

## Dear tomorrow, when will you arrive?

When Malcolm took his last step on this earth, staring at me as the bullet shot cleanly through his heart, I couldn't help but feel nothing. He staggered helplessly to the ground and with what must have been the last of his strength, he reached out. His fingers grappled the air in front of him, but as one would expect, there was nothing there. That was how Malcolm died. In disgrace; on a dirty and cold floor in the cellar of an unimportant building that was soon to be demolished. He died just another foolish man who fell victim to the ungrateful. He had ceased to be my husband. He was no longer a son or a brother. Malcolm Skinner died and no one of importance would mourn him.

Once upon a time, I must admit, I found him a good man. The first time we met, he spoke with such conviction of what was ahead. Our fathers were sitting next to us but he still spoke of our children and our picket fence. He nodded quickly when his father mentioned the minister post with the Skinner name on it and then launched into a conversation of appropriate destinations for our honeymoon. Meeting Malcolm had made me look forward to our marriage. Not a word left his mouth without intent and no action was without passion. At the end of it all, there were only ashes left because Malcolm burned too bright.

Home with Malcolm became a quite spacious flat in the capitol's highest and most ostentatious apartment building. We moved in the day after our wedding. I spent the greater part of three years inside those walls. I would speak to my brother and tell him about what I suspected to be content while looking out over the city. Every evening, Malcolm and I would watch TV in the living room and listen to the news of economic growth in the rural parts of the Nation. I would tell my husband to have a good day at work in the morning. He would ask how the script for the Announcements for Safety in the Nation was going over dinner. Laying in his arms under grey covers, he would speak of another life.

'One day, my love, we will raise our children in a free nation,' he would whisper in my ear. 'They will never know of friends who never existed or Appropriate Employment Placing. They will have it better.'

'My dear, how can zero unemployment be bad?' I would laugh in that coy way I knew he found charming. 'We are lucky to have it so very *good*.' He would scoff then hug me tighter. He fell asleep soundly. I did not.

Three years was all it took for Malcolm to trust me with his deepest, darkest secret. For three years he only spoke of this wonderful life we would lead if things were better. He whispered and mumbled after dark had fallen about this imaginary future without the help and support of the Nation we only had to serve in return. But after three years he confirmed what I already knew. Over dinner, he told me: 'Claire, there is something I have been keeping from you. There is a part of me I have yet to share. I... I feel that you are on my side in this, and I want you to join me.'

'What in the Nation's name are you talking about, Malcolm?' I cried.

‘I want to free this Nation from tyranny. The Nation Leader is a dictator and we are complicit in the oppression of so many of the Nation’s *dear citizens*,’ his voice went up and his tone turned sour at the mention of the general population, ‘because every report and every article is false. We are being fed propaganda and out in the villages, well they are being fed bullets.’

When I was little, my father used to say I would never have a future in politics. He said I was too clever for it; too much intelligence laced with spite and not enough charisma to cover my deviance. It took me twenty years to fully understand what he meant. It only took me three years to realise my husband was not worthy of me. My husband believed me to be daft and shallow. Malcolm thought no higher of my mind than that of a common man. These two realisations, two sides of the same coin, took place simultaneously.

‘Oh, Malcolm,’ I started, a plan worthy of my intelligence already forming in my mind. ‘I am on your side! Every time you speak of a free world I have been too scared to say anything. I thought you might have been testing me! Both your father and mine are such important men. It all made me awfully hesitant about your intentions. Yet, I cannot keep the happiness all your talk of a better future brings me... Introduce me to your world, my love! I want to be part of it!’ Malcolm looked at me with such adoration then. He picked me up and spun me around. He did not stop until we were both dizzy, him from happiness and I from the spinning.

Adoration had been a look later mirrored when he looked out over his makeshift revolutionaries and as they gazed back at him. He preached government reform and they cried justice for every man, woman and child. Anne screamed for affordable food, Nick argued for fair wages, and Robert conjured up a city without levels dictated by right of birth. These were the men and women Malcolm Skinner presented as my equals.

Thus, Malcolm Skinner's passing meant nothing to me. Adoration turned to betrayal. I recognised it in the cold, lifeless eyes of my former lover; in the scathing looks from Anne, Nick, and Robert as they passed me, led out in handcuffs and littered with bruises. Anne even went so far as to spit at me. The disgusting glob of saliva hit the dark grey uniform of the guard holding her. He grabbed her arm roughly.

‘There’s no need to act that way. We’re all just following orders,’ he said, with no particular inflexion or engagement the little microphone attached to his helmet could pick up on. The guard pushed her towards the entrance, keeping her face away from himself. This position, however, made it impossible for him to see her face. The bulky guard could therefore do very little when Anne took a deep breath and let out all her grievances towards the world.

‘I have yet to meet a man lacking what he believes to be justification,’ she screamed at the top of her lungs, ‘I wanted food for my family! I wanted medicine for my children! I wanted a *fair chance*! In no other place in this world—’ a punch to her stomach and her speech was over. Five or six of Malcolm’s followers were still in the room and their eyes were locked on the ground. Their passion had suddenly disappeared, it seemed. Maybe they would find it again when this future they held so dearly finally ascended from the sky.

Another group of guards and three men in True Uniform entered as the last of the true traitors were led out. I knew two of the men. The fourth had a purple band around the arm of his black uniform. It was discreet, had been made to be so. Immediately, my back was straighter than before and my feet together. The Guard Authority turned when he spotted me. He promptly walked over and I made sure to focus on the spot to the right side of his chin.

‘It is a pleasure to meet you. Your father speaks very highly of you.’

‘It is my honour, Guard Authority.’

‘You have done the most excellent work, Claire. This helps keep our Dear Nation safe. If we do not eradicate all true traitors the consequences would be dire. I am sure you can imagine the disorder that would subsequently follow.’ he said in a solemn yet stoic manner. He was a man that demanded attention and his words indicated that he was well aware.

‘As a reward for your helping to keep the Nation safe and so that your talent will not go to waste, we have a highly regarded position for you,’ spoke Mr Sawyer. He was a friend of my father’s – as was Mr Withaker, standing a step behind him – and I knew him quite well. ‘The Office of Safety and Prosperity will gladly accept you as a valued colleague at the Department of Acute Internal Safety. Not many display the characteristics necessary.’

Both Mr Sawyer and Mr Withaker were smiling. They were proud.

‘I was not recommended for the post on my Appropriate Employment Placing evaluation,’ I said in the most apathetic tone I could conjure in this moment of joy.

‘Appropriate Employment Placing is not applicable to this post,’ said Mr Whitaker nonchalantly, ‘You will be given an apartment closer to the Office and it is urged another union is arranged. This man will also be working at the same Office to ensure no information is handled with negligence... Oh, and Claire? No person named Skinner has ever existed. I am certain you understand.’

I nodded and saluted. My three superiors left again. I was pleased.

I would work surrounded by my minds equal to mine. I would soon have another big apartment and another husband. My husband would not speak of our children, but not of a fabricated image of family. My husband would speak of our perfect life, but not of living anywhere other than the safe arms of the Nation. My husband would be *better*. I could see a formidable future ahead of me. Perhaps it was good that I had married Malcolm Skinner. A woman of lesser character would perhaps have been persuaded by his words. She would have stayed with him and let him fool others with his empty, delusional words. Had it not been I, the Nation would never have discovered my full potential and I would forever feel guilty that I could not aid the Nation. Whatever was a picket fence anyway?

The last I ever saw of Malcolm Skinner was his corpse. It was carried out to be cremated along with all evidence of him ever being. I would be coming home to chaos. My apartment would be turned upside-down to make sure nothing pertaining to all this was there. As I stood in the now empty cellar my desk and records were being moved to my new workspace. In their villa, my mother and father would have been informed of all that transpired and several men were already in the running.

Tomorrow will be a new day for me and for the Nation. Tomorrow, life goes on in just the way that is right for me and for the Nation.