afterwards. That night in the treehouse, the bruise worsened and the right side of my face was starting to show signs of swelling. Anytime I touched it or moved my face muscles it ached and was tender to the touch. Right before going to bed, Dejah came over to say goodnight. When she leaned in to kiss me, she kissed the cheek Amy struck and I cried out and instinctively shoved her away from me so I could cradle the left side of my face. Upon further inspection, she saw that my wrist was red and the skin was friction burnt.

Dejah. Was. Livid. She wanted the names of the people who hurt me and her wasn't nice. She was serious, but I hesitated to tell her. She wasn't going to let it go, so in the end, I told her who did it. Ever since that day, when I see Amy or any member of her squad, they do one of two things.

Their eyes widen and Amy and her squadmates quickly turn around and walk the other way or they bow their heads and avoid making eye contact with me and don't move from where they are until I leave the classroom, hallway, lunchroom or anywhere where we're all together.

I can't prove it, but I believe that Dejah is responsible for the changes I've noticed at school. Part of me wants to reprimand her for this, yet I am genuinely moved by her desire to protect me. I'm also convinced that Rivera was aware of the consequences faced by those who bullied me or suggested that my relationship with Dejah was sexual. She must have realized her mistake at that moment because, just as I was about to head to the front to greet Dejah, she gently grasped my wrist and tugged me slightly towards her.

Her eyes flickered to the left as she pressed her lips together in regret. After a brief silence, she softly apologized for her insult, confessing her jealousy regarding my soulmate relationship with Dejah. I blinked in surprise at this revelation about Rivera. Although I wanted to sit back down and delve deeper into this intriguing development, Dejah called my name. The moment she did, the entire classroom went quiet. Rivera released my wrist, allowing me to leave her so I could walk between the desks towards Dejah. I moved to the front, passing Amber without a glance. Dejah, however, did not ignore Amber. She turned her head, scrutinizing her with a playful smirk before posing the obvious question. She said,

"You new here? Never seen you before. Name's Dejah Chamott. I would welcome you to Purity Vale School and all, but you seem like the type of girl who would detest dishonestly, so let's try this. Welcome newbie, to the realm of (---). It's a real (---)show. FYI, the food, if you can even call it that, (-----) sucks. Do yourself a favor and bring your own from home."

Mr. Noble should have gotten onto Dejah for that jabbing remark against the school, but he subtly cleared his throat and nervously adjusted his polka dot tie, saying nothing. Hmph. Why does the teachers fear Dejah so much? She's not that scary and it's not like she's the principal, but for whatever reason the teachers yielded to her and rarely corrected her for this sort of stuff that would land anyone else in detention. Right after Dejah so nicely introduced herself and berated our school, she proceeded to compliment Amber's elaborate outfit and asked her what her name was.

Never mind that Amber's full name was written on the chalk board in large, fancy cursive and that she was wearing a "Hello, My Name Is: Amber Fierce" sticker on her chest. Just as Amber was going to respond, I walked right into Dejah's open arm that was waiting for me, giving no consideration to their conversation. I didn't mean to do it, it's just so natural for me to gravitate to Dejah when she beckons me and I act sub-consciously. Every. Single. Time.

Dejah wrapped her arm protectively around my waist and pulled me closer, shifting her attention from Amber back to me. Normally, she greets me with air kisses, but today, she kissed my cheek and then playfully brushed her lips over the spot she had just kissed. It tickled and made me giggle, which was exactly the reaction she wanted from me. Aware of our audience, I gently pushed against her shoulder and pointed out that homeroom was nearly over and it was almost time to head out.

On cue, the bell chimed, but everyone remained seated and none of the students dared to leave their seats. They sat there, their gazes moving onto Dejah, as if to ask her for permission to leave. Mr. Noble continued to sit calmly at his desk, saying nothing and made no move to tell the students to leave. I could feel Amber's gaze sizing up the situation with Dejah, even with my back turned to her. I kindly reminded Dejah we needed to get going and to join me if she wanted to hear the latest updates about my family.

Dejah threw her head back in hearty laughter and graciously offered her arm for me to take, confirming she fully intended to leave with me. I linked my arm with hers and together we exited homeroom and stepped into the hallway, leaving a bewildered Amber behind us. I could sense her confusion and I caught her asking Mr. Noble in the background,

"Are those two dating or just putting on a show?"

Dejah and I heard Mr. Noble's comeback to Amber's question and it made us grin.

"I...I... you know what? Nobody truly understands what they are or how to categorize them. Each time someone assumes they're homosexual or bisexual, it gets dismissed and my students end up in the counselor's office, scarred for life. One thing that is well-established and clear is that Maxine is Dejah's territory and Dejah will not tolerate anyone who harms her verbally or physically. My suggestion? Keep your distance from Maxine and refrain from bothering her about

her relationship with Dejah so you can have a happy, stress free high school experience."

Should I feel bad for traumatizing Amber on her first day? I mean... why? Seriously, why should I? Am I to hide my affections for Dejah or how I act with her because Amber is the new girl? Do they expect me to stop being my authentic self for Amber's sake, someone who means absolutely nothing to me? I could have resisted Dejah's invitation to the hug, but then she'd look at me funny and later ask me why I rejected her hug. Not too sure if Dejah would like me choosing a stranger's feelings when we both have made it clear to everyone in the town that we will always choose each other. Not matter what. Amber will soon see this for herself and I think it's better she figures it out on her own.

January 7th, 2025

Dejah... it's been so long since I've seen her, texted or called her. I'm sure she thinks I've abandoned our soulmatehood, but what did she expect? Her father molested me in **her** house on a day that should have been the best day of my life. I tried to tell her about it so many times.

I cried way too many times, dreading what she would say and her reaction to the truth behind my family's reason to move away from Purity Vale and to Paris. I did not make this decision, something I think she tends to forget. My father, Rhett Sarsfield, made that decision for the both of us.

It couldn't be helped. Dejah's dad, River Chamott was the mayor at the time and the entire community backing him. Including the police department, our school board, even Crazy Jimbo. Crazy Jimbo was and still is convicted felon who murdered seven women, six cats, twenty horses after he anal raped them and one sea turtle, whose shell he ripped out and then ran over multiple times. When the criminal scum

of Purity Vale endorse a politician who convinced the prosecutor to drop his charges, you know you've lost.

And sadly, that's what happened to me, my court case and my family. No one would believe me. My parents did obviously! But Dejah was my soulmate! She should have believed me, but... but I didn't get to talk to her about my court date or the events leading up to it. My biggest mistake and regret was cowering away from confessing my side to her in private.

I wrote letters, but never sent them or even tried to leave them in her locker at school. I wanted her support so badly, but couldn't fight for it the way I know she'd fight for me, had my father molested her and she without a doubt, would have approached me in person, at school, at church, the park or our secret base tree house across the railroad tracks.

She would have made it her mission to tell me. Why? Because she's bold, daring, strong, deviant... everything I'm ***not.*** When I close my eyes and see her face, I know my home is no longer in her embrace. When I think about the incident and my lack of action, I don't deserve her, her affection or her ahavah. I grip this pen as I write down my thoughts on the matter because I selfishly still want all those things with her.

But my court date on December 12th changed us and how we saw each other. My confession before the jury, the judge and of course, Dejah, shook everyone who knows her father. The looks of disgust and anger were expected from the public. I was ready to see their reactions.

Nothing could have prepared me for Dejah's reaction. Betrayal, anger, confusion and rection was staring at me. Despite having medical evidence of River's "residue" in me, bruises on my body where we hit me and a damaged vagina, guess what? Everyone, including Dejah, were convinced I raped the Mayor, wanted attention and set him up for failure. For Dejah I understood why she sided with

the jury and the judge. River was rich, handsome, smart, had no record of doing wrong to anyone since his family came to settle in Purity Vale.

In other words, he was the town's perfect angel sent from Heaven to protect them all. River had no past of bad behavior and his side of the story was very convincing. River claimed he was blackmailed while he was drunk, that I took advantage of his condition for money's sake. I mean, it is true that he was drunk that night and it is true that my family was on the verge of filing for bankruptcy, but I would never and I mean ***never*** force River to have sex with me for those reasons.

I'm just 15 years old and only recently had the sex talk with my mom one week before this all went down. What really bothered me is how River said I would have harmed Dejah if he didn't sleep with me. So again, if Dejah is mad at me for not keeping in touch, I have valid reasons, all of which are justified and yet... I miss her. Deeply. We've been apart for only a short period of time, but it feels like such a long time to me.

I keep writing her letters, fully knowing I won't send them. Let it be known Dejah, if you ever find this journal and read it, that I can't get you off my mind and how we left so much undone between us. I want to be in your arms when I'm scared and rest against you when I'm limp with exhaustion, like when we were kids, but I can't face you and admit these feelings. I can't face you. I'm still upset and hurt over what happened that day and can't deal with your choice to side with your father.

Maybe that's selfish on my part, maybe it's wrong for me to criticize you without considering your perspective in the court room and how it made you feel. Maybe I would have done the same thing if my father was Mr. Perfect and the people were beguiled by his presences and you said something that destroyed my entire view of him? My father meets the profile, he is pretty good at this Christian life he believes in, so I guess if the roles were reserved, it would be no different for me and it would be you writing letters to me?

All the letters I wanted to give you I keep in a box in my room and don't send out. All the unsent text messages and "forgetting" to return your missed calls makes me feel like I'm constantly letting you down, but in reality, I'm scared.

I'm scared and I don't know what to do anymore or how to talk to you without believing you will erupt on me and guilt trip me into confessing a lie when I know the truth of what happened between me and River. Here, in this journal is the confessions of the things I didn't do and still fail to do. A, I didn't talk to you about what happened before my court date.

B, I didn't take your feelings into consideration and expected you to simply support me and choose me, the soulmate, over your family. C and lastly, I didn't tell you that you were to be a sister to the child I miscarried at ten weeks. These are the things I didn't do and now you're there in Oregon and I'm in Paris.

Now that the fog has cleared my mind, I wish you were here, so you could help me through the grieving process. Alan, the name I gave your brother, deserved to live and meet you, but my body wasn't strong enough to carry him full term.

I think it was a combination of the emotional trauma I suffered when I was carrying him, the emotional weight of my court date, the stresses of packing and moving and the flight to Paris was too much on me. I blame myself for the miscarriage and at times I wonder if you would blame me too for being so weak... but I wanted my son to live.

I may not have liked what brought my son into this world, but he wasn't the issue His conception was shameful, but he was innocent and I would have loved him just like any mother would love her child. It wasn't his fault his father did something so horrible.

I was going to tell you about Alan once he was born and at least a month old. I was going to force myself to reach out to you. You had the right to meet your brother, even if it was only over a Facetime Video call. I was really looking forward to that day so much. I wanted to show him off to you so you could the resemblance, which I'm certain he would have looked like you. How could he not have? You truly did deserve to meet Alan, but I think Alan would have been the only reason you would truly accept what happened in that court room and what your father did to me. When I think of this as a possibility, it makes me sad to know that it would have been your brother to convince you, not your soulmate. Hmph. Soulmate.

Are we still soulmates, Dejah? It's been almost a week now since I miscarried, and they are letting me out of the hospital tomorrow, but it won't be my parents picking me up though. Mother arranged for me to go live with her brother and some other distant relatives while she and father try to get jobs and a house for us.

Until they do this, my uncle and the other relatives agreed to give me a fresh start and care for me while my parents get things set up. Since I left the US and got settled in Paris, a total of three months have past and nothing between us has changed. With this rift between us and with everything that has happened to me, to you and being an ocean away now on top of my inability to face you, I doubt we're soulmates. If anything, I think we're more like strangers.

Honestly, I can't miss a stranger, be mad at a stranger long term or desire to be loved by a stranger, so I think I'll keep my longing to always have you in my life will be a treasured secret between me, you (who will never know) and Elohim. I may be at odds with Yahweh, Ruwah and Yeshua right now, but if there's anyone who can bring us back together and restore what has been broken—it's Them.

Copyright Disclaimer