

TW: suicide

EMAILS OVER RESEARCH

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The door opened slightly, letting out the bit of daylight that was from the hallway windows. All morning, she sat in her lifeless office with just a few pictures of her family scattered among the many shelves of books. She sighed after answering the fiftieth email she had responded to. Her eyes strained from the countless hours of focusing on what was on her screen.

A knock on the door was quickly followed by footsteps and mumbling. A girl stood in the corner of her eye; she wore a very shaky smile like she was trying to force it.

“Can I help you?”

The girl leaned into her personal bubble, her face inches from hers; she bent over as if she were bowing. She made direct eye contact. From here, body tremors were radiating from her whole body.

“Hi, Dr. Kassel; sorry to bother you, but do you remember me from last semester?”

Dr. Kassel slowly shook her head until the girl continued to blurt out words.

“I remember you.” She closed her eyes and let out a shaky sigh. “But it’s ok, you’re very busy. I wanted to see if you had any updates about research?”

Dr. Kassel shook her head again and slowly closed her laptop. “I have a lab, but there isn’t much to do right now—”

“Great, that’s what I thought, but—”

“*Please* email me back and come during office hours if you want more information.”

The girl backed away; her smile dissipated into a quivering thin line.

“Ok, thank you, Dr. Kassel.” her face was still focused on Dr. Kassel’s face. “I was coming from a different professor and thought I would stop by. I’m sorry for interrupting you.” And with her last words, she dashed out of the office.

Dr. Kassel sat in her office, confused at what had just happened. No one ever came to her office hours. But Dr. Kassel shrugged it off and kept answering emails.

About a month passed, and her co-worker stepped into her office briefly.

“So, how’s the lab?”

“It’s fine.”

“How is it fine?”

She concentrated on her emails again, clicking, opening, typing, and repeat. Her fingers flew right off the keyboard, glancing back at the screen, making sure everything she wrote conveyed everything she said.

Her mouth moved. “Just fine.”

“Well, my research is going great.”

“That’s good.”

He paused, his glance reading her reaction. “And I need more people.”

She stopped, finally looking at him. He wore a cocky smile.

“And?”

“I just need more people to care for the rats, Kassel.”

“Sure.”

“I do!”

“Don’t you have 30 people in your lab?”

“It’s not enough.”

“It’s not *enough?*”

“Rats Kassel. The Rats need their young mommies and daddies.”

She rolled her eyes back at the phrase “*Mommies and daddies.*” A twinge of cringe hit her in the gut. Her fingers started to dance back onto her keyboard, distracting her from it.

He started tapping her monitor, his grimy fingers reaching her emails.

“Crine cut it out. I don’t have anyone.”

“Yes, you do.”

Her fingers left the keyboard one last time, her dark bags staring straight at Dr. Crine. “Is this how a professor in a Ph.D. in Psychology from *Yale* should be acting?”

There was a moment of heavy silence before Dr. Crine threw his hands in the air, stuffed his hands in his pockets, and stomped off. His cursing echoed through the halls. A satisfied smile appeared on her lips as she returned to her typing and reading. She had finished her last email when she moved on to her next. It was the girl.

It was a simple email. Stating that Dr. Kassel had a good week and asked about research.

Her eyes went to the date. It had been sent a few days after she barged into her office. But it had been about a month for Dr. Kassel to read it. Her fingers hesitated over the keyboard. The girl must know that she’s a very busy woman. She must know. She must understand.

Dr. Kassel wrote a simple reply to the message apologizing for the delay and to please see her during office hours.

The door to the dark office opened, letting in the morning light into the lifeless office. She put up her coat and put her bag on the floor. This time, she grabbed a textbook from her bookshelf. She flipped it open, starting off a lovely morning with a daily dose of *Anxiety and Other Related Disorders*.

As she finished the last paragraph, she noticed someone’s head peeping out of her door. It was the girl.

“Hi, Dr. Kassel. Did you want to see me?”

“No, I thought you wanted to see me.”

She paused, closing her eyes so tight that the wrinkles on her eyelids and shook her head as if her actions could suddenly restart their conversation.

“Sorry.” forcing a smile, “I’m just nervous.”

Dr. Kassel said nothing. The girl pulled off her old blue backpack and took off her own coat. After that, she hugged her coat

tightly as she sat.

“So?” Kassel asked. “Why are you here?”

“I wanted to see if you had any research opportunities right now. I was interested in your research on anxiety and depression.”

“Yes, my research.” She put her hands together on the table. “Well, we aren’t currently looking for anyone right now. I only have a grad student who is a TA in the biology department and another student finishing up the paperwork from last semester. I have a bunch of data, but I don’t know what to do with it right now. That is mostly how it works. I experiment, and then I have a bunch of data that sits around for years before it’s picked up and we see if anything happens to it.”

The girl’s shoulders rose to her ears. She rubbed her fingers together. “But what about the presentation you did last semester? I went to see it. Is that all done?”

“Yes. It’s all done. As I said, it’s all being turned into a research paper. Try to email me again if I have any openings.”

The girl’s nails started to dig into her cuticles. “Are there going to be any openings? It’s just that I need this research before I graduate.”

Dr. Kassel hummed, noticing the skin picking from the other side of the desk. “What are your plans after graduation anyway?”

During the first draw of blood, she kept picking over the blood. She rubbed the sticky blood into her fingers before she spoke. “I want to either work in Clinical work or become a family therapist.”

Dr. Kassel paused. “If clinical work, what would you like to study?”

“Working with depression and anxiety.”

There was a longer pause between them. The blood on her fingers started to run onto her hands.

“That’s interesting, then; what would you want to do research within family therapy?”

The girl took a deep breath, rubbing her damp, bloody fingertips on her worn-out jeans.

“I want to see how depression and anxiety affect the family.”

“That’s very similar to my research.” Dr. Kassel whispered, squinting her eyes. “Is that why you want to join my research?”

She nodded, her words spilling out of her mouth. “It’s just I’ve been emailing you and contacting you since last January, and you still had no openings for your lab.”

“You should try talking to other professors about research—”

“But I want this research!”

The girl stood out of the chair, her coat still in her grasp. Her jaw clamped down as she stared directly at Dr. Kassel. There was a hint of body odor when she stood; a sweat drip ran down her forehead. She wore a long-sleeved shirt, trying to pull down her sleeves. The girl whispered as if this was her last hope:

“Please.”

Dr. Kassel shook her head, leaning back into her chair, and shrugged.

“I’m sorry, but I just don’t have any openings right now. And this isn’t how a college student should ask her professor about opportunities. Think about being more professional.”

The girl’s shoulders lowered. Her eyes drooped to the ground; a gray film waved over her eyes. The desperation in her face was lost.

“OK, I’m sorry. I’ll try emailing you later in the semester.”

The girl walked away.

“Hey, Kassel.”

Dr. Kassel looked up at the door to see Dr. Crine. Unlike his bubbly, annoying, childish self, he stood straight up. His usual cheeky smile turned into a thin line, and his brows furrowed.

“What is it, Dr. Crine.” “

Did you hear about the news?”

“I swear if you are asking me again about research, I am going too—”

“We lost a student last night.”

Her attention was on Dr. Crine.

“Did you ever hear the name Haile Morton?”

Silence.

“She was a psychology student?”

She shook her head in response.

“My advisee?”

She stopped shaking her head, still silent.

“She wouldn’t shut up about your research to me, and how bad she wanted it?”

Dr. Kassel paused. She blinked a few times, her eyes shifting from one side of the room to another until her whole world connected.

“You pushed her to send those emails?”

“Look.” He moved into her office; he stood up, leaning on the chair the girl sat on just a few days ago. “I know I can be a real pain in your ass, but I was personally hoping for something. The girl was going through some stuff, and she didn’t have the funds—”

“Why didn’t anyone tell me?”

Dr. Crine looked down and broke eye contact with Dr. Kassel.

“Kassel.”

“What?”

“The faculty thought you knew about her.”

“Get out.”

“What?”

“I told you to get out of my office. Now.”

Dr. Crine did what she said—and left with no more words to say. Moments, seconds, minutes, and hours passed. She missed lecturing in her first, second, and third classes. She missed taking her lunch break. She, herself, was lost. She put in her two weeks that same day.