



My buzzing phone jolted me from my sleep at midnight. I stabbed my finger on the screen to snooze, but I couldn't find the right button. My fingernail hit my watch and bent. Biting my lip, I tried not to scream and wake the others. Five single beds sat in this room, and five more in the next. Resting against the headboard, I yawned and looked at the blinding light of my screen. The buzzing stopped.

"Don't do this again." Greta, who I shared a bed with, rolled onto her stomach and yawned.

"Are you going to do it?"

"No. I have grandkids to feed."

"So?"

"They need me here."

I rubbed my eyes and wanted to flip her off. "No one else is going to do it, so that leaves an old bird like me." After I walked to the closet stuffed with wrinkled shirts and torn jeans, I pulled out my pink housecoat, letting the pile of nightgowns topple over.

"Yasmine, is that necessary?" Shelby hissed like the snake she was.

"Mind your business," I said.

I stomped out of the room and downstairs to the basement. I collected three packages of red rose seeds out of a box on top of the dryer and stuffed them in my pocket. The ladies hated that I kept the seeds in the open, but nobody was going to look in a home with sweet old ladies for contraband. They already knew where the bad seed was.

When I went to the front lawn — and when I say lawn, I mean a small patch of dry dirt — I got a whiff of boiling sewage and asphalt. The sky was black, as it was day and night. Skyscrapers outside of my neighbourhood housed the rich citizens who caused the toxic explosions in year 2043. The rest of us resided in cramped houses with a minimum requirement of six people to a property. Most places had at least eight to ten, not including their children.

I pierced the dirt with a gardening trowel until I found softer ground. With both hands, I scooped out the dirt and placed it on the hard surface beside me. I wanted to use a flower pot, but my last one broke when I was running from the police. After creating a pile, I pushed the seeds inside and packed down the dirt. I pulled a flask filled with water out of my housecoat pocket and emptied it onto the soil.

"My efforts are fruitless." I sighed and laid on my back beside my seeds. The police sirens echoed, getting closer with each second. The neighbours exited their homes with crying babies and grumpy husbands to see the crazy lady get hauled off.

Officer Brennon tore down the street in his cruiser, screeching to a halt in front of my house. He leaped across the sidewalk and hovered over me with his taser pointed at my chest. "We can't keep doing this, Yasmine. If you dig up the contraband now, I can save you a night in jail."

"You're late." I patted my hand over my mouth pretending to yawn.

"Believe it or not, I have other crimes to police. Should I put the cuffs on or will you?"

"I'm too weak to stand. I'm a frail woman."



Brennon rolled his eyes and gestured for two officers to hold me up while he cuffed me. I kept my body limp, leaning to one side or the other to make it difficult for the men.

"Don't bring back diseases," Shelby said as Brennon ducked my head into his car.

I spat at the ground, wishing it would bounce up and hit her.

I woke when Brennon tapped on the window of the cruiser. He led me to the cell and slammed the door. Plopping my saggy bum on the steel bench, I saluted Brennon. "I like this cell. Very roomy." I stretched my arms and ignored the water dripping from the ceiling onto my head.

Brennon gripped the bars. "I want to keep you here alone so you can reflect on the damage you're causing to the peacefulness of our society."

"Living on two meal credits a day and using technology that we have to make our own spare parts for. Cramming ourselves into homes that can barely fit a family of five, never mind the amount of people I live with. Staring at the tall buildings knowing that those tenants are using the last of our precious resources without realizing the repercussions. Is that peace to you?"

He hung his head. "I'm doing the job I was trained to do. What do I have to do to make things easier?"

I crossed my arms and stared him down. "Let me plant my flowers."

He shook his head. "Goodnight, Yasmine."

Scrunching up my housecoat to use as a pillow, I thought about the women I left behind who never stood by me. The women I used to have a book club with before entertainment became a luxury that few people could afford. Shelby was the first of us to sell her home to the Skyscraper People.

"You were always good at herding sheep, Shelby," I said before falling asleep.

In the morning, Brennon drove me home and walked me to my doorstep. "I'm assuming I'll see you again tonight?"

"Why don't you keep me in a cell, Brennon?"

The bags under his eyes darkened. "You're not a murderer."

I stuck the key in the lock, and he walked to his car. "You can make a difference, Brennon. Open your eyes."

"I open them to watch you."

Shaking my head, I went inside.

My phone buzzed at midnight. I turned off the alarm and held the phone. I stared at the time, then looked around at the sleeping women. My body didn't want to move. It was tired. Tired of fighting alone. I flipped off my blanket and sat on the edge of the bed. My flowers called to me. The seeds from last night were surely dug up and burned by the other officers. Tears formed, and I laid back in bed. "I'll close my eyes a moment longer."

"Yasmine, wake up!" Brennon's fingernails dug into my skin as he shook me. How long had I slept? With my limbs warm and heavy, I tried to sit up and face this mad man. He lifted me by my t-shirt and threw me into the wall. "What are you planning?"



I scanned the room of concerned faces and the two cops in the doorway waiting for a command.
"What are you talking about?"

"Don't play dumb. I waited for you for two hours. You didn't come outside, so that could only mean you're planning something dastardly."

I grinned. "Dastardly? Like planting a tree?"

Everyone gasped.

Brennon furrowed his brow and released me. I smoothed the wrinkles of my shirt, and he clenched his fists.

"I will arrest you if you don't tell me the truth," he said, "I know you're planning something. I'm sick of your jokes and this tired routine. What is your end game?"

"All I want is to plant a flower or two and bring some light to a crappy household."

He took a deep breath and his expression softened. "You're breaking the law. You can't plant any unauthorized foliage on residential ground. There are designated areas for that."

"Regulated by the Skyscraper People. How do you know they're still maintaining those areas? Have you seen them yourself?"

"Well, no..."

"Exactly. Are you going to keep arresting me for trying to promote hope?"

"False hope. We can't have people thinking..."

"What? That the world can be beautiful again?"

He scratched the back of his head. "We need a solution, Yasmine. I can't come here every night. I have a family to care for. The wife doesn't want me working night shifts anymore."

"I have the perfect solution." I snatched Brennon's gun from its holster. His lackeys charged at me, and I shot the scrawny one in the chest. The bang rang in my ears, and the man fell in slow motion clutching his wound. Brennon and the other cop collapsed at his side. The women surrounded me, their faces outraged or devastated. I saw their lips moving, but I only heard ringing.

I retreated to my bed, letting my legs dangle off the side. The noise returned simultaneously. Shelby screamed like a banshee. Brennon called in the attack on his radio. The other women cried and whispered to their whimpering grandchildren. I clutched the sides of my head.

While I thought about what my new prison cell would look like, the room quieted. The cops stood over the still body. The women left the room.

Brennon trudged over to me. "Give me your hands."

Smiling, I put my wrists together behind my back. "Be my guest."

He cuffed me and read me my rights. I knew them by heart. He marched me through the house and towards his car. Red and blue lights flashed in my face and the neighbours' prying eyes glazed over with pity. I couldn't hear what they said, but the rumours had started. What had this crazy old woman done now?



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"You see what you've done?" I screamed at the neighbourhood, "You've sent me to prison with your apathy. I killed a police officer and I'll kill any one of you to get my point across." Brennon put me in the cruiser, glancing at me with disappointed eyes. Muffled sounds of angry citizens filled the air and tire screeches from news vans came down the street. "If only you had helped me," I whispered, "If only you had helped."