

# Madison

She lives on a long green block. The kind where all the houses eerily look the same, with their Lexus's and BMWs parked safely in the driveway. The kind that turns white in the winter. Perfectly white, white that sparkles in the sun but doesn't melt or muck with dirt or dog pee until the exact date of springtime. But then again, for a change of scenery you could always pan around to that old house. The one with the yellowing windows, and the browning wood that reeks of old books and death. The one that stands out menacingly at the end of the block. It's the house that kids from the high school, conveniently placed down the street, try to break into every year when the carved pumpkins come out, and the perfect green leaves begin to dust the ground in a reddish-orange array. But maybe they bring the bolt cutters out in the hot July sun, where layers of sweaters and long sleeve shirts won't encumber their movement if the blue and red sirens were to resound.

Then again how would *she* ever know what kids her age did? She was just the girl that lived in the old house.

Honestly only her best friend and family had been inside, so who was anyone to judge it? Other than the fact that it stood out amongst all the other clean homes like a sore thumb.

It wasn't the dirtiness of the outside, or even the old wallpaper that was practically jumping off the wall that bothered Madison. It was the fact that she was all alone there. With her parents in and out of the small suburban town every other day on business, it was just her and Oliver. Just her and Oliver who *really* knew the old run-down house's secrets.

No one knew. No one knew about the old blood stains that littered the upstairs carpet from an "accident" that had happened the first week they moved in. Or the section of gutter pipe that was bent perfectly so it formed a stripe of mold every time it poured hard enough to rattle

[Madison's bones](#). She never got around to fixing it though. Maybe it was because she was secretly hoping one of her parents would get around to it before her. Or maybe she was just lazy.

## Oliver

Oliver's house was nice. So nice in fact many people wondered why she even spent time at Madison's. But they didn't know.

She lived on the other side of town. Although it didn't really make much of a difference what side of town you lived on. It was all the same. [White polished windowsills, garnished with fancy metal window boxes full of flowers. Stone-paved driveways all leading up to a fancy SUV.](#) In a neighborhood where everyone thinks being 'different' is painting the door a different primary color, it's kind of hard to tell where you are.

The thing is that Oliver was always bored. Bored of her house, of her neighbors, of her classmates, and Madison kept things less boring. So did her house.

They met in 7th grade; it was all over an assignment. Oliver had gotten mad at Madison for not completing her share of the work, resulting in both of their grades dropping. She'd gone over to her house that day after school and immediately regretted it.

Oliver stood furiously at the dark door, not even processing the [eerie dirtiness of the home](#), her emotions barely being contained by her small figure.

It was Madison who had opened the door. [Standing there in the big entrance all those months ago looking gaunt and miniscule next to the greatness of the dark colors behind her.](#) She looked frightened to even be in Oliver's presence.

She had gone into that situation with fury but didn't even have the courage to open her mouth.

All that came out was a small release of breath followed by a “I’m sorry. I’ll come back another time.”

Madison’s face had matched Oliver’s confused expression, but it soon changed to something that seemed like fear once booming footsteps echoed throughout the grand entrance. A fake sheepish smile spread across her face quickly, “See you tomorrow Oliver,” was all she said before the heavy door slammed shut and shouting resumed from behind the grimy walls.

Ever since that interaction Oliver had made it her goal to help the small girl in the dark house.

## Madison

She got home late that night. So late that she almost missed her 10:30 call with Oliver. They’d made a habit of talking every night if, of course, she wasn’t knocking on Madison’s door with her sweet soft smile that always managed to cheer her up.

Madison was halfway up the stairs that only creaked conveniently at night when she heard her father’s harsh words cut through the dark orange glow of the house.

“Madison,” was all that was said at first. That had always bothered her. When they shouted for her without following up, as though she would wait on their every call. But when she continued further up the stairs he called again, “Madison. Downstairs, now.”

With a heavy sigh, she dropped her things, and turned on her heels.

“I know you’re not coming into my house at this hour,” Her father’s arms were crossed so tightly that Madison thought he might actually pop a vein.

“It’s barely past ten dad,” She started protesting, but immediately knew that was the wrong response. Her father was a firm man, and even with the best argumentative statement, he would not be able to be swayed on his own beliefs. So, for her to suggest that he was wrong in

any way, was an automatic pathway to defeat. Especially with the power he held over the family, including her mother.

His eyes looked like they were going to pop right from his head. Madison often imaged the most extreme, detailed images of him when they fought. But this time it was accurate.

“Barely? Are you serious right now? After school I expect you to be in your room and doing your homework by the time me and your mother get home from work.” It was obvious when he turned to Madison’s mother that he was asking for backup, but she simply looked the other way in solemn, clearly displeased with the way he was dealing with the situation.

Her mom continued to fidget with her hands, the tension in the room growing at a rapid rate.

“About that honey...” She didn’t look at Madison when she started talking. “Me and your father are leaving on business tomorrow.” Her mother had an empathetic tone, as she finally looked up from her hands.

She’d hit her breaking point. “I figured,” The words practically fell from her mouth. Crafted in her heart, not her mind. That was new.

It had been the third time that month that her parents came to her in their first living room, the one on the first floor, to tell her they were going out of town again. It just so happened to be that they were missing possibly one of the most important days of her life. One of her drawings was being featured in an art gallery downtown. But her parents didn’t care.

“Excuse me?” Her father practically wheeled on his feet, snapping to face her. He hated when an attitude was being raised.

It took her a couple deep breaths before she found the courage to start this long-awaited conversation. “It’s been what? Months since we had a family dinner? And how long has it been

since you guys showed up to something that was important to me?” She almost stopped there, but she cut her father off quickly, “I thought family was something that was supposed to be there for each other, for what was important in each other's lives?” She couldn't help it. The tears started to spill from her eyes, wetting her face in an uncomfortable pattern.

“If you don't like us going out and making money for you and all of your needs, you can leave,” Small droplets of spit flew out as he spoke.

Madison was a bit taken aback, never had he ever suggested that she leave. If anything, he was the one always trying to get her to come home earlier and stay home when he had her there. She blinked slowly, choosing her words more carefully this time.

“Well then,” She stared into her father's eyes, not daring to back down from him, “maybe I will.”

## Oliver

When Madison showed up on her doorstep that night, Oliver knew. She knew that she had finally achieved her 7th grade goal of helping her best friend through the dark orange glow of her mysterious dark house, and to find a family in her own.