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Pure Illusion (Web of Deception #1)

Michelle Watson

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Sneak Peek of Pure Perception (Web of Deception #2)

Thank you note & About Author

*To the lonely ones that ever felt unworthy.
You are cherished more than you know.*

*To the irrational ones who opt to think outside the
box.
Keep it up, you are inspirational.*

*To the rebels that defy the world's perception.
Stay focused, we need you.*

*To the scared ones.
Move forward, we love you.*

*To the dreamers.
Don't ever wake up.*

Illusion: a false mental image produced by misinterpretation of things that actually exist.

Prologue

7:00P.M., October, 31st

People never truly know you until you die, that's when your soul really is free of limitations and heavy confines that living cause. Once your soul leaves your body it unfolds to reveal your true nature, whether it may be a deceitful web of nasty little secrets or an honorary existence as pure as gold.

I can't say I'm astonished or even remotely surprised to be here, witnessing my very own funeral. To be honest, I expected it. But, it still pains me to see them all hurt, especially my older sister, Isabel. We made a blood oath long ago and promised one another that we would never take our own lives, only because our parents took that exact route. But what she doesn't know is that I didn't renege on something that meant everything to us. I didn't commit suicide. My killer is amongst the small somber crowd that is dressed in funeral black and holding towering umbrellas over their heads to keep them dry from the never-ending rain as they all gather around and watch my polished mahogany casket lower into the wet, runny, muddy earth.

There are a few shining stars among the sea of black, though. The people I sincerely and wholeheartedly cared about and loved with every facet of my being. These special stars of mine have on a rainbow symbol somewhere on them, whether it's a

bracelet, earrings, or in Hero's case, a bowtie. They wear it to represent me, not just because I was a proud gay, but because I loved rainbows. I always thought of the colorful, vivid arch in the sky as a bridge, a bridge that leads to a happier and brighter place.

A bridge was how I died. My killer shoved me off The Suicide Bridge, the tone of steel with a 210-foot drop to jagged rocks and rushing rapids. Besides the abundance of wild cherry trees, meadows, rivers, and cliffs, it's the biggest attraction we have in Cherry Creek, North Carolina. Countless souls willingly took the leap of death off The Suicide Bridge, and I wasn't one of them.

It's kind of ironic though, right?

My poor sister, she's too blinded by the thick cloud of misery and grief to ever see all the beauty and danger that surrounds her.

Hunter Knight stands a few feet away, fidgeting with the thin multicolored rope bracelet around his left wrist. He likes to wear meaningful things on his left side because it's close to his heart, a heart that I thought iced-over long ago. But I guess I was wrong, because here he stands, intently staring at Isabel as if she might instantly vanish at any second. He looks guilty. Hunter Knight should feel guilty; he caused Isabel so much anguish throughout her life, so much heartache, so much sadness. Isabel isn't aware of Hunter, though. I don't know whether he's more harm or aid to her at this point. She's going to need help—a boatload.

I run my fingers through her long hair and then wrap my arm around her waist, pulling her close and leaning my head on her shoulder.

I love you Isabel.

Her body begins to shake.

I am very sorry you're hurting.

Tears pool in her eyes.

But I need you to wake up, beautiful girl.

She tries to hold them in to keep them from falling.

Wake up and seek the truth.

A stream slides down her cheeks.

With the truth you can move on and so can I.

Her fists ball up and clench at her sides.

*This is reverie, beautiful girl. Everything you
thought you knew isn't what it seems.*

Isabel's throat constricts and she cannot catch her
breath.

*I need you to break out of the illusion and see reality
for what it is.*

Wake up.

Wake up.

Wake up.

BREATHE!

Through the tears, she inhales a deep breath.

Known and unknown hazards and threats lurk within the shadows of the golden path that leads to the end of the rainbow. All that you see and don't see are set purposely to question your intuition. Remember within this world of reverie trust your two eyes and heartbeat.

Beyond the paved asphalt roads and proud American waving flags from the porches of neat rows of identical colonial brick houses and further past the lush green lawns and churches, something sinister harbors within Bayham County. The darkness may rest within the moss-covered oaks of the small southern town of Cherry Creek, North Carolina.

Part I

Drowning

Chapter one

Lights Out

Today is the last day of the rest of my life. I've lost the fight to live and the struggle of breathing every day is just too much to bear. This emptiness within me can't be filled with anything that has sustaining power. I wish seeing the sunrise every morning was enough, enough to make me change my mind, enough to keep me here. But it's not. Even when the brightest star shines its halo on me, my eyes see nothing. My eyes are as vacant as my soul; every ounce of my being feels stripped, bare and left exposed to the harsh elements of life.

Fragile.

Talk of me, Isabel Charm Waters, will spread like wildfire. I'm proving everyone is this small-town of Cherry Creek, North Carolina, right. I'm the little weak girl that would snap at any moment after my brother's horrific suicide.

His name was Tyler Casimir Waters.

I watch idly as Tyler's brown teddy bear floats face down on top of the surface of the murky water, near the end of the tub. The bath I've ran for myself has gone cold, as cold as the blood slowly pumping in my veins. With as much energy I can muster, I try to reach for it

but my arms are too numb and heavy to lift. Giving up, I sink further back into the tub, allowing my muscles to unclench and relax. The water is overlapping my nose. I can feel my heart beating. It should be wild and deafening but it's so slow; a mellow melody of death. Once the song ends though, there will be no replay or encore of any kind, just silence.

All I want is silence.

My eyes shift to the empty bottle of sleeping pills on the bathtub countertop. Suicide doesn't happen like it does in the movies. It isn't instant, lights out, unless, of course, you're brave enough to pull a trigger and blast a bullet through your brain.

You have to wait for the blackness to swallow you whole. The worst part is waiting on death to happen. The peace you want is there, within arm's reach, but it's taking its leisurely time to put you out of your misery. Even when you stoop to this level of desperation, you still don't get the satisfaction of getting what you desire when you desire it the most.

Please just take me.

I'm ready.

I'm ready.

I'm ready.

Closing my heavy lids, I begin to drift away, my heart faintly thudding in my chest. It's a fading tempo that I can't keep tabs with.

Black.

Then reality.

Silence.

Then the sound of a weakening heart and labored breaths.

Nothing.
Then a fragmented view of everything.
A voice calls to me as I float in and out of
consciousness.

It's a real voice.

"Isabel!"

That voice.

That voice wants me to live.

"Isabel!"

The voice gets closer as I drift further.

"Isabel! Please, please, please open your eyes."

I'm so sorry.

Darkness.

Then the heat of someone's fingers wrapped fully
around my upper arms as they settle behind me in the
tub. The heat is burning my skin. My body slumps
against someone's solid frame. Whoever's behind me
has an intense fire within. Their flame is scorching me.
"Isabel, baby, open your eyes." That voice sounds as
hopeless as I feel.

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm just tired.

Stillness and then movement.

Warm fingers are forced down my throat; searing
vomit sprays everywhere, on me, on my unidentified
angel.

Everything comes back and hits me like a freight
train and it is pure agony.

The oxygen I'm tussling to inhale whistles through
my chest and scalds my deflated lungs. Salt from fresh
tears fill my slack mouth as I whisper incoherent things,
as I release my secrets and tell someone my every fear,

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