

foreordination

The eggs were boiling. Despite the name, boiled eggs are never meant to be boiled, that much she knew. Leia dropped the encyclopaedias she was shelving, and stampeded through the house to turn off the abandoned stove, trampling over cardboard moving boxes scattered in the hallway.

Phew.

What did the recipe say again?

Oh right. She had to let them cool.

Lola looked around in her new kitchen, littered with half empty boxes. There were three-no, four- boxes on the floor, two stacked on the little round table, and one peeking out of a cabinet.

She might as well start unpacking them while she waited for her eggs.

Leia picked up a heavy box labelled "cutlery" and opened it. Inside, instead of a miscellany of tableware, she found a large bounded book. In a clean calligraphy, there was just one word:

"Life"

Interesting. Leia wasn't an 'artsy' type of person, certainly not to the extent to create a sketchbook-or whatever this was.

However, she was the curious type. Curious enough even to kill the cat.

The first page, in the same beautiful calligraphy, was labelled

"School"

There were scraps of test papers and pieces of report cards, showing a straight A student from the same public school that Leia went to, and marks from the university of her dreams.

She too, was a straight A student, and the classes and timetables glued to the scrapbook showed uncanny resemblance to the ones she had. The teachers' names were cut out, but the grades, the classes, they were all the same. On the same light-blue paper, with the same font. She was certain that all her school records were in that public storage unit that her mom had rented for her. So what was this?

Leia turned the page, a little baffled.

The second one was labelled

"The Guy"

This one was covered with photos. Photos of a boy with a nerdy look, but with a certain appeal. Wide smile and dark dark brown eyes framed with glasses. There were mostly solo pictures, the photographer catching him in candid moments. The Guy taking a walk, The Guy mid-yawn, The Guy with his eyebrows furrowed, reading a romantic novel that the photographer definitely forced him to read.

However, tucked half-underneath another photo, there was a small photo-booth picture of the couple.

Leia looked closely, and saw someone half-buried in a hug with The Guy. It was her. Perhaps in a couple years, with a tint of lip balm and longer hair, but it was her. Her with the same slightly slanted eyes, the strong nose, even the birthmark on the tip of her right eye.

"Huh"

She turned the page.

"Star Wars"

Which showed the girl at Comicon in various years taking pictures with various characters from Star Wars. There was a Yoda that was definitely The Guy, many Chewbaccas and R2D2s, with a Princess Leia in the middle. The girl, always dressed as Princess Leia.

Leia. Her name.

Leia was getting excited. Perhaps she had uncovered a prophetic book, or a dark piece of magic, where her life was already laid out before her, like a path that she just needed to walk. Maybe this was her life that God had dropped from Heaven, in the form of a scrapbook. Maybe she was meant to follow it, see where it led her.

/// two years later ///

Leia picked up her century egg from the cheap Chinese place close to campus. Take-out bag in one hand, celebratory cupcakes in the other, she headed back to the dorm. End-of-year results had just come out, and she was eager to get home to open her emails.

She walked into the dorm to meet thirty other freshmen. It wasn't a party, per say, more like a gathering of nerdy friends. They all looked at her expectantly as she set down the food and pulled her laptop out of her backpack.

"Oh my gosh, if he gives me less than an 85 I swear"

Everyone gave a tense laugh. It's obvious who she was talking about, but there was something in Leia's eyes that didn't seem quite like she believed her words. Her face was too carefree, her body too relaxed for someone who cared so much about grades, and for a teacher so strict.

Leia remembered the scrapbook in her kitchen stashed underneath her cot in the dorm. Each page was filled with a prophecy that painted her mind, which spoke to her.

"School"

Her fate was already predetermined. There was nothing stopping her from dropping the Economics course next year to pursue Physics, or from getting that 95 in the course everyone dreaded. It was already laid out, all in the scrapbook.

There was a moment of tense silence as everyone opened their emails, and then sighs of relief, of disappointment, of despair.

Leia however, was quiet. Because, in Times New Roman font, under the dreaded teacher's name, was her grade.

'94'

Maybe she was wrong, maybe the scrapbook was nothing but a scrapbook. An illusion like pulling doves out of a hat. Then Leia recalled the pages again, the pages she pored over which she was certain were her destiny. Those pages were old, she told herself. The smudge after the nine? Probably a four, just misinterpreted.

Yes, that's what it was.

Leia turned around to join the cheers, grabbing herself a purple-iced cupcake.

Victory

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"Kirsten's having a party, wanna go?"

Leia walked down the path to the library with her friend, textbooks and her egg sandwich in her arms.

"I don't think so..." Leia looked despairingly at the amount of work in her hands

"Take a break for once, it's the college life!"

"Literally no one says that. Besides, it's *university*"

"Same difference. Please? Just for a little bit. It's like the Pomodoro method. You've been studying for five days straight, it's time to take a break"

Leia gave her friend a look. "It doesn't"

"I *know* it doesn't work like that, but you get my point. When was the last time you even saw Kirsten?

What's the point in having friends if you don't ever see them?"

Leia rolled her eyes, masking the unintended sting with annoyance.

"Fiiine. I'll go. But only until nine-thirty"

"There really is no winning with you, is there?" her friend laughed.

Leia stayed a lot longer than she intended. There was a crowd of about fifty people crammed into the Common Room, beer sloshing onto the hardwood floor, a game of DDR in the back corner. Leia leaned against the couch with her red Solo cup filled to the brim with apple juice, watching a guy in glasses play a particularly difficult song on the DDR machine. He tripped over his feet as they crossed over to hit opposite tiles, grinning in embarrassment, and Leia caught his face.

"Oh my gosh" she whispered.

It's not just a guy, it's *the* guy.

The Guy.

Without a second thought, Leia set down her cup and walked up to the station,

"Can I have a go?"

//thirty years after that//

The Thanksgiving chicken was burning. Leia leaped over the chair, reaching over the counter to stab the 'end' button on the oven. Letting loose a string of expletives, she opened the door to find a charcoal-black hunk of meat.

"What the hell, scrapbook," she raged.

Her life had revolved around the revered scrapbook she had found so long ago, from her academic life, to meeting Andrew.

She had stayed with him for ten years, desperately trying to find the connection that the scrapbook foretold of. She tried to persuade him to bring her to arcades, to take photobooth photos, displaying affections that neither of them felt. She made him go on ski trips to Quebec to take photos on the mountaintop, after which he insisted on taking the chairlift down. She dragged him to Comicon every year like a clockwork, loaned money from the bank to buy those stupid costumes, and sat through the festivities with gritted teeth.

A decade of searching for a love that was simply not there.

There were the other pages too. One called "Vacations" in exotic places that Leia couldn't afford, but still insisted on. One called "Hobbies" with photographs of music artists and quotes from books that Leia had never even seen.

And now her chicken. A picture on the page "Family" of her holding a dark-brown chicken, hosting the Thanksgiving dinner at the house she purchased.

But there was no dark-brown chicken, only a hunk of black. There was no Andrew, and though they had been together for so long, there never was. There was no PhD, because Leia had failed out of university in her third year, head aching from the courses that she never wanted to take.

Leia let the blackened chicken drop on the floor.

"I'm done"

From now on, she would choose her own destiny.