



Faithfully Caged, graphite
Lindsey Blumenfeld

Fate or Mistake?

Josephine Clark

My shoulder grew tired from carrying the grocery bags full of milk cartons. A brisk breeze hit my face as I watched a few leaves fall off of a maple tree, the first signs that fall was approaching.

It was only a few blocks back to the little townhome that managed to house six kids along with our foster parents. Three of us didn't even count as kids now that Jack and Alyssa are 16, and I'm 17. Let's just say we go through groceries fast, but I'm always first to volunteer to go to the store to pick up more. I'll take any excuse to get out of that chaotic house.

As I walked forward at a sluggish pace, I heard the rhythmic noise of heels clicking on the concrete behind me. A woman hurried past, knocking my shoulder. She didn't apologize and continued at a speedy space onward.

I wasn't bothered by it though. She was clearly in a rush to somewhere more important than the grocery and back. The clicking of her heels grew fainter as I

watched her strut farther down the block. Her blonde hair was pinned in a high bun, and her gray business suit fit her slender stature and contrasted the black heels she managed to effortlessly walk in.

Suddenly, the woman bumped another man, and a small, black, leather wallet fell out of her blazer's pocket onto the sidewalk. I expected the man to pick it up, but he kept strolling along, unaware, as did she.

"Hey!" I shouted. "Excuse me! Ma'am!" She didn't slow down. I picked up my pace to get to the wallet before anyone else did. But when I reached it, the woman had already crossed the street, and the cars roared past me under the green light. *Ah, crap.* I looked down at the wallet in my hands. It was real leather — nicer than anything I had ever owned, but I was going to return it to her.

After I unloaded the groceries and made sure the house hadn't gone to hell while I was gone, I went outside, the only place I'd have a little bit of privacy. I knew all my foster siblings would be nosy and force

me to keep the wallet and all the money inside for the family. "Finders keepers" they'd say.

I sat down on the dusty brick steps that led up to the back door and pulled the wallet out of my pocket. I opened the front snap. It was stacked with twenties, a Visa and Master card, a Bed Bath and Beyond card, and... *Ah-ha!* A driver's license.

Name: Samantha Fetzner. Samantha Fetzner. No, I thought to myself, There's no way, but I couldn't stop my heart from beating faster.

I never knew who my dad was. All I know is that he left my birth mom early in the pregnancy, so I've always had my mom's last name, Fetzner. I'm Johanna Fetzner.

I know. There are plenty of people out there who have the name Fetzner, but I couldn't help but notice she had the same pin-straight blonde hair and blue eyes I have, and she lives in New Jersey, where I was first put into adoption and where I've lived my whole life in foster care.

I had a chance, a chance to meet my mom, a chance to have some sort of family. But what would I even say? What if she never wanted to see me again? I've spent my whole life being angry at this woman for leaving me with no family. But now, I just wanted to meet her.

I knew no one would notice if I was gone, but I left a note on the counter anyways saying I had gone for a walk.

I'd have to take the bus to get to the address on her license, the nice side of town.

Once I made it to the subdivision, I found my way to a large brick house with perfectly trimmed grass and a driveway leading up to a two-car garage. A black Lexus SUV sat in the driveway along with bins of chalk and a blue razor scooter. *Kids*, I thought. I could hear my heart pounding in my chest as I gripped the wallet in my sweaty hands. *Don't chicken out*, I thought. *Seventeen years...seventeen years you've waited.*

I walked up the steps to the door. It was almost dark outside now, and warm yellow light streamed out of the windows. My hand trembled as I reached out to ring the doorbell. After some 30 seconds, the woman appeared as she opened the door. She looked surprised to see me standing there.

"Oh, hello, sweetie," she said. She was still wearing

her gray work suit but had thrown an apron over it with splotches of tomato sauce across the front.

"Um, hi," I said in a quivering voice. Suddenly, a tall man who looked to be in his late thirties appeared at the door. He wore blue jeans and a collared shirt and was holding a little boy in his arms. The little boy had the woman's blonde hair and blue eyes and attempted to hide his shy smile in his dad's shoulder. My eyes darted back and forth between Samantha, the father, and the child. *Look at this family*, I thought. *This happy, perfect little family.*

"Um...I just wanted to return this to you," I said and presented her wallet. "You dropped it on Blackwell Street earlier today."

"Oh my goodness!" She exclaimed, placing her hand on her chest. "Thank you so much! I thought it had been stolen. This so sweet of you."

"Oh no worries," I said, forcing a smile. She shook her head at her husband as they chuckled in relief. She looked back at me, suddenly taking notice that I was here, alone, in the dark.

"Gosh, you came all the way over here to give this to me. Can I give you a ride home? Where are your parents?" My heart sunk to the ground. *If only you knew*, I thought.

But I couldn't do it.

"No no, I don't live far. My uh, my parents are waiting around the block," I said.

"Well, here." She took the credit cards and ID out of the wallet and handed it to me, full of cash. "I want you to have this - for your honesty. It's the least I can do."

"Really, it's OK," I refuse.

"No, no, I insist. Please." She forced the wallet into my hands. I nodded appreciatively and thanked her, turning before she could ask any more questions. Tears welled in my eyes as I cut through the grass back onto the street.

I couldn't do it. Not today. There's a reason why she didn't want me. There's a reason she hasn't contacted me in 17 years. Maybe her husband doesn't even know. I would be such a burden, such a bomb blowing up in her perfect life.

Maybe when I'm older, I'll go back. When I'm living on my own and can support myself. Maybe she's not even my mother.

Maybe it's not fate... just a mistake.

"I had a chance, a chance to meet my mom, a chance to have some sort of family. But what would I even say?"