

ACHING DIVIDE

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Two am; the silent melody of the piano played hauntingly. No fingers worked the ebony and ivory keys, although the notes sounded clear and perfectly tuned within her mind. She swept herself about, her form elegant and graceful, yet somehow each movement wept of a sullen sadness. The unvoiced music was her partner tonight, leading her, moving her whole body. Together they were dancing slowly in an empty room. No, she thought, No, tonight the lonely was her partner.

It was the same as each night before; legs gave out from under her, crumbling like the careless foundation of a house of cards. A shambled mess now curled on the floor she began to cry off her face again. Arms held knees to breasts and lips trembled whilst singing herself a quiet lullaby. Muted soothing words of childhood comfort.

Seconds slipped by into minutes and minutes fell away into unknown time, finally; sodden dripping eyes rose timidly from under matted hair and fell upon the shelves of competition trophies and medals: once they were so prized and treasured, though they meant nothing to her now. The two little figures of gold, silver or bronze stood as inert as her spirit. The floorboards she thought felt chilly and hard against the touch of her exposed skin and caused her to shiver. She knew if she lay there any longer she would most likely catch a cold from the ice crystallizing inside her soul. Her damp glassy eyes moved from the hollow lifeless statuettes holding each other to the closed door which led to the rest of the house. Finally she pulled herself from the floor, shoulders hung limply like wet washing. Moving to the door she paused, hand tentatively poised over the brass knob, she couldn't do it. She struggled with herself and finally managed to move it slightly.

Cracking the door just enough, she slunk through the gap and walked the darkened hallway. The only sound was her own faint footfalls on the wooden floorboards and the silent sound of loneliness following her to bed again. As she approached the bedroom doorway she paused again at the threshold, too afraid to go inside, for the pain of facing one more loveless night. A ghostly silhouette of a girl that she so wanted to be, a shell of a girl that she used to know well. Now, she was nothing, a mere shadow of her former self, her life up ended and everything she longed for torn away from her.

'But why?' she thought. 'What had happened and why was she like this, so cold, numb and empty inside.'

'You know why,' the lonely mocked.

'What's done is done, right?' she questioned, to which it unseeingly nodded its approval.

Lightly her toes crept their way onto the edge of the carpet, and then one foot at a time she slowly walked toward the solitary sleeping figure in the bed. By crossing the threshold she was letting the loneliness closer to her. She knew he'd never reach out and touch her again, but she just had to be close to him.

Everything felt numbly cold to her, even the bed sheets as she crawled imaginatively between them. She'd lost everything when he'd left her here alone with the lonely. Now everything to her was just broken pieces of a barely breathing life.

'Can the lonely take the place of you?' she murmured to the sleeping figure beside her. 'Yes,' the lonely breathed within her. She rolled on her side and looked at his warm form laying in the bed alone, breathing steadily in slumber. One thing was certain and she couldn't help but whisper to herself, 'So the loneliness will stay with me . . . and hold me till I fall asleep . . . for where there once was love. . . now there's only . . . me . . . and the lonely.' Her eyelids fluttered closed as she watched him into the early hours; finally she let him go and let the lonely in. It swept her into the starless darkness, devoid of pleasant dreams. For death is dreamless, but so too was she now, dreamless and dead, and he was still alive.

THE AFTERLIFE