

X.
ALTERNATIVE ENDING

By N. Le

Sometimes there is a certain feeling of emptiness in someone, it's the type of sadness that haunts someone when they can't sleep at 2 AM. It is the moment when their mind stops its usual stream of useless thoughts and fills with silence, the moments where they've wandered far too deep into the waters to be saved. Although in their defense, you only ever went as far as the shallows. The presence of false comforts and the facade of concern were the only things they could get out of you. But was it enough? At a certain age, I began to realize that in life you are bound to be hurt by others, by yourself, by everything. When things began I thought that there wasn't gonna be an end, that somehow we'd last forever and that nothing would be wrong. They say that sometimes it is ok to be wrong but tonight I am sorry. I am sorry it wasn't ok and I never meant to hurt you, but I did and I wish I hadn't. You never hid it either, the way you felt, your concern about us. I wonder now if we were all wrong or if we were enough in the end? Tonight and every night that will follow, you are the emptiness that will haunt me and at 2 AM, in the midst of my sorrows and pain, I will let my mind wander back to what had happened between us:

"I want to love you too, but loving me is a distraction to you and you don't have the time for that right now. This is over." December 31st. It was too late.

"Hey, we need to talk." December 27th.

-Sorry, can it wait? I wasn't busy I was tired. I should have answered.

"Hey, can we talk when you're not busy. You're always busy but still..." December 26th.

-Sorry, I'm always busy so I don't know when I can talk. I'm sorry I should have tried harder, I love you. Please don't hate me.

"Nothing, never mind. I love you."

-Okay. I knew something was wrong but I didn't feel like talking about it.

"Why do you do this?"

-Do what? I knew what you meant. All my ignoring and excuses.

"I'm sorry, I'm just being needy." December 23rd.

-It's fine, sorry. I knew you were in pain when you said that. Why didn't I say more than that, you weren't being needy you were being human.

"Are you okay? You're really distant, well, not distant but distant." December 23rd.

-Yeah, sorry. I didn't mean to become so detached from us.

"I'm sorry you must be busy, I'll talk to you later." December 22nd.

-Sorry, I just saw this. I didn't notice this was the start of an end. An end to us.

"I love you." December 21st.

-Why? I love you, too.

"Hey." December 20th.

-Hi. Goodbye.

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I carelessly rub my eyes and wipe away the sleep. The dim light radiating from the wake of the day begins to creep through the blinds like a child peeking out from behind the protection of its parent. As I sit up in my bed, I begin to process my thoughts. Replays of last night's dream flood my memory but I quickly push them to the back of my mind as I push the blanket off of me. To my right, the clock reads 5:03 AM. The early morning emerging from the night as it begins to shy away and leave room for the day had left the sky stained a cold blue and my heart stained with the colors of you. I'm sorry, I really am. I get up and shudder as my feet come in contact with the cold tile. I casually slip out of the empty bedroom and make my way towards the bathroom. As I slip into the shower my mind wanders to a memory, one that I tried so hard to bury quickly resurfaced, a memory drowned by the murky waters it was being concealed by:

Everything was cold. His hands slipped around my throat and I wanted to scream or to fight back or to resist at all. But I didn't as I slowly let my eyes close and it scared me, it scared me more than the monster with his hands around my throat, trying to kill me. I was convinced that I wanted to die because up until then I never realized that there needed to be a purpose to live. But then it hit me. Bad choice of wording on my behalf but still. I didn't want to die this way or at least not yet. I opened my eyes to see that the dimly lit living room was no longer the safe place it used to be and that the furniture was in disarray like the remains of this sad excuse of a family. His body reeked of alcohol and his eyes no longer displayed the man who raised me with so much love, in his place was a monster. My father was gone, taken by a demon disguised in a bottle and transformed into a raging alcoholic who no longer could love. I wanted to give up but there was still you. The thought of you gave me have a reason to live because even though I had lost the love from him I still had yours. I looked around the "living" room, where I was ironically about to die in and searched. Searching for one desperate last resort, anything at all. And I saw the glass frame that held the last photo we took as a family. Dad had a smile so bright it made the sun look dull and Mom looked alive. You could see her hair was thinning as a result of the chemo but she looked so alive. Then there was me, with a slight sunburn on the visible parts of my body and eyes that sat half closed due to the glaring sun and a wholesome smile aimed at the camera. I wondered: "How did we end up here?" before reaching out for the bulky glass photo frame and swung. The glass shattered and shards stuck out of the side of his head as the grip loosened. Suddenly everything was cold again, the once lively lives we shared together collapsed and nothing was ok and everything became worse. Blood slowly began to drip down and his body became still. I smiled for the first time in a long time. For a split-second I felt the adrenaline, then bliss, and then there was no feeling at all. I continued not to feel anything when the police arrived or when they stuck me in that psych ward for three months afterward.

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The cold water hits my body, breaking me from my thoughts before I could begin to drown. I guess I've never had good luck with any form of love. Not even the easiest ones, but then again is love ever easy? I grab a towel and dry off but somehow, even with all the water I wipe away, I couldn't remove the tears that began to drip out. I wipe away my tears and take a deep breath before gathering my thoughts together. I walk into my room to get dressed I feel a chill from the cold air hitting my skin. Even after I am dressed I think that the cold chill ended up stuck on me.

I step out from the security of my apartment complex and begin to make my way towards work. The weather outside is slightly chilly but not enough for me to be bothered by it. The library I work at is only two blocks away but for some reason, today, it felt miles away. No matter how far I walked it only felt farther. The sky above began to start getting brighter but ironically enough, it all seemed so dark. The air begins to suffocate me and suddenly my mind wanders back in time. A time when I could feel the life get sucked out of my soul and I had to fight to feel whole. My body slows down and I quickly climb out of the hole I have fallen in before the weight of the world could come crashing down on me, again. Breathe in. Breathe out. Repeat. I continue my trek to the library and leave behind the thoughts that don't belong in my mind.

The library is quiet, though in our day and age that's nothing new. The only visitors usually consisted of tourists, asking for directions, and the occasionally misguided teen, looking for a sense of individuality to feel different from their peers. I liked the emptiness of the library, it was secure and peaceful. As I make my way towards the book check-out desk, I greet my coworkers and then the day finally begins to move along. Even as the world continues to move forward I am stuck in the past:

“How do you feel? Alone? Happy? Sad? Angry? Empty?” His body was there, I could see it, I could hear him, sense him. But when I looked up to face him there was nothing there. The room was a blur, the air was cold on my skin and everything became distorted. “Are you ok?” the words echoed when he spoke them. No, I wasn't ok. The walls began to start crumbling down and the lights began to twitch rapidly. I broke. I clawed at my skin, for my body no longer felt like my own. I tugged at my hair trying to pull out the thoughts that kept attacking me. My father. My mother. And you. Two or three contorted bodies surrounded me and then it all went black. It was like sleeping, no noise, and no feelings, like being dead but without dying. The problem was, I wanted to die. I won't ever admit to anyone and frankly, I would deny any suggestions towards it. I wanted to die because the world around me was giving up on me and slowly I was, too. My mind gave way and fell apart, nothing around me was what I thought it was anymore.

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With enough alcohol, anyone could feel at home even in unknown places. How ironic, tonight in my own home I feel more detached than ever. The usual 2 AM emptiness chased me throughout my days and momentarily it's managed to catch up to me so I called the only person I knew I could. "Come over," The words escaped my lips but I didn't recognize the person speaking them. On the other end of the phone, you stayed quiet, like you were thinking of what to say and I thought you would hang up or reject me, again. But you didn't and without sparing another moment you replied with a soft, "Ok." The rest of the night was a sloppy, rushed blur. Your touch was hot but no matter how close you were, we were still so far away.

"Sameen," your voice is quiet, gentle as if you're scared that if you speak any louder then I'll break. The sun was peeking through ever so slightly as you faced me. I could feel the warmth of the light on my exposed leg, it was almost comforting. I lay in silence, simply looking over at you to make sure you understand that I'm listening because if I were to respond to you right now I might just shatter. "We should talk," this time your voice gets more serious and the tension in the room rises. "You vanished for months and didn't say a single word to me regarding what happened. How was I supposed to feel when I found out what had happened with your father? You refused to answer any of my calls or texts. Next thing I know I'm told you were in a hospital and completely unstable. I care about you and I love you, just let me. You owe me such." I know that I can't change the past and it continually ends up catching up to the present. At the end of the day love has lots of unconventional meanings, to some its an illusion, to others it's a priceless treasure. The way you define love is how you experience it. To people like you and I, love is just a four-letter word. One with no meaning and no presence in what we revel in. "Sameen, I lo-" I stopped you. You were rational to be cautious earlier because you must've said something too loud and it shattered me. "Get out." My voice trembles and my hands shake. You don't respond at first, still in the midst of processing my words so I take it upon myself to repeat them. "Get out! I don't owe you a single thing because you don't control me. You don't love me, not even close, you just cling to me because that's what sick people do. Cling to familiarity and use people when they don't have enough attention. Do yourself a service and go home." I need you. Sorry but this is how this needs to be. I wish you would just agree and left without a word but you couldn't do that, could you? You had to break me even further. With a trembling voice, you exclaimed to me this, "Don't tell me how I feel. I love you. Please don't allow this be the end of us. I need you." but still following that, you got up and left. The door slammed closed and I collapsed deeper into the comforts of my bed. We've always been like this, haven't we?

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Your hands felt like home. Somewhere along a misguided stream of drunken 'I love you's, I began to make excuses to justify forcing myself to depend on you. How was I supposed to know that what I was doing was wrong? I was intoxicated more than half of the time and when I wasn't, I was preoccupied trying to convince myself that I was okay. We used each other because we were both too afraid to admit we had our issues. You and I were just two strangers who needed to feel loved or at the least accepted to feel whole. We shared secrets and memories full of trust and love but none of that could ever be confused for real love because, in the end, it was all in vain. "Why won't you let me in?", you asked me that one night, half-asleep but still completely aware of the impact of your question. I'll never understand your basis for such childish questions, mostly when you already knew the answer. After my Father died I found a form of ecstasy in hurting people. What you had interpreted as a "special connection" between us could have been easily thrown away in a matter of seconds or however long it took me to get bored of you. How did you expect me to feel bad for not loving you when I was surrounded by toxic, hateful people: an alcoholic father, a mother that let cancer kill every part of her spirit and consume her being paired, and past lovers who spent every second of our "relationship" getting me intoxicated enough to overlook that he was a physically and emotionally cruel man.

"Sameen, I lo-"

"Don't."