I'm not a robot



Credence book

Readers seeking emotional depth and complex relationships will find Credence by Penelope Douglas captivating, despite the author's absence from social media. Douglas is a renowned author with numerous bestselling series and standalone novels translated into twenty languages. Her work often explores mature themes, as seen in her books on misconduct and relationship complexities. In contrast to her literary successes, Douglas' personal life remains private, revealing only that she resides in New England with her husband and daughter. Meanwhile, an unnamed narrator is shown observing a seemingly empty house, hinting at a family's absence or strained relationships. The narrator recalls watching their parents play on a tire swing ten years prior, yet they remain detached from the scene. A conversation between the narrator and Mirai is interrupted by the commotion of paramedics and police arriving at the house, suggesting a tragic event has occurred within the home. The mention of medications in the bathroom implies that the family may have been struggling with underlying issues. Despite the intense scenario unfolding before her, the narrator appears disconnected from it all, raising questions about their relationship with their parents. I stood frozen as I watched the tire swing slowly sway back and forth, its rhythmic motion a stark contrast to the turmoil brewing inside me. Mirai's eyes welled up with tears as she told me about my father's passing, her words painting a picture of a man who had tried everything to fight his disease but ultimately succumbed to its aggressive nature. I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of loss and regret, knowing that he had been struggling in secret while we were all oblivious to it. The thought of my parents' final moments together was almost too much to bear, the image of them embracing each other fully dressed and surrounded by their luxurious possessions leaving me breathless. Mirai's silent comfort was a balm to my soul, but even her presence couldn't ease the pain that had been building inside me for so long. As I turned away from the swing, I caught a glimpse of myself in the window reflection, my eyes red-rimmed and my jaw clenched in an attempt to hold back tears. The sound of scissors cutting through the rope was like a punch to the gut, but it was also a release, a sense of liberation that came with Mirai's actions. As the tire swung gently to the ground, I felt something stir within me - a sense of love and gratitude for this woman who had been by my side since childhood, a love that had grown stronger despite the distance and secrets between us. It made more sense to cancel renting an apartment altogether, especially not a bigger one. I declined politely. She took Toulouse instead since that dog has about as much affection for me as a wet cat would. She said she'd be back in the morning to pick up her belongings. In hindsight, I should've been kinder when she offered to stay here. The noise and attention were overwhelming, and I didn't want to deal with all the phone calls Mirai had to make that evening. It would only remind me of the chaos unfolding on social media, where people are speculating about my parents' death and even making predictions about what will happen to me next. They're saying some hurtful things about my family, and it's hard not to take it personally. I'm feeling anxious, just thinking about all this. If I thought living in a fishbowl before was tough... The steam from the pot wafted up as I turned off the burner and served myself a bowl of ramen. I stared at the yellow broth, my stomach growling with hunger, but I wasn't really hungry. I just enjoy the process of cooking; it's meditative for me. As I wrapped my hands around the bowl, feeling the heat seep into the ceramic and up my arms, chills ran down my body. I almost swallowed, but realized it would take more energy than I had. The truth is, I haven't cried yet; I'm just worried about tomorrow and figuring out how to handle everything. The thought of attending social events or dealing with people's sympathy over the coming weeks is unbearable. I feel sick thinking about it. I don't know what to do, and I'm not equipped for this kind of situation. My parents knew I wouldn't be able to handle it; they expected me to break down. But I just can't fake a smile or pretend everything's fine when it isn't. Digging out chopsticks from the drawer, I ate my ramen in silence. After finishing, I carried the bowl upstairs and sat on the floor against the wall of my room, letting the cool hardwood soothe my nerves. It was weird that I stayed in the house after their death this morning. The coroner said they likely passed away around 2 a.m., but I didn't wake up until 6. My mind is racing between wanting to move on and needing to process everything. Mirai's presence here every day feels like a reminder of how much I'm struggling to come to terms with what happened. Arms over my knees, eyes burning with exhaustion. No note, just the sound of silence. My world was turned upside down. The door loomed ahead, a constant reminder of what was to come. Suddenly, a faint buzzing broke through the stillness, sending dread coursing through my veins. I reached for my phone, but it was off. Then, memories came flooding back - a special number, hidden away, reserved only for urgent matters. The phone vibrated in my hand as I answered it. "Hello?" A deep voice spoke, his tone laced with surprise. It was Jake Van der Berg, my father's stepbrother, calling after seventeen years. He didn't waste time on condolences; instead, he dove straight into the reason for his call - my father's attorney had reached out to him regarding a will. My mind reeled as I struggled to process the sudden intrusion into my grief-stricken world. Looking forward to seeing everyone at the meeting tomorrow and discussing our strategies. “Wait a minute. You’re still underage, aren't you? Your parents left you with me, apparently. So, that's what this is about. He continues, “You'll be eighteen in a couple of months, though. I'm not going to force anything on you, so don’t worry.” I hesitate for a bit, unsure if I feel relieved or annoyed. My life won't change significantly because I wasn’t an adult before my parents were gone. He says, “Growing up in that life, you're much more world-wise than we are and can take care of yourself by now anyway.” We? He means my brothers Noah and Kaleb. We’re almost as old as me, maybe a few years younger. So, I have cousins or step-cousins. I just wanted to tell you that if you want to become independent, I won't stand in your way. You can leave whenever you want. I look at the light blue thread on my sleep shorts and pinch it between my nails as I pull it tight. That’s all. He says thank you for calling, but then asks if I want to come over. A single mom's home is surprisingly empty, except for a tire swing in the yard. It was her child's favorite place to play, though they never left any drawings or toys behind. Given article text here The dim glow of night only served to intensify the magic within our home, as my father's words and gestures ignited a fire that drew me in, making me yearn to be at the center of their playful universe. However, with every fleeting glance from them, I could sense the spell being cast, and it would inevitably vanish into thin air. Thus, I remained perched on the windowsill, an invisible observer, silently watching as the night unfolded. Even now, my gaze falls upon a lone green leaf dancing in the breeze, landing softly within the tire where my mother sat countless times before. The vivid image of her nightgown and flowing locks remains etched in my mind, frozen in time like yesterday's event. Suddenly, a throat clears behind me, and I blink, my eyes drifting away from the poignant scene. "Did they say anything to you?" Mirai asks, her voice laced with tears. I turn my head, avoiding her gaze as I respond with a slow shake of my head. When was the last time I spoke to them? The sound of approaching footsteps grows louder, but it halts as I hear the clanking of an ambulance, its arrival signaling the chaos that lies beyond our gates. The distant commotion outside – the wailing sirens and murmured questions – serves as a stark contrast to my frozen emotions. Mirai's voice breaks through my reverie, "The police discovered medication in your parents' bathroom." Her words hang in the air like a heavy mist, shrouding me in uncertainty. They have my father's name on it, which led the doctor to reveal that he had been battling cancer, Tiernan. My jaw locks into place as I struggle to find my voice. Mirai pauses, her words becoming barely audible. "Apparently, he tried various treatments, but the disease was aggressive... The doctor said he wouldn't last another year, honey."The wind picks up outside, rustling the swing and sending the tire spinning wildly as it twists in an unpredictable dance. My heart aches as I recall the scene I stumbled upon that morning – my mother's Scottish terrier, Toulouse, frantically clawing at the door, demanding access to their bedroom. As I opened the door a crack, a sudden realization struck me: they weren't up yet. Yet, before I closed it again, my eyes landed on a sight that would forever be etched in my memory – my parents embracing each other, fully dressed, in each other's arms. My father wore his favorite Givenchy suit, and she was radiant in the Oscar de la Renta gown she had worn to the Cannes Film Festival. The truth hit me like a cold slap: they knew, and my mother had decided not to let him leave without her – she wanted nothing more than to be by his side until the end. The sting of their loss still lingers, but it's a pain I've grown accustomed to, a constant reminder that some wounds will never fully heal. I'd grown accustomed to being away from my parents, spending time in schools and summer camps where others took care of me, and as a result, their actions no longer caused me much pain. However, it seems there are still some wounds that can be reopened. They didn't even leave a note, nothing to say to me, not even now. I try to hold back tears and focus on the swing swaying in the wind. Mirai sniffs and sobs quietly behind me, understanding what I'm going through since she's been with me from the start. After a while, I see her outside, walking towards the tire swing with scissors in hand, and as she cuts the rope, the tire falls to the ground. A single tear rolls down my cheek, and for the first time all summer, I feel something resembling love. Hours pass, the sun sets, and the house becomes quiet once more. Reporters linger outside, but I'm almost alone. Mirai had offered to take me to her small apartment, but I declined, and she left with Toulouse, saying she'd return in the morning. I should have been kinder to her, but I just wanted everyone to leave me be. The constant noise and attention made me anxious, and I didn't want to hear her making phone calls, reminding me of the chaos unfolding outside. People are talking about my parents, speculating about me, and offering their pity and predictions. It's overwhelming. I walk back to the stove, letting out a breath, and turn off the burner. My parents left me to deal with this mess. Steam rises from the pot of ramen, but I'm not sure I have the energy to eat. I wrap my hands around the bowl, feeling the heat, and chills run down my body. They're dead, and I haven't cried, I'm just numb. I'm consumed by anxiety about what tomorrow will bring and struggling to cope with the aftermath of my parents' passing. The thought of facing studio executives or old friends at their funeral and dealing with the inheritance is unbearable, making my stomach churn. I feel like I'm drowning in emotions, unable to muster a smile or fake it. My mind is a jumbled mess as I try to process everything that's happened. Even small tasks become overwhelming - picking up chopsticks from the drawer and carrying them upstairs feels like a monumental task. As I sit on the floor, my gaze falls upon the open door to their room, and I'm reminded of the fact that they're no longer with me. The coroner estimated they died at around 2 a.m., but I didn't wake up until 6 a.m. My thoughts are caught between wanting to move on and needing to understand how everything happened. Mirai is always by my side, and I'm grateful she's here every day, but I wish they had waited until next week to come back to school before passing away. The question lingers in my mind - did they even remember I was in the house? I let out a deep sigh and lay my head against the wall, trying to calm myself down as I replay the events of that morning. They didn't leave me a note; instead, they dressed up and put the dog out before scheduling Mirai to come later than expected. The silence is deafening, but then, suddenly, my phone starts buzzing, and my heart skips a beat. It's their private number, one that only my parents and Mirai had, and I know it can't be them since they never used it. A reporter must have tracked down the old iPhone, which I've been keeping in my desk drawer for emergencies. My grip on the phone tightens as I answer it, hoping to find some solace in the voice on the other end, but all I get is a stranger's voice, saying "Tiernan?" I was taken aback when I heard Jake Van der Berg's name on the other end of the line. It was a name I hadn't mentioned in our household for as long as I could remember. My mom grew up in foster care, and my dad had an estranged stepbrother I'd never met. But then he revealed that his brother, my uncle Jake Van der Berg, had been calling me after seventeen years. It turned out that my parents' attorney contacted him earlier, informing him that since I was still underage, they left me in his care. I didn't need anyone's help, but the thought of being under someone else's control didn't sit well with me. However, Jake reassured me that I'd be eighteen soon and could make my own decisions. As we spoke, he mentioned his sons, Noah and Kaleb, who were only a few years older than me. This meant I had step-cousins. Whatever the label, it was nothing to get excited about. I politely thanked him for calling and considering my independence. He then asked if I wanted to come visit them, but I didn't respond before hanging up the phone. ####

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