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### **Real Friends**

Her private school uniform hid inside a box in her closet with old Christmas cards, a safe for hidden things. She had straight blonde hair, and blue eyes with green flecks surrounding the iris. Sometimes when she wasn't around anybody, she pulled out the box to bring the cards to her chest. Inhaling these faint scents, send goosebumps down her arms, and cause bricks to weigh down her stomach. A pink card reads, "If you need me, call" with a phone number. She tries to not look at them anymore.

A remixed-version of a rap song starts playing, snapping her head up towards the noise. She scrambles up, and answers her phone, toying with a small charm connected to it; its shape is that of a dolphin. Warmth fills her stomach, and her eyes light up. *I am wanted.*

"--can't pick you up, I'm so sorry B," a high-pitched voice apologizes, music blares in the background. The phone shows the face of a tanned girl with black ringlets tied back in a bun. "Are you still going, Jaz?" B replies, acting nonchalant. She bites her nails silently and presses her lips tightly together. Tears try to burn her eyes, so she presses her nails into her palms and her breath steadies.

"Yeah, but Trevon's picking me up," Jaz says slowly. "You know I got you, but it's not my gas!" "No, no, it's fine," B laughs off the concern. She hears Jaz sigh in relief through the other end. She smiles at the wall, but her eyes sting red. "I'll figure it out."

"Love you, Brandi!" the voice echos, and the call ends. She throws her phone at the wall. She tastes blood and wipes it away. She looks around her simple room. There is a full-size bed in the center of the room with a faded pink duvet from her childhood, and a black vanity against the wall. Clothes are littered around the floor. Brandi walks over to her vanity and struggles with a

drawer, forcing it to open and its contents scatter. Old CDs with girls' derrieres on the cover lay on her dirty-gray carpet. A lighter with Nicki Minaj on the face, crafted with "Miley, what's good" lays next to the CDs. The lighter is empty, but throwing it away would mean throwing away a memory of someone she has few of left. A green lighter lays next to it, full.

"Fuck," she hisses. She grabs the green lighter, and pulls out a brown cigarillo from her shirt pocket. She inhales smoke, and smiles. The tears have subsided.

Blinking, she looks at her phone. It's been twenty minutes, and she grins. Brandi hears a soft ringing in her ears, and grabs a fistful of her hair. Repeating this a couple times, she imagines being massaged. Her phone is dialing now, and she hears someone pick up.

"Xavier!" she hears her voice raise an octave, and she giggles. "Are you going to Kim's tonight?"

"I don't fuck with high schoolers anymore," she hears a lighter snap and an inhale. A cough.

"Shit," was all she said.

"You busy, ma?" Xavier's breath lowers, and she feels warmth at her cheeks. She sits on the edge of her bed, tucking her legs under her butt.

"I don't know," she softens her voice and bites her lip.

"Me and Travis are finna meet up in an hour," she hears, "but I could be over in ten."

He's on her bed, and dark, rough hands grab her thighs. She hears him whisper sweet nothings in her ear, and she smiles. Wanting to believe him, she pulls him closer to him for a kiss. He kisses her once, practically a peck. He's not here for love. He's already zipping up his pants, and his eyes dance over her naked body. Brandi's face warms, enjoying this.

"I want some sweet tea," she muses, but Xavier ignores her. She lays down on her bed as he slips out of the house. She realizes he's gone, but doesn't feel like he was ever there. She's now on the phone with a girl named Veronica. Veronica is giggling in her ear, and Xavier's eyes are ghostlike on her body. Her mouth is dry, and she feels an emptiness in her stomach.