

## Cold Embraces

The corpse still seemed visible at the surface of the water. Staring blankly into an abyss, her eyes never seemed to submerge in the depth. Blood still surrounded her stationary body, not knowing when to wash off with the lake.

I come here twice a week, smelling the stench of the week-old cadaver and ichor that never dried up. I come here to see the perfectly fitted dress on her, even though the water should've destroyed its charm. I come here and wait until I know she's not visible to me anymore. My watch seemed to be moving quicker than usual. I realized that heading back before the night arrived would be a suitable decision.

I drove back home with a feeling of dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction of knowing that I have to arrive at the lake again tomorrow. But for now, I needed a bed.

I rang the doorbell to a door I regret coming back to. It wasn't before 5 rings that my girlfriend opened the door and welcomed me with the warm feeling that only she could ever understand: *love*.

"How did it look?" she asked as if she didn't know the answer.

"The same love; you're still not budging," I spit my words with an angry tone.

"No matter how many days you visit, that corpse is not going deep down in the water. You know that— or, rather, you know it, but you just can't accept it."

She did appear quieter than usual. I wondered if the body was actually drowning inch-by-inch. Or maybe it was just her trying to prevent me from going back to that swamp.

"When you say *you just can't accept it ...*" I lowered my tone.

“What do you expect me to say? I haven’t changed this dress since you started visiting that place. Hell... I can’t even touch you,” she says, though what she said was pretty obvious.

“Yes, I know. That’s what happens when you’re not around to stay alive,” I shouldn’t have said that.

She turned around and started admiring all the details of our house. The raised roof, drooping chandelier over the dining table, the faucet that kept dripping water seemed too familiar to her. About five minutes into her walk around the house, she stopped at the picture of *us*. I never understood what she saw in *us*, her admiration for this relationship always seemed to be at par with my desolation.

“I want to feel this,” she whispered while struggling to grasp the photograph.

I left her to her admiration of our picture. Going back to *our* bedroom, Darya entered before me and took her usual position in the bed. *Always right*, she thought. My mind didn’t let me change my clothes and shower, so I crashed into bed knowing that my trip to the swamp is waiting for me.

“Goodnight, *love*,” she uttered those words till I felt the hollowness crawl inside my body.

She slid close and embraced me with her long hugs. But, instead of warmth and safety, I sensed nothing but myself clinging to my own skeleton.

The next morning seemed too repetitive for my own good. Darya’s constant comments, her walks around the house, and the sensation of madness in my bones.

*“I amble with ease and yet I can’t feel the ground,*

*I talk with passion but can't hear anything but your sound.*

*Swamps and water give me a feeling of home,*

*And yet our house has an entity walking around."*

I drove to that dreadful place with her poems in my thoughts. Every rhyme made the feeling of that corpse not drowning even worse. But to my imagination, this time she was lying sideways in the water. It was like she was about to fall asleep in her bed. Like she was about to slide closer and hug someone till the hollowness crept back in.

No... no. Just my imagination, as I thought.

The drive back home got more disappointing day by day. Ringing the doorbell until I realize that the door is always unlocked, sensing Darya's tone-deaf footsteps, and crashing into bed with her to realize that I can never feel her hugs. The word, *dreary*, perfectly complimented these circumstances.

The word, *dreary*, complimented my life at this point.

Darya's poems got more potent every morning. Her strolls around the house got louder with each passing minute.

*"The entity that resides in your house,*

*Stays within the confines of the cadaver you wish to see drown.*

*And, to add, it will definitely not drown,*

*Until I depart from the domicile where your death may be found."*

Every night became colder with these words sticking to my skeleton like the thought of that corpse never drowning.

Darya's hugs became hollower.

My body became weaker, exhausted, and deprived of some life.

My brain gave up.

On our last night, she jumped into *our* bed. *Always right*, she said. I crashed, slid closer, and embraced her, even though I knew I couldn't feel her body.

She brought herself close to my ear and said,

*"Now the entity departs,*

*As your death lives in the same place where my blood was found."*

To which I replied, "Goodnight, *love*."

She departed.