

X.

By N. Le

Sometimes there is a certain feeling of emptiness in someone, it's the type of sadness that haunts them when they can't sleep at 2 AM. It is the moment when their mind stops it usually streams of useless thoughts and it fills them 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 would never be an end and that, somehow, we'd last forever and that nothing could ever go wrong. There is a saying, that sometimes it is okay to be wrong, but tonight I am sorry because I was wrong and 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 wiping away the sleep. A dim light radiates as 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 my body, exposing it to the chilled air. To my right, the clock reads 5:03 AM. The early morning emerges as the night begins to shy away and leave room for the day. The sky stained a light orange and my heart was stained with the colors of you. I get up and shudder as my feet come to contact with the cold tile beneath me. I casually slip out of the empty bedroom and make my way towards the bathroom. As I undress to slip into the shower my mind wanders and suddenly a memory that I tried so hard to bury quickly resurfaces, 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. Stationed next to her thinning body 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, a wholesome smile aimed at the camera. I questioned, "How did we end up here?", before reaching out for the bulky glass photo frame and I swung. The glass shattered and shards stuck out of the side of his head as his grip loosened. Suddenly everything was cold again. The once vibrant lives we shared together collapsed and nothing was okay. Blood began to slowly drip down the side of his head and his body became still. I smiled for the first time in a long time because for a split-second I felt the adrenaline, then bliss, and then there was no feeling at all. I

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continued not to feel anything when the police arrived or when they stuck me in that psych ward for nine months afterward.

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: when is love ever easy? I grab a towel and dry off yet even with all the water I wipe away my eyes produced more. I wipe away my tears a final time before taking a deep breath. As I walk into my room to get dressed, I feel a chill from the cold air hitting my skin. In spite of getting dressed, I could still feel the cold air clinging to my skin.

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 began to suffocate me and without notice, my mind begins to stray from the present and make its way back in time. A time when I could feel the life get sucked out of my soul and I had to fight with my own conscious 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 had no place in my life in the first place.

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, greet my coworkers, and let the day progress on its own. Despite the continuous forward movement of time, 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 inspect his demeanor there was nothing there. The room was a blur the air was cold on my skin and everything became distorted. “Sameen, are you ok?” his words echoed when he spoke them. No, I wasn't okay. 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

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wanted to die. I won't ever admit to those thoughts directly, to be honest, I would probably deny any suggestions towards it because I am terrified of exposing my ugliness and weakness. 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.

I come home from work and make my way to the bathroom. I turn on the bath faucet and water slowly begins to fill the tub. Time becomes an insignificant factor in my life and I go to turn on my speakers and put on a soft piano tune that fills the rooms that I will have lived in. I left you a note, by the time you get home and read it I will be okay again. Tonight I will kill myself and only then will I finally be alive. I light candles around the tub and shut off the faucet when the tub reaches $\frac{3}{4}$ capacity. I quietly strip and turn to look at my reflection. The body before me is one that does not have a spirit, just an empty shell. I make my way into the tub and slowly lower my head under the surface. My lungs begin to burn and my vision becomes distorted. My mind runs nearly blank and my life begins to flash before my eyes, forcing me to relive every moment.

My mother laid still on the hospital bed, peaceful, lifeless, and smiling. I wanted to say that her death was hard on me by it wasn't. Somewhere along the line, I started to hate her. She never really did love me either so I guess it was only fair that I hated her. See, my mother was selfish and sick -ironically enough, both mentally and physically- and she never let me be content with anything. When she was younger she had lost her father so she took it upon herself to make sure I didn't have one either. I mean, he was there but he never let himself love me like he loved her because she used her father's death to manipulate him. Perhaps if I had said something before she died then he wouldn't have become a monster.

An empty bottle hits the wall, shattering into hundreds of scattered fragments. Dad was having another episode. He usually got aggressive when he was drunk and unfortunately for me, he was always drunk. I was 13 when my mother died and I dealt with his abuse for 5 years before I was free. I don't think I'll ever regret killing him. I just regret letting things go so far that I had to.

Next, my reminiscences take me to you. I met you two years before that night. I never told you how much I loved you. I'm sorry for letting you go. I'm sorry I didn't love you when you were right in front of me. Every thought I had was consumed by your image but I couldn't show you. We fell in love in the blossoming spring but as the years went by you grew weary of waiting for a door that never existed to open and hence the cold winter took you with it.

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More memories filled my thoughts but the light was getting darker by the second. I will cease to exist and soon my memory will die. Please forget me. I need you to, for my sake. My body finally feels weightless and my stress and sadness begin to disappear along with my consciousness. Tonight a potential mother, friend, coworker, cousin, grandmother, artist, author, dreamer died. Tonight I gave up on everything I could have been because what I was haunted by myself. I leave behind an empty soul. I am leaving behind a life with so much to hold and it is selfish but I don't think that I could care at this point. It is too late. Up until this point I've never accepted the truth: I was never afraid to die but scared that I never truly lived. I let my life slip out of my own control and I was too ashamed to admit it. Something went terribly awry during the course of things.