Fiction

All You Got was a Ring

By Kaitlin Schuler

Photo credit: Narvon Vacation Rental

Going to the empty cabin was hard enough, even five years later; now I have Jen's treatment journal to read through. I'm afraid of what I'll find in here, but I have to read it. She was my baby sister, you know? I should've been there to protect her when everything started falling apart, and I have nightmares about what she went through every night. Maybe it really was the doctor's fault, or maybe I'll learn things about Jen that will replay on the insides of my eyelids night after night. I have to read it, though. I blame myself every day and it should have been me. I was the bad sister, the one that our parents had no hope for. And now I'm the only daughter they have left. I owe it to her to read the final work she left behind, even if I'll be the only one to ever read it. There were demons in her head that no one could save her from, but Jen was still my sister. I should've been there. I should've…

February 3rd, 2002

It's winter here but I see no white. They turned the snow into fire so I can't go outside. They want me confined to this house so they can take me, too, when the time is right. The doctors say there is no fire and there is no "them," but I know better than to believe that. I'm tired of being in this house, all alone with these doctors. I've been here since November and I haven't gotten any "better." Nothing was wrong with me in the first place, only that I can hear voices that they can't — the voices that tell me that these doctors are bad people. The man's voice came to me again last night and reminded me that the doctors are part of the government experiments, too, and are going to hand me over once they think I am ready. That's why they are giving me the medicine that bites through my insides, to get me ready for the treatments that they're already giving Bobby.

I'm practicing kickboxing in the basement now so I can fight if they capture me; they're just happy I found some exercise that I "like." And then I can bring Bobby back and save both of us. He sends me secret messages through my engagement ring. Only when I go out onto the porch though, because the doctors can't see it then. And it has to be sunny, otherwise Bobby can't talk to me. It only sparkles in the sunlight, and that's the only time he can send me messages. He was the one who told me to get strong so I can fight when they come for me. I was scared and asked if I could get away from them, but he told me no, that they are working with everyone to take me next because they know I'll be good to test the vaccines on. That was all he said last time we talked. I hate being stuck in this cabin with the doctors, waiting for them to attack me, but Bobby can talk to me here. He couldn't when I was home in Toronto and I think that's what let the voices get to me. He always protected me from them,

but now they have him. I need to get him back.

February 6th, 2002

New doctor today. This one is a woman, and I think she might be secretly working against them and that she'll help me get Bobby back. The man's voice last night didn't like her at all. He kept saying, "Fuck that bitch. We will still kill you. She can't stop us." I got scared and tried to run, but they put a guard in front of my locked door, so I can't attack them while they sleep. They know I'm planning to fight them, but I won't do it yet. I want them to start the fight, so everyone knows I was right all along and not "crazy." This new doctor wanted me to write about what I see while I'm journaling today and I like her so I think I'll try. Her name is Dr. Holly Hockane and she looks like my friend from college. She isn't, though; I know that most days.

I'm typing this on the laptop that my parents gave me before they sent me here. They don't understand what's going on in my head either, and it pisses me off. I threw a pot at my mom when she told me I needed to stay with the doctors until I was "fixed." I was so damn angry that even she thought I was broken. I'm not fucking broken; they're going to hate themselves when they realize I was right and that the government has Bobby. She just shook her head and I snapped. I grabbed the pot of green beans from dinner off the stove and chucked it at her, hoping to knock her head off. It hit the wall instead, but that's how I got here. That and I tried to kill myself. Bobby wanted me to escape and said that was the only way. It didn't work.

So I see little red ants running around my fingers on the keyboard, trying to sting my fingers. I don't like working on here a lot but Dr. Hockane wanted me to try it. She said that if I work on the laptop more, then maybe the ants will find another place to live. I don't think so, because I see them on all computers and TVs, but I want to believe she will help me so I'm trying . I don't see much else right now except Jasper, my cat. He plays tricks on the bad doctors but those stupid doctors never notice him. He comes and goes from the cabin whenever; he has no problem walking on the fire, like he doesn't even feel it. He always comes back to sleep with me at night, and he tells me when he sees Bobby at the factory where they're keeping him. When the doctors attack me and I overtake them, I'll escape and find Bobby and his friends. Their captors control the fire outside for the scientists in the factory and when they die, the fire will go away. I want to just attack them now and kill them all, but Bobby says I need to wait for the right time. I wish the waiting didn't take so long.

February 20th, 2002

This is the first time I've written in two weeks. They tell me I had

an “outburst” the other day and tried to strangle Dr. Suthers when he gave me my medicine. I’m sick of taking all these fucking pills and I wanted him to know that. One of them is weakening my immune system, Bobby told me, so they can take me down more easily when the time is right. I feel like the time is coming, too — Jasper has been spending more time away from the cabin and I can see him running in and out of the flames, hissing at something chasing him. I can never see what it is though. I started screaming the other day because I could see Jasper’s fear out in the fire and when I wouldn’t calm down, they stabbed me in the thigh with a needle and I woke up the next morning in a room I had never seen.

You know what, though? I was actually *excited* for a second. I thought they had finally taken me to where they were keeping Bobby and I started begging for them to let me see him. A nurse came in who I’d never seen and shushed me like a child, setting a tray of lunch on my lap. When I looked down, I saw maggots crawling through my pudding, and chucked the whole tray at her back. I knew she was working with them once I saw the maggots; just another way for them to poison me and take me away. So on top of that and “attacking” Dr. Suthers, I’ve been confined to my room every day for two weeks. They let me out to pee and shower and exercise but that was it. I hadn’t seen Jasper the entire time and I was worried that they had taken them, too. He’s back with me now, but the voices were horrible without him there and without being able to get outside to talk to Bobby.

When I went out on the porch yesterday, Bobby was furious that I hadn’t gotten in touch with him and threatened to stop helping me. It made me cry and scream and the doctors took me back inside. I tried to keep calm today, which made the tics in my leg come back, but Bobby apologized and said that the scientists were trying a new drug on him that was making him angry and violent. I want to be with Bobby again, I just want to be near him, even if they torture me with those vaccines, too. I’m so lonely and no one ever visits, not even Mom and Dad. I didn’t expect Laurie to visit because she never understood me, she always thinks I’m making it up, but my parents were always there for me. Maybe Mom is still mad about the broken pot...

February 25th, 2002

The voices haven’t stopped and they’re scaring me again. Dr. Hockane said it’s okay to be scared, but she doesn’t sleep in my room at night, she doesn’t hear their heavy breathing and see the shadows with knives circle my room. I’ve woken up the entire house with my screaming the past five nights because they were trying to slash my blankets and drag me to the scientists. They were calling me a “fucking

coward" for not wanting to be a test subject in the sick experiments and told me they would cut every organ out of my body before taking my heart. I think anyone would scream. The nurse shushed me again though and told me the "bad dreams" weren't real, but I couldn't focus. The voices were all calling her Queen and bowing their shadows down on the wall behind her. I knew she was working with them, and the voices confirmed it.

I told Bobby today and he said all of them are working together, even *my parents*. He saw them the other day through a glass window in the factory where they do all the experiments. That explains why no one has visited me — they hated me for this "disease" and wanted to erase me from their perfect lives. They just wanted me to trust them so when this happened, it would be easy to take me down. Well, they're in for a surprise when I escape and save Bobby. We've got a plan now; I just have to wait until March 25th.

Their wedding anniversary — March 25th. I didn't even realize that had been the date that it all happened. The things my sister was going through…and I wasn't there. She terrified me, if I'm going to be honest. Jasper isn't anything new to me; he was around the entire time we were growing up. I think the earliest I remember him is when I was nine and she was six. We were playing with our dolls like always and she squealed in delight.

"When did Mom and Dad get us a kitty, Lauren? He's so dark, I love him!"
I had no idea what she was talking about, and started looking around frantically for some stray cat that had snuck into our living room. I couldn't find anything but she was looking at her lap and still had that silly grin on her face and said, "He's so warm! I'm gonna name him Jasper, okay? Like from that book Mom read us the other night." And that was it. I started to think my sister was crazy. She would play with Jasper all the time and see things that I never could, and I started hating being around her. Looking back, I was actually ***jealous*** *that she had all these "visions."*

There were some scary times, when the "bad" voices first kicked in during high school, but I don't think my jealousy ever really went away. She was bat-shit crazy in my opinion but my parents always loved her more, it seemed. It wasn't enough, I guess, since they abandoned her with those doctors in the middle of the Ontario forest in our family cabin. That shouldn't have surprised me, though; that was their way of dealing with their children. Buy them the most expensive gifts, send them to the most prestigious schools, pay for their happiness — and hope to God that it will make them wonderful people. Neither of us had real friends because we were the rich, snobby girls. People only befriended us when they wanted to use us for something, like concert tickets or fancy trips. We were really all each other had, until her

schizophrenia got worse and I abandoned her. Oh god, I wish I knew more about that disease then. I wish anyone would have known more. Maybe she wouldn't have died all alone in the forest, under the care of a bunch of phony psychiatrists who tricked my parents into thinking they were "the best." Mom and Dad always had the big bucks, but never the big brains. And their youngest daughter paid for it, with her life. Damn them.

I want to say that I would've helped her if I had known, but that's probably not true. She still scared me, up until the end. Only now am I really not afraid of her, now that she's gone. She was still my sister though, and she shouldn't have had to suffer with schizophrenia alone. If my parents hadn't been so worried about what their snooty, high-class friends thought of their "mentally disturbed "daughter, Jen could've gotten the right treatment. She could've taken her meds and gotten real therapy. I might still have a sister if my parents had cared about more than their money and appearances…

When Bobby came around, I thought he had "cured" her craziness. They were perfect together, and Jen ever stopped talking about the voices somewhat. Now I think he was just a really good actor; he must have figured out how to play along with Jen's episodes and get her to believe he saw them, too. I think he loved her too much to tell her otherwise; I still blame my parents more for Jen's death, but I kind of wish Bobby would have tried to get her help, too, instead of just showering her in love and hoping it did the trick.

Doesn't surprise me that she got even worse once he died overseas a year after they married…she never got to see his body because it was destroyed in the explosion, and her broken mind turned it into a conspiracy against everyone, particularly she and Bobby.

To think that everyone you live with, except this Dr. Hockane, was out to kidnap and virtually torture you…anyone would've gotten a little paranoid. I'm afraid to read this last month of journals, but I need to know what really happened. Not what my parents told everyone happened.

March 1st, 2002

It's getting closer to my time to escape. I just want to be back with Bobby and I can get him out of the factory soon, he just keeps telling me to be patient. Holly wanted me to read through some of my old work today, to see if she could identify any triggers of my "attacks." I did read through them and she said that when I read *Deadly Dunes* I began moaning like someone was stabbing me and throwing things at the shadows on the wall. Makes sense, since the war is where they captured Bobby and took him away from me. I don't remember any of this happening though, I must've blacked out again.

It's been awhile since my last blackout; I think it happened

during college. Laurie was yelling at me for not keeping our room clean again, and the next thing I knew I was laying on my bed feeling like I just woke up from a nap. Except for the fact that everything in the room was destroyed: the dressers were thrown to the ground, clothes strewn everywhere, curtains were yanked from the window, and my lamp was broken near the door.

My parents told me that I was too old for "tantrums" and needed to get myself under control or they would "get rid of me." They weren't kidding about getting rid of me, but I still don't remember doing any of those things that day. I guess I did, though; I must have let the shadows and voices take me over and control me. That's why I'm working so hard with Holly and on my kickboxing, so they can't control me anymore. I don't want to forget what I've done ever again. They don't get to have control over me.

March 5th, 2002

Holly — Dr. Hockane wants me to call her by her first name, so I feel like she's more of a friend than a doctor — said it's really good that I want to "get better," but I don't think there's anything wrong with me. I don't know why I'm the only one who hears these voices and sees the shadows, but I'm not sick. No one else wants to believe that the government would test cancer treatments on people. They don't believe me when I tell them Bobby was diagnosed with lung cancer before he left on his tour. They tell me they couldn't have sent him to war with a cancer diagnosis, but that's because Bobby hid it from them.

The man's voice came and told me that someone in Bobby's unit found out that he had cancer and was working with the scientists. So they staged the explosion so everyone thought Bobby died, but he came back and told me that he had been kidnapped and used as a test subject because of his cancer. I was furious and terrified for him and then the voices came back, mocking me, telling me their scientists were "treating him like the fucking animal he is" and saying, "That fucker deserves it, he was killing innocent people over there. He deserves to suffer. You know that." I saw the shadows come back and threw anything I could find at them. None of that was true; Bobby didn't want to kill anyone, he was just protecting his country.

After that, my parents made me move back in with them so they could keep an eye on me. I thought they would believe me but they just started treating me like a child, going with me everywhere and not leaving me home alone for any longer than half an hour.

That's when Bobby started talking to me more. He knew my parents were smothering me, and he tried to comfort me. But every time he would try to talk to me, I would end up crying and throwing anything at the shadows again

because I wanted to be able to help him but I couldn't with my parents always watching me. Throwing the pot at my mom was part of the plan to get away from them, even though I was genuinely pissed off. She was being a bitch and treating me like I was disabled again. They're the idiots, not being able to see these shadows and know what they're doing to my husband. But I knew if I acted like that toward my mom, she would panic and make my dad send me away. They never wanted people to think something was wrong with me — that would mean something was wrong with them, too. They told everyone I moved back in to save money so I could move to the US and work on my next piece in New York City, my husband's hometown. So Bobby helped me come up with the plan to show them that I was still "crazy" by their standards so they would give me some space.

I don't like that I spend all my time with doctors now, but at least they leave me alone unless they're studying me or doing tests on my "well-being." It lets me talk to Bobby more and figure out the plan to save him. I didn't really expect my parents to abandon me. They said they would come back once they believe I'm "better." That means I'll never see them again... Only twenty days left.

March 9th, 2002

I spent all of yesterday in my bed with the curtains shut and Jasper curled up on my pillow. He'd been gone for awhile, probably hunting out in the woods again. I didn't even want to talk to Bobby. Holly made me talk about my writing before Bobby was captured and about my suicide. She said she thinks the two are connected, but I tried to kill myself because Bobby said I could be with him then. I wouldn't really die, I would just join him with the scientists. But she made me talk about it anyways.

I hate talking about it. I'm not fucking suicidal; I wanted to be with my husband again and he himself told me that I had to kill myself so the scientists would come for me and bring me to him. It was after the pot incident, and was part of the plan. My parents had been talking for days about "what to do with me" and Bobby said it was taking too long. So he told me he heard the scientists say that they wanted me to test the treatments on healthy people as prevention. I was afraid that the scientists would hurt me but I love Bobby and I wanted him with me again. So that night I went to take a bath.

I filled the bath with lavender soap bubbles and relaxed for a few minutes before taking the steak knife out from inside my folded towel. Bobby wasn't with me then because it was dark outside, but I felt calm knowing that I would be with him soon. I took the knife and sliced across both wrists and watching the blood flow down my wrists and mix with the purple

tinted bubbles. Then the shadows came.

I saw them slide in under the door and up through the toilet drain. I could feel one slither through the drain at the bottom of the tub and curl it's fingers around my toes. I was getting dizzy from the blood loss but I screamed out for help. I didn't want to stay alive and away from Bobby, but I didn't want the shadows to take me either. Three of them had hold of my body and the fourth was coming at me, whispering, "You stupid bitch, we get to take you now," when my dad broke the lock on the door and came in. All he saw was his daughter in a bath full of blood, thrashing against the shadows that he could never see and screaming like she was being tortured.

I don't remember a lot after that, I just remember waking up in my bed at the cabin surrounded by doctors and shadows on the wall bowing down to them. I knew I was in trouble then.

It took awhile for Bobby and I to come up with a new plan since the doctors had surround the house with burning flames, but when Jasper came and found me in the cabin, I realized he could find the factory and lead me to it when I freed myself. He found the factory at the end of January, and I've been waiting and preparing to carry out our plan ever since then. Sixteen days left.

March 19th, 2002

I've been really busy preparing for my attack: a lot of kickboxing, basically anytime I have free time, and keeping the shadows and voices at bay. I get a lot weaker when they are always attacking me with insults and trying to grab at me, so I'm trying to ignore them. It doesn't always work but I've been doing better. They do get angry when I ignore them and sometimes that makes their taunts worse. "You fucking bitch, you know we're here, you can't ignore us" and "You're a piece of shit, you'll never escape us or these doctors. You know they're working for us, you're fucked" were two of the worst and they did make me snap and go after the voices.

I've been okay the last few days, and talking to Bobby a lot since the sun has been out every day. He says he's excited that I can be with him soon. He knows I'm strong enough to take them down now and that none of their medicine can subdue me. I want to free my husband from these monsters and I'm so close.

Holly made me read more of the books I had written about wars, and two days ago she brought the manuscript I had started right after 9/11. I started reading it and thinking about continuing it, when I got to the part about the Twin Tower attacks. My jaw dropped. All those people...we thought they died...they're with my husband, and the scientists! It wasn't a terror attack at all; our

own government needed human test subjects who would never be found! I got frantic and started yelling for Bobby, throwing the pages of the manuscript at Holly and running from the room.

That's the last I remember, before smacking my head on the wooden front porch. I have a huge knot on the front of my head that the voices keep taunting is a tumor full of red ants to attack my laptop with the rest that are already there. The swelling has gone down now and I didn't see or feel the ants, but they could have escaped while I was on more painkillers. I never see the shadows or hear the voices when I'm on meds, but I hate feeling cloudy and I can't talk to Bobby when I'm taking meds either. I avoid them as often as I can, but usually the doctors try to force them on me. I've gotten good at hiding the pills in my cheek when they check my mouth and putting them in my hollowed-out copy of *Alice in Wonderland* late at night. The doctors never think to look there.

I just have to hold out a few more days, and then I can escape. I hate that I have to attack Holly, too, but she can't come with me even if she wanted to. She doesn't hear the voices and doesn't know what Bobby has been telling me. I'll apologize to her after I free Bobby and all those other people from the World Trade Center. I know everyone, especially her, will understand once they see my proof. Six more days.

March 24th, 2002

It's almost time. Less than 24 hours and then I can start my journey to my husband. I've been resting all day, so I have my strength for the attack. I've been planning and planning and now it's time. Yesterday I almost warned Holly to be somewhere else besides this cabin tomorrow, but I stopped myself. She is a nice woman and she's not working with the voices, but I couldn't risk everything being ruined. My husband is still the most important person to me. I just hope she tries not to fight too much so I won't have to hurt her.

Yesterday after therapy, I was looking at some of the books that I wrote before Bobby went "missing." I miss being that writer, and knowing what was going on in the world. Here in this cabin, I don't know anything except what's going on in my own head. The doctors don't let me read newspapers or watch TV. I'm only allowed to exercise, read the books that are already here in the cabin, go on the porch, or journal in my free time. I wish the doctors would listen to me, because I think if I could have some connection to the outside world, I could get away from the voices more often. But since it's really only them, Bobby, and me here, I have no escape.

Some of the stories, like the ones about war and cancer, make the bad voices come and the shadows try to attack me, but some of the

other ones make me feel better. It's as if Bobby is only away at war still, not being turned into some test subject for corrupt scientists. I know that we need to find a cure for cancer, but the test subjects should come willingly, not be ripped from their lives and counted as dead. Soon I can expose their secrets, though, and everyone will believe me. Things will go back to normal.

The sun is setting outside, and Bobby just winked goodnight to me through the ring. He wished me luck on tomorrow's attack earlier today, and we ran through the plan again to make sure I covered everything. The plan is flawless. I should go to sleep now, because tomorrow will be a busy and tiring day. I know the shadows will be vicious tonight, because they know what I'm planning, too, but they don't scare me right now. I'm too close to freedom and getting my husband back for their threats to hurt me now. Maybe I'll publish this journal after I get out, so everyone knows that the voices were real and that Bobby was alive the whole time. They'll stop trying to "fix" all of us with the extra voices in our heads and listen to us instead.

I'm coming, Bobby. I'll see you in the morning, love, finally after all this time. Goodnight.

Oh god. That's what she was thinking the night before it all happened? How could you ever love someone that much, to attack others to get to them and risk your own life? And my parents, what a pair of fucking liars. They said that Jen had saved up all her pills because she was "deeply depressed" and she killed herself because she couldn't take it anymore. This journal says ***nothing*** *like that.*

She went down fighting. That explains all the lawsuits from the "doctors" that my parents kept quiet and hidden from me. They just paid them all a huge sum of money to shut the hell up and never speak about their "unstable" daughter again. Well fuck them. This isn't staying quiet anymore; Jen might have been the world-renowned author, but she wasn't the only one with writing skill in the family. And now I'm going to do her justice.

I wake up every single day wishing my sister was still here, even if I was the only one left to take care of her, the way she needed to be taken care of. I was scared of her, but she was still a human being and my baby sister and I didn't help her. Now I'm going to help clear her name at least, so people won't always look at her as the "nutcase who offed herself." My parents were fine with their daughter being dismissed as suicidal, but I want everyone to see the darkness she was really battling and understand why she attacked those doctors.

Part of me wishes she had killed them. I knew she wouldn't be strong enough from just kickboxing, but I was hoping her adrenaline from wanting to save Bobby would help her. She did

manage to break the arm of one of the woman doctors. That made me smile, especially when I got my parents to admit that Jen broke that bitch's arm. She gave a black eye to one of the other doctors before she was taken down and drugged.

When she woke up, I guess she realized she had lost and didn't know what else to do. After reading all these journals, though, I think Bobby's voice came to her and told her that she would "find" him if she took all the pills she had hidden in the book. And she did. I looked it up and taking that many pills would have killed her quickly and painlessly. I expected that to give me some comfort, but my sister didn't need to fucking die.

I wish Jasper had chosen me when he came to our house that day. She suffered so much and no one believed her.

Jen, you shouldn't have died, and I can't change that now, but I can use your journal and your memory to help others like you. You were the kind sister, and I know you would've wanted this. You didn't deserve loneliness and suicide; you deserved a happy marriage with the husband you loved with every part of you. Instead, all you got was a ring