




The hair came next. Her light brown strands, which she used to brush easily, began to feel coarse and unruly. It possessed a tight curl. Her hair, which once was naturally straight and brown, was now pitch black and springly, like coils or springs. She ran her hands through her hair, mouth open in shock as her own hair felt foreign to her.

The final noticeable change was in her voice. Robyn found herself speaking aloud, and it did not sound quite like her usual crisp, mid-range American soprano. It was deeper. It dropped lower, richer, sounding heavier when she uttered vowels.



Just as resignation began to settle into her bones, dread and depression about her new appearance, the door opened. A large man stepped in. He held a thick envelope stamped with crests Robyn recognized instantly; the ransom payment had been made.

The man looked around at her, then smiled at Robyn. "They paid up," he said in clear Russian accent. "And we have something special for you little girl ..."



A woman walked into the small space from behind the captor. This new woman was dressed in an identical blue gown to Aaliyah's, but looked like Robyn's long lost twin sister. She looked exactly like her, from her light brown hair to her small chest and white skin. Who was this woman? She looked directly at Robyn and said, her voice carrying that same low, smooth tone of authority Robyn had been trained with since childhood, "Hey Robyn girlie."

That nickname. Only Aaliyah ever used that nickname. The shock hit Robyn so hard it stole the breath right out of her lungs. Her vision narrowed to just the shape of the newcomer's face. Aaliyah was the mole.

The man nodded once at Aaliyah, who offered a tight, small smile, like a predator watching its trap spring shut. The guard flipped the switch on a bright, harsh bulb, flooding the room with white light. Against the far wall sat an antique mirror. Robyn felt weak suddenly, dizzy, her body's weight was foreign to her. She stared into the glass.



The woman looking back was not Robyn Hayes. It was Aaliyah. The skin was the deep brown. The lips were fuller and darker. The hair fell in thick coils that reached well past her shoulders. Even her face had those subtle angles, the broader nose bridge, the fullness of the cheeks, that belonged to the woman standing beside the mirror. The realization washed over Robyn like a train. Aaliyah had stolen her life. Now she ... she was Aaliyah.



Aaliyah stepped forward, a victorious smirk spreading across her new, familiar face. She tilted her head and gave Robyn, the newly transformed Aaliyah, a little pat on the arm. "Thank you for your jewelry," Aaliyah purred in a crisp, mid-range American soprano, gesturing toward the gold chain nestled around Aaliyah's neck. "Daddy will be so happy to see me!" She let go of the heavy keys to a small table beside the chair. She threw a bag of old clothes, a wallet and an ID card, already embossed with Robyn's new identity: Aaliyah Jones.

Robyn felt a surge of frantic, hot anger bloom in her stomach, instantly eclipsing the terror. This was theft. Complete, total ownership theft. She looked down at the card, then back at Aaliyah's green smug eyes, and let out a deep scream. Aaliyah stood with her hands crossed over her small chest, "I'm going to go back to my rich family and you ... you can go back to wherever you came from" she smugly. The new Robyn did a twirl and skipped out the door with glee, leaving the new Aaliyah to cry in the room. She looked at her new wallet, barely a dollar to her name and some change. She threw it across the room and screamed, she was just another poor black woman in the world. No longer special.

Ransom #11 _____