

UPLOAD

Written by

J.E. Clarke

Copyright
J.E. Clarke
janetgoodman@yahoo.com
(917) 328-5253

EXT. DESERT PLAYGROUND - DAY

A cacophony of teenaged voices. Hormones and adrenaline rise into pristine clouds, a heady mix.

KYLIE (16) and SANDRA (16) wobble on the top step of a jungle gym. An almost endless span of MONKEY BARS stretch out before their eyes.

An unlikely friendship, these two. Sandra's designer spandex matches her perfect face and hair. Kylie's clothing is more bargain bin: basic jeans - lots of grunge.

The girls exchange looks. Internally, these two are a match.

KYLIE

I thought we were going to the
arcade tonight.

SANDRA

I said we would. Nothing's changed.

KYLIE

In that case, I don't wanna die!

Kylie leans against a bar, glances down: At a yawning 2 mile drop. One that makes the Grand Canyon look mild.

The horizon looks untamed, too. On one distant cliff:

A TEEN GIRL sits cross legged on dusty rocks. Clad in a billowy white dress, she stares at something in her lap.

SANDRA

(to Kylie)

You're the athletic one. Go first.

KYLIE

Athletic doesn't mean reckless.

SANDRA

What are you scared of, Ky?

Sandra peers down. Her baby blues grow wide.

SANDRA

Oh, you're right. Count me out.

A feral YOWL behind them. In unison, both girls jump.

WILL (17) hurtles between Kylie and Sandra. A blur of momentum and muscles, Will dives right off the edge: and grabs the first monkey bar!

Grinning as he swings forward, Will pivots back at the girls.

WILL

No pussies allowed in class. What are you girls waiting for?

He reaches for the next rung: almost slips!

SANDRA

No!

She reaches out protectively: almost trips off the edge. Sandra backpedals - yelps.

Will dangles over certain death by just one arm. Mimicking a chimpanzee, he scratches his waist. Then his neck.

Specifically: a tiny SOCKET below Will's right ear. It resembles an USB. Seen up close, both girls have those, too.

WILL

Time's a-wasting. Ladies, boost up!

He flashes a "challenge" grin at Sandra.

SANDRA

Oh, yeah. I forgot.

Slowly, she opens one balled fist. Revealing: a postage-stamp of FABRIC in her palm. Imprinted with a "circuit" design, it pulses - almost seems alive.

Will crooks a finger at Sandra: "come on." She gauges the drop below them. Then turns to Kylie: what now?

SANDRA

Fear shouldn't stop us from winning.

KYLIE

Win what? Attention from the boys?

SANDRA

My folks'll kill me if I flunk gym again!

Will continues his primate routine, hoots.

SANDRA

Stop making noises. I'm in!

Sandra slaps the fabric on her neck implant. The cloth glows, then FLOWS into the socket. As it vanishes...

...Sandra's fear fades.

Buoyed by instant bravado, Sarah dives forward like an Olympic champ. She swings from bar to bar to the mid-point of the monkey bars. Stops to rest at Will's side.

Proud of her achievement, Sandra squints back at her BFF through harsh sun. Kylie lingers at her ladder starting point - unsure and still unmoved.

SANDRA

Don't leave us hanging!

Will snickers at the joke. More TEENS swing by him, including BIRK (17): red haired and all sinew, Birk shoves Will aside.

BIRK

Stop blockin' the road, bio breath!

Birk grabs for the next bar, but misses! Screaming, he falls into the abyss! Will and Sandra watch Birk's body flail and tumble, no concern in their eyes.

SANDRA

Mrs. Glass better grade on a curve.

KYLIE

Uh, that didn't look very fun.

WILL

Who cares? That's just Birk.

KYLIE

I think I'll sit this one out. You guys keep going.

WILL

Upload and join us, Ky!

Kylie stares at FABRIC in her fist: the same kind Sandra used before. She contemplates hard options; makes a choice.

KYLIE

Okay, I'll do this.

SANDRA

Yeah!

KYLIE

Au natural. On my own!

Kylie tosses the fabric off the platform edge. Gathering courage - she jumps! Her hands slip-slide against metal. Kylie *almost* falls, but latches on!

The fabric scrap flutters down. Kylie watches it disappear into the void.

Dangling from monkey bars by one arm, Sandra reaches out to hold Will's hand. He doesn't notice. Sandra frowns, and waves to Kylie instead.

SANDRA

Don't stop. You got this.

KYLIE

You think I do. But I don't!

Kylie's fingers slip. She gulps, prepares to fall.

A WHISTLE splits the air. Will and Sarah twist around.

WILL

It's Mrs. Glass. We're screwed now!

The two swing toward the far platform of the monkey bars. Kylie dangles at the other end - abandoned... all alone.

A disembodied VOICE floats over her panic.

MRS. GLASS (O.S.)

Ten seconds left. Complete the course now - or fail!

MRS. GLASS (40s) wades in from the sidelines. Your classic kindly school-marm, Mrs. Glass walks god-like over clouds.

Kylie dangles, eyes screwed closed. Mrs. Glass grabs the frozen teen by her waist.

MRS. GLASS

Sweetie, sometimes it's best to just let go.

Mrs. Glass yanks *downward*. Kylie's ripped from the bars. Mrs. Glass clicks her belt REMOTE.

The HOLOGRAM CANYON dissolves. In its place: a playground.

Kylie hits the sand ass-first. Which isn't all that painful. In reality, it's just a three foot fall.

Mrs. Glass turns and bellows to other TEENS.

MRS. GLASS

Gym class is over. Circle group in the history nook in 10 minutes. Be there, and cleaned up - quick!

INT. HISTORY CLASSROOM - LATER

For any school, this room's barebones. Electrical outlets and benches line a wall. But no desks or books in sight.

A CIRCLE OF TEENS sit on the floor. Some socialize and flirt. The majority obsess with their phones.

Sandra and Will sit side-by-side. Focus on their screens, they don't talk.

Birk chills to Will's left; very alive - and annoyed. Impatient with his phone, he fishes a cord from a pocket, and plugs the cell straight into his neck.

Instant satisfaction. Birk shoves Will aside, and leans back. He closes his eyes and relaxes: absorbs data from his phone.

IN ONE CORNER:

Mrs. Glass counsels Kylie, her face concerned, voice low:

KYLIE

Are you gonna fail me, Mrs. G?

MRS. GLASS

For one tiny slip-up, dear? No! We all make mistakes once in a while. And we all must learn our lessons. Both in gym class - and life. Your one mistake was not uploading your bravery module...

KYLIE

I wanted to pass the test on my own.

MRS. GLASS

Which was admirable. Until you froze. Sweetie: it's not weakness to admit when you need help.

KYLIE

(mutters)

It's still cheating, though.

Mrs. Glass grabs Kylie's chin, raises her eyes to hers.

MRS. GLASS

Do you think it's "cheating" to take medicine when you're sick? Or fly in a car, when walking by foot would do?

KYLIE

Uh, not if it gets me there faster.

MRS. GLASS

Precisely my point, dear child!
That's the same principle as
uploading knowledge modules. Using
bio-adaptive tools is just as
"real" as studying in older ways.
It's just far more efficient. And
that efficiency's a blessing:
leaving us time for *more* important
things in life. Do you understand
what I'm telling you?

KYLIE

Kinda. What you say makes sense.

MRS. GLASS

Of course, I'm your neuro-guide.
Which makes me an expert on what's
best. The main question you must
always ask yourself:

(points)

Do you want to maximize your
potential, or miss out on
opportunities, like her?

Kylie follows Ms. Glass's finger to the far end of the room.

There, the girl in the white dress (RAMONA, 15) sits: cross
legged once again. Apparently not part of the gym simulation,
she reads from an OLD SCHOOL TEXTBOOK in her lap.

KYLIE

What the heck is she holding?

MRS. GLASS

An antique artifact, called a
"book". Similar to a tablet, it's
made of paper. But none of the
words or links move. Luddites use
it, instead of better options. No
more questions, Kylie. Assimilate
into the circle. Time for class!

MOMENTS LATER

Mrs. Glass stands in the center of the student circle; a
digital DECK at her feet.

CORDS snake from the console, and plug into each student's
neck. No lights blink. The lesson hasn't started... yet.

MRS. GLASS

Class, today's upload is on 21st century history: specifically, how the rapid rise of the internet grew knowledge transfer rates by leaps and bounds.

Kylie huddles between Sandra and Birk. Will sits on Sandy's other side. Birk sneers at their teacher's words.

BIRK

External mail and searches; that old tech? When are we gonna discuss things that matter? Personality reboots, connectome replication - that sorta stuff?

MRS. GLASS

History should be understood in order, Birk. Do you need a patience upload? First things first.

Will and Sandra's wires seem tangled. Will fumbles with his cord, reroutes. He accidentally grazes Sandra's arm. Sandra blushes at the boy. Oblivious, Will turns away.

Rebuffed, Sandra pivots to Kylie next.

SANDRA

Speaking of personality tweaks -

KYLIE

Shhh - Will's right there!

SANDRA

He's not listening, as usual. What module would make him notice me?

KYLIE

Call me crazy - but why not be yourself?

SANDRA

I did. It doesn't work! And what's wrong with boosting my flirtation skills? I'll still be me - but with lots more charm.

KYLIE

Cause personality rewrites are cheating.

SANDRA
 Quit being such broken record!
 What's wrong with using bio-
 enhancements to get ahead in life?

Sandra scrolls through PERSONALITY UPLOADS on her phone.

SANDRA
 Be honest. What do you think would
 give me a better shot with Will:
 sexy-cute or modest-coy?

Mrs. Glasses' disembodied voice floats towards the girls:

MRS. GLASS
 Ready, Class? Brace yourselves.
 Upload in 3, 2...1!

FLASH. The data upload hits Kylie hard. All the teens rock back on their heels.

INTERNAL VISION

A kaleidoscope of flowing IMAGES. Dates, PET pictures of brains, hordes of humans "jacking in".

WOOOOOOOMP. Just as quickly, the data assault's over. Kylie blinks and looks around.

Birk shrugs it off, unimpressed. Other teens rub their eyes, groan. Mrs. Glass surveys her shell-shocked students:

MRS. GLASS
 Any questions, Class?

Will's the first to raise his shaking hand.

WILL
 Does it always hurt this much?

MRS. GLASS
 Migraines *often* follow uploads, due to vaso-constrictions upon transfer. But as they say, no pain no gain. Education's always worth the cost.

More images FLASH in Kylie's mind: Stock footage of computers, bio-implant surgery. A massive overload of historic events - all in one mental blast.

Kylie raises her hand to ward it off.

KYLIE
About this history lesson...

MRS. GLASS
What about it?

KYLIE
It's pretty detailed.

MRS. GLASS
Knowledge is power. For my class,
no expense will be spared.

KYLIE
But how can we know it's real? We
all - uh - make mistakes. Couldn't
even history writers sometimes...
be wrong?

MRS. GLASS
(snaps)
If it's in the curriculum, no.

Mrs. Glass squints at Kylie, suddenly concerned.

MRS. GLASS
Did you miss your morning serotonin
shot? You seem *off* today, dear.

To Kylie's immediate right:

Sandra scans a FABRIC UPLOAD to her phone. The screen reads:
"Social mating skills: Female."

Before Kylie can comment, Sandra slaps the scrap to her neck
port. Like before, the "chip" glows, then dissolves. In
seconds, Sandra's personality reboot's complete.

Armed with new confidence, Sandra turns to Will and smiles.

SANDRA
Will, you were *so* brave in gym
today. I've never seen someone
quite like you!

WILL
I looked brave?

SANDRA
(purrs)
Wanna share 5D vids after school?

WILL
You mean with me - alone?

Kylie groans, waves her hand once more.

KYLIE
How are curriculums written?

Mrs. Glass shrugs, turns to Brink instead.

MRS. GLASS
Mr. Truggs, you're usually brimming
with comments. Do you have any
questions now?

BRINKS
Yeah. Why do WE study, but not her?

Brinks points to white-dressed Ramona in the corner. Mrs.
Glass carefully chooses her next words:

MRS. GLASS
Ms. Cleary's parents have - quaint
traditions. It's not *illegal* to
hold onto superstitious quirks.
Even if the result is: your child's
learning's slow.

BRINKS
Learning's slow. Ramona, too?

The class titters at the joke. Ramona and Kylie lock eyes.
Then mutually shy away.

MOMENTS LATER

Between classes, teens loiter. Some debate lessons (MOS).
Others consult their phones.

Mrs. Glass uploads a new lesson plan to her deck: Calculus
110. Untangling cords for the course seems hard work.

Kylie searches for Sandra in the crowd, and finds her glued
to Will. Thanks to her BFF's upload, the two are finally
hitting it off.

SANDRA
(to Will)
Wanna go hang out at my place after
we Five?

KYLIE
Sandra, what about our plans?

SANDRA
Some other night, OK? Will and I
have things to do!

Sandra grabs Will's hand. He reciprocates! Kylie contemplates her new third wheel status. Sandy dismisses her with a wave.

SANDRA
I'll call you later, Ky?

KYLIE
If there's room in your programming then, fine.

Kylie slinks off, eyes low. She looks up and spots Ramona. The girl's *still* reading. The two exchange awkward looks.

KYLIE
Hey. I'm Kylie.

RAMONA
And I'm Ramona. Call me crazy, but you look lost.

Kylie glances at Sandra: flirting with Will, across the room.

KYLIE
I'm not lost. I'm... exploring alternative social avenues now.

She points at Ramona's leather bound book.

KYLIE
I hear that's like a tablet. But without a data connection: the links don't work.

RAMONA
Kinda. My parents call this a book.

KYLIE
Wouldn't it be easier to upload?

RAMONA
Yeah, but dad says that gives people less intellectual "agency". If you learn indirectly with your eyes, you don't *have* to believe every word.

KYLIE
Then why bother with class at all?

RAMONA
'Cause school is mandatory, silly. My parents would get arrested if I don't show up.

Kylie sits down, and stares at the ancient tome.

KYLIE
How do you scroll on that thing?

RAMONA
Piece of cake. Like so.

Ramona flips a page, then drops the book in Kylie's lap.

KYLIE
(grins)
Heavy. But nice in an antique way.

RAMONA
It gets better. Read some words.

KYLIE
What's this "book" about?

RAMONA
It's called *War and Peace*. By some dude called "Tolstoy". They called them "novels" in the old days.

KYLIE
What's a novel?

RAMONA
They're like 5D videos, but slower. Getting through one takes more work.

Across the room, Sandra flirts with Will. The two jack in for class. Kylie ignores their bonding moment, and reads on.

KYLIE
(to Ramona)
Are there other "novels" out there?

RAMONA
You kidding? Come to my house. My parents' library'll blow your mind!

KYLIE
What's a library?

Ramona laughs at the question. Mrs. Glasses' decks BUZZES with the next upload, drowns it out.

Engrossed in her book, Kylie doesn't notice. Her eyes light up as she reads: Tolstoy's got her full attention now...

FINAL FADEOUT: