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Howell's School Llandaff, Year 10

### New Rules for the future world

Rules. Set to keep us in check. Obey, follow them. How can you not? The puppets don't control the master.

I wanted for her to push for her own future. Her world was hers to create.

Our lives hang in the balance of the people around us. We play the game; we put our trust into them, striving to make our own rules. In most cases, we decide our own fate, but today, her life was in my hands.

To decide anyone's fate is difficult, but to choose between life and death for your own daughter is an impossible task.

We don't have a set rulebook, but we don't need one. Who does when they're drilled into us our entire lives? From a child, we tell them to design their own path, to strive for their dreams, yet we hinder that by enforcing society's ideology on our own children. All I wanted was for her to be her own person, without anyone's manipulations.

That's what led her to the crossroads, razor in tow. Despite society's protestations, she never wanted to be perfect. They assumed she was theirs to build, however that was never the case.

Middle school. Before, all of the children were allowed to fly in their imaginations, but here they had to learn to follow the strict regime leading to popularity. You have your standard rules, don't run in the corridor, don't push in line, but they're never told to treat everyone as equals, because nobody is. We all have our place in the world, it only becomes apparent once you realise it yourself.

She realised it that day. The day when she went into school, ready to begin her new life, ready to aim for success, no sooner to be beaten in the halls, the pure white lockers stained with blood. Purity. Perfection. The expectations of many dripping to the floor.

Rushing through the front door that evening, I knew there was nothing to say to make her believe anything but their lies. The chain had begun. There was no stopping the dominoes from falling beneath her feet.

The days dragged on. The rules never changed. 'Kill yourself, you're worthless' written in her books, pictures of her vandalised until even she couldn't see who she was anymore. That's when she chose her rules, their rules.

She chose them. She chose that her future was theirs to decide.

The progress was hard to notice at first. New shoes. New clothes. New accessories. But the change became more apparent as her personality morphed into their ideals. New hair, new face, new body. Unrecognisable. She had been challenged by the pressure, and she succumbed to its demands.

She was just a shell of her former self when high school rolled around. Instead of being the weird girl in the shadows, she was a fully-fledged member of society, humiliating and demoralising any who she deemed a misfit. She had become so fixated on what everyone else deemed her to be that she had forgotten who she was, what she wanted for her future.

Nothing she did could quash her desire to be the most popular. Friends came and went as often and as certain as day turns to night. She discarded her flaws as easily as you pick apart a puzzle. She didn't realise that once the pieces are gone, you start to lose the bigger picture.

But rules change, and everyone's past, present and future change with them. Those who were previously shunned become rising stars, and the futures of the powerful sink like quick sand. Eventually we all realise that no matter how much we try to conform ourselves to society's distinction, you're still the same person, the same, desperate person underneath.

She only comprehended how far she had been willing to go for everyone else when she saw herself as an outsider again.

Pain. Hurt. What she had done to all those who tried to help her. The depression she faced when she owned up to her actions overwhelmed her.

We can create new rules for our new future whenever we want, but having to live with what we've done is the most challenging part of all.

She couldn't. She couldn't live with herself. So she chose not to. The blades pierced her skin as her words had done to so many before her.

I knew when I found her, lying there, stained in the acts of her former-self, that I understood what I did. I pushed her so much to find herself, that she lost sight of who she really was.

I wake to the sounds of announcements over the tannoy. Another emergency, another future in the hands of someone else.

I wish that could be the case for my daughter. For her life to be up to someone else.

No.

It is my decision. I'm the one who decides whether to pull the plug, the last hope, from her life. I can do it for her, save her from having to relive what she did to herself, what I drove her to do. Or I can save her, save myself, and redesign a new world for the two of us to create our own new rules in.

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