I shot up straight in bed. I was covered in sweat and breathing heavily. My heart was hammering against my chest. I felt the palpitation radiating throughout my entire body no matter how hard I bid it to stop. Horrified, my eyes searched around the dimmed room to get the sense of where I was. I saw the familiar feng shui of onyx furniture splayed about and realized I was still in my room. My bedroom.
 *It was just a nightmare*, I coaxed myself. Images flashed through my head all at once. The sight of a burning cigarette in my step mother’s mouth. The suffocating smell that made me feel as if my chest was constricting--musty, fog-like and burnt--it made it hard to breath. As she took a puff, the bud burst into a colorful orange. I knew what she was going to do. With that haunting and sinister smirk on her face, I just knew.
 I tried to run. I really did, but my body felt like it was in some sort of stasis. Stuck in a trance. Immobile, the only thing I could do was stare, stare at her green eyes, similar to mine but hers were dull, devoid of life. Nothing could be seen behind those. Then finally feeling that ignited cigarette singe my skin. Hearing the sizzle of burning flesh and the blood curdling scream I let out triggered the feeling of acidic bile to rise from the back of my throat.
 Gingerly, I threw the covers off my lap, not caring if I woke my boyfriend or not and ran to the bathroom, barely noticing the blinding bright lights that were always on at night. I pushed opened the lid to the toilet and dry heaved.
 After some time of gagging, I realized I wouldn’t lurch. Frustrated, I pushed away from the toilet and scooted over to the sink, back against the oak wood. I brought my knees up and hugged my legs closely to my chest. And finally with all the overwhelming feelings of tonight, I allotted myself to cry… I didn’t know whether it was a few minutes or a few hours that I came in here but I couldn’t bring myself to cry anymore. My dream… no, my nightmare brought up so many memories that I tried and failed to suppress about that woman I once called step mother. So many memories…
 My eyes were completely dried up; I could feel it. I couldn’t bid the tears to come even if I wanted to. They hurt; an irritating pain that wouldn’t go away unless I took medication. They were a light shade of pink from the tears that were constantly cascading my face. Underneath my eyes were vexed from the profuse wiping. I inhaled deeply as I lolled my head against the light wood of the sink’s opening shelf. I didn’t even register that it hurt. Maybe I wanted to feel more pain, but all I felt was nothing. At that thought, I felt as if I might start crying again from the constant reminder of the white lighter and the lite cigarette, the burns and ash it left on my skin. Yet, nothing came out, sans a wet hiccup from the back of my throat.
 I’m exhausted. Completely and utterly exhausted. I felt the crick in my neck. I wanted to rest my head somewhere cozier than the sink. I knew from experience that my boney knees were anything but comfortable. It wasn’t a secret that there wasn’t much cushion there. Of course, there was my comfy full sized bed in our room, but I couldn’t bear the thought of sleep. Not now anyway.
 I’m sleep deprived. I know because I started to hear voices. One, tenor and familiar, soothing and calm and the other an alto. The second one seemed familiar, too, yet I didn’t recall from where. Something told me to trust it. I wanted to go with the voices. Have them talk to me, console me until the physical world slowly grew distant and into the unconsciousness of sleep. That was the *only* way I would manage to sleep after the night I had.
 I heard the voice call my name again. The tenor one, but I ignored it. Then, I felt something warm touch my shoulder. A hand. I jumped, startled by the action of my apparent ninja boyfriend. One of the voices was his. He was looking down at me through his long blond hair with a small smile, attempting to comfort me. His smiles always made me feel secure--to the small dimple in his left cheek to the lopsided smile that involuntarily played on his face when he did so. Even him being shirtless and donning red and blue checkered pajama pants that made up his sleeping attire didn’t help. His small attempt of a smile dropped when he realized he was unsuccessful.
 “Samara?” he called, concern growing on his face. I opened my mouth to answer but I quickly clasped it shut once only silence came out. Not too long after, I heard the paddle of his feet against the salt and pepper marble tiles before he groaned as if he was fifty instead of twenty and sat down beside me. "Samara? I know this is probably the stupidest thing to ask right now, but are you okay?" Jaden said softly, taking caution to be careful enough not to cause anymore distress to me, but loud enough so that I could hear him.
 "No. I'm not alright! Nothing's alright!" I fired back with a few sniffles.
 "Well...do you wanna get out of here and talk about it?" There was silence for several seconds before I nodded my head and pushed myself up to get out of the bathroom. Jaden jumped up and followed me out the door. Simply put, I was a mess. I knew it. My hair was frazzled and sticking up in places, my clothes that made up my pajamas were rumbled and unbuttoned, and most striking of all my eyes were red and bloodshot from crying for God knows how long.
 "Yes," I whispered in a strained voice to answer Jaden's question. "Yes. I want...I need to talk about it."
 "Alright," Jaden said softly as he stepped around me and placed a hand on my shoulder. "Let's go to the kitchen for a little more comfort.”
 I nodded absently and allowed myself to be guided into the kitchen. Once Jaden flipped the lights, he lead me to the table and carefully sat me down. I looked up at him and opened my mouth to say something but the he stopped me with a raised finger. He then walked over to the pantry and opened the door.
 "I feel a major heart-to-heart coming on here so we're going to do it right," he remarked as he turned around and held up two containers of cookies. "So, what do you want? 'Super Fudge Chunk' or 'Oatmeal and raisin'?"
 I blinked at first but then quickly gave him a small amused smile. "'Super Fudge Chunk' sounds pretty good," I replied.
 Jaden couldn't hide his look of disappointment, but i knew he reminded himself that not only was I put first tonight but the one in need so he'd have to forgo his favorite flavored snack for now. He walked over to the cupboard to pull out a pair of glasses then walked over to the table and set the container and a glass down in front of me before getting milk, and taking the seat across from me. We just stared at each other in an awkward silence.
 "Okay, spill," Jaden demanded when he realized I wasn't going to speak up without help.
 *To be continued…*