

Hope

I run wildly in the snow. He is running behind me with a ball of ice in his hands. I am laughing. He swings the ball at me. I am covered in ice. He comes running towards me. I hit him playfully. He holds my gloved hands and looks deep into my eyes. Then he holds me tight and we kiss; almost kiss. He suddenly pushes me away. I fall down hard on the snow. I look at him with shock and surprise. Now he starts laughing; a deep throaty laugh. But it is not sensual anymore. It is evil; pure evil. Then *she* comes out of nowhere. They embrace and kiss and mock at me. I want to get out of there. I try but I cannot move. I am held closely by the snow as if by invisible hands. I am a mute audience to their love making. I scream.

I open my eyes with a gasp. I am sweating; but I am relieved. I was only dreaming. Dreams like this have become pretty common. There are always about him and her. I think about the most recent one, and I realize I have a deep pit in my stomach. I move my heavy limbs out of the warmth of my blanket and get out of my bed. I am shivering by the time I reach the bathroom. I look out of the window. It is snowing again. I brush my teeth, avoiding eye contact with myself in the mirror. I hate to look at me; the look of me. I shower and prepare my breakfast. I eat because I have to. My roommate is in deep slumber in an adjacent bed. She is snoring loudly. It is almost bright outside. But I am unable to see if the sun has risen or not. The tree outside is leaden with snow, its branches bent under the burden. A few weeks ago, I would have found this sight beautiful. I would have beheld it in my eyes with him by my side. We would have looked at each other and smiled. Then we would have kissed. I close my eyes abruptly. *I have to stop thinking about him*, I tell myself. I cover myself for protection against

sheets of snow. I collect my book bag and other important things, and leave my house to perform dull chores.

I look down as I near the bus stop, to prevent the snow from entering my eyes. I stand there alone in a puddle of icy water while the rest of the town sleeps away. The bus comes after what seems like an eternity. It is sprinkled with people; early risers. *At least I have company*, I tell myself. It takes me fifteen minutes to get to school. I think about him. Every pore of me misses him. We would have talked and laughed and cracked silly jokes in the bus. I would have felt alive and spirited. The bus stops at a red light and I see the church I want to visit but never have. I look at the stained glass pictures of Virgin Mary. I see melancholy in her downcast eyes. I see the others in the picture, mocking at her sorry state. Divinity came later. Unknowingly I touch my belly. I remember something and my heart thuds loudly, as if protesting against the torture. I feel sick and suffocated. Mercifully, my school is here. I get off the bus.

When I reach school, I find out there are no classes today due to blizzard like conditions. I inwardly moan and slump my shoulders. *I knew* school was closed. But I forgot; just like I forget to submit assignments on time. I shake my head and bite my lips to stop the tears from escaping my eyes. I leave the school building in the blinding snow. I don't feel like going home. It reminds me of him. I decide to go to the coffee shop. It is deserted. I take a seat by the fire place. I think about the time I visited this place with him, many eons ago. We sat near the fireplace with cups of delicious steaming coffee. He told me that I was the only one who could understand him. *She* never did. That's why he fell in love with *me*. He wished that he could do something so we could be together forever. His eyes water and he blinks hard. I feel the lump of emotion in his throat. I hold his hands in mine and look at his innocent face. I smile and declare my love for him. He smiles, but doesn't say anything. We know we can never be together. But

we are content at the moment. *Love transcends all boundaries*, I tell myself. I am jolted back to reality by a crackle in the fire. I realize I haven't touched my coffee. I sigh deeply as tears start to form in my eyes. The pain in my heart is searing, threatening to burst any moment. I leave in a hurry. I still don't want to go home.

Its morning but it's gray. It is as if the sun is weary of the world. He wants it to be doomed in darkness. There is no reprieve. As I walk, I come to the church I always wanted to go to. I decide to go in. *Maybe God can answer a few questions*, my conscience teases. But before I can visit God inside, I see something in the courtyard. It is a statute of the Virgin Mother, standing alone in the harsh snow. Instead of going inside, I go towards the statue. It is made of pristine marble. I look at the life-sized sculpture of the Mother, the woman whose fate was unkind to her. *But she gave birth to the Son of God*. Yes. She did. But as I look at her, all I see is a crestfallen woman with a burden she cannot share with anyone. She has been entrusted with a job, that of delivering the world from evil and sins.

"I committed a sin too Mother." I say to her. "I loved someone so much, I gave myself away. I stooped so low that now I can't seem to come back from the depths. It is a chasm that is sucking me in more every day. Mother, I loved someone with all my heart. I trusted his words and believed them even though I knew his heart belonged to someone else. I melted under his touch and rose again. I felt things in my heart I have never felt before. I did everything for him. I planned my day as he wanted. I went where he took me. I let him love me and I loved him back like there was no tomorrow. I knew I was sinning, Mother. I knew, his heart belonged to someone else. And still, I was soaking up as much as he offered me. I was the enchanted princess. He made me feel like one. And when life fluttered within me, I was happy. I forgot who or where I was. I also forgot, I was a replacement, filling up a void in his life that had been left

there by someone's absence. Mother, as the seed took root, I was ecstatic with joy. I forgot the Rules. When I remembered, I was so afraid that I let foreign hands throttle the tiny life. I gave up a part of me as if it was not living. He said that I had to let go of everything as that was the right thing to do. He said that he had warned me about this. He also said that the body craves what it craves for. I was just that, a means to an end. A craving that needed to be satisfied. A different taste for his palate. I was silly to think he loved me. I gave him everything Mother. Everything. And now, no one cares. If I die today, no one will shed a tear for me. Just like you. If you fall today, are unearthed by this demon of a storm, will you be resurrected? Will people care if you stopped existing in this square? Or if you brave this storm and stand tall? Will people care then? Will you be taken for granted?"

I become conscious that I am crying again. I tell everything to this stone in front of me. But I don't feel better. I am submerged in snow. I look at myself helplessly. I feel like I don't want to live anymore. Not after what he did to me. I remember my friends' unheeded warnings. It has to be done now. I take the blade out of my pocket. I make a deep slice with it on my wrist cutting the artery. It hurts momentarily. I see my scarlet life escaping out freely. I realize I am clutching onto the robe of the Mother. I have to let go. But I can't. Why can't I let go? I start to feel dizzy. I feel sleepy and tired. I want to rest. I am falling now. I see the puddle I have made at my feet. As I collapse I realize I don't want to die. I want to live for what it is worth. I panic. Is it too late? I am on the steps. Any moment now, I will see the light at the end of the tunnel. I see flashes of my life before me. My desires, achievements and hopes, explode all at once. I see people who love me genuinely. *It was a mistake*, I say. Before I close my eyes, I see the Virgin Mary staring at me through her downcast eyes.

"My child, my child." She is saying. "Why did you do this?"

Now she is wearing a red cap and pulling me up. I hear sirens somewhere in the distance. I sink into a deep sleep.

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I open my eyes, to see the worried faces of my roommates looming over me. They smile and wish me. I look around to grasp the reality of my surroundings. I first hear the beep-beep of the monitoring machines. Then I see the blood bag hanging over me. A needle is piercing the skin of my elbow and my arm is heavy. I am in the hospital. I gauge the situation gingerly. I am relieved to be breathing again, but I feel ashamed of myself. I am unable to make eye contact with any of them. *What can I say to them?* We avoid talking.

The tension is broken when a doctor comes to evaluate me. She says something about a major depressive episode or nervous breakdown or something similar. I am put on drugs that make me drowsy. But they also fill me with a sense of tranquility. I haven't cried in days. I still think about him and feel the stabbing pain. But I don't cry anymore. My friends come to see me every day. They bring me flowers and sweets. They tell me funny stories that make me laugh until my sides hurt. They shower me with their care. I feel guilty, because I thought I don't matter anymore.

"He knows about what you did." My friend says.

"I don't care."

I mean it.

A volunteer comes to see me every day. He reads to me. We discuss Hemingway, Garcia-Marquez and Plath. Before long, we share our life stories. I tell him everything. He says that I am

a brave girl. He reminds me that life is important. It is not worth ending for anyone. I agree with him. I am feeling better with each passing day. I have agreed to see the counselor after I go home. It has stopped snowing. The sun is out again, I hear them say. The long night has ended. Spring will be here soon. I will go home soon. I thank everyone for getting me out of the hollow I had buried myself in. I thank the Mother for not giving up on me.

It is night. I will be discharged tomorrow. I am looking forward to it. I go to sleep.

I am running again in the snow. He is running behind me with a ball of ice in his hands. I stop and turn to face him. I push him away as he comes near. He falls. I turn around and start running towards the bridge in front of me. I turn back to see that he is still running behind me. I run faster. I am full with energy. He is falling behind. Now he is just a dark speck in the colorless snow. As I cross the bridge, I see flowers everywhere. The snow is gone. Spring is here. I see hope. I am saved.

I am saved.

The End.