

When One Ignores the Whispers

By Lily Zediana

Mummy's been overhead for a few months when we go to find a new house. Linny rebukes all my fusses; she moans on and on how this is for the best, how we were rotting like the flowers. The thing is the flowers weren't rotting because of us. They died. We just never brought the corpses out. The day we leave, I wake up at four in the morning. We have to throw out our mattresses because the new house has new, apparently 'better' ones. I then ignore all of Linny's plights. She's quite a bother; "*You oughta stop that or we'll be eating carrots with no sweetnin*" and "*If we're getting anymore calls 'bout this old problem of yours, soon you'll be dealing with em*" were the forte. Only, she was quite rude. She never said it to my face; I would be in my room and hear a rumbling from beneath my cold toes. I would sometimes sit in the bathroom, leaning my ear against the grate that opened up to the kitchen.

Mummy's room has been quite sad for a few months, and now it's in the garbage truck. My sneakers are soaked, toes curling at the cold itching them. The few remnants of our home that Linny is letting us keep are shoved into her little bug that makes people punch each other. After grumbling enough she sorted through and found me a tennis ball. I wonder what it tastes like.

Linny's eyes linger over me longer than necessary. My hands tighten around the ball and it would've been in my favor to yell at her: "Dontcha got some baloney to take care of missy?!" But she patted my hair back and returned to the mattresses, a box cutter in hand.

I stood over the puddles, circled the fog, whipped the ball against a tree. After one too many times where it fell to the snow and I had to swim through for it, I gave up. The garbage trucks came some time after Linny set out our mattress and now they and Mummy's pretty dresses are being murdered.

"Mummy," my brain yells out, "*why haven't you come for your dresses? Linny is doing horrible things to them.*" Only then, do I remember Mummy is overhead and is probably having her wings sewn into her skin.

Some woman is joking about some celebrity while some song teases us and some of my patience digs into the sum of all my troubles. "Don't pick," comes Linny's voice, nitpicky as ever. I decide to chew my fingers instead.

Our new house is big. I close my eyes after seeing it and try to bring my mind back to nights without sleep, imagining what this new place could look like. I don't believe I imagined thick veins of vines running up the arteries of red stripes, laid over the skin of green paneling; shutters holding on for dear life as a tree branch teases and tickles them; a great big white rectangular board with scribbles on it.

There is a man who shakes Linny's hands. He says something about me but I am inclined not to talk to him. Linny murmurs not to be rude once the man is taking our bags in. My attempts to retrieve my belongings are sullied by the man who keeps a firm grip on one of my bags. The fibers of artificial grass dig into my hands and the man asks if I play tennis. I say I don't know what that is. He says I can call him Nick.

Mummy's kitchen was smaller, and whiter, clean, and simpler than this kitchen. The home is decked out in green, from the walls, to wallpaper, furniture, to shutter, cabinets, to plants. I note none of them are corpses. I ask it to no one but Nick says he's been watering them. He should save them from us.

The leaves ripple from the taunt of a force that whips my hair to the side of my head and tickles the base of my necks. With it dances a sound, something strange and sweet, sentimental and calm. And so so long it trickles in my ear; a little undertone burrowing deeply. Linny locks the door and scratches the back of her neck.

Beside an open doorway leading to a long hall which winds then wilts to a living room like our flowers, is a strange thing. I approach it with greater resistance than I had ever held in my bones. And yet my fingers are running along the thin strips of wood paneled in a way that creates the bend of a quarter of a circle. As I go to retract them, I am overcome with shock that stills one's body when a hand, much larger and firmer, grasps the wood.

"You can touch, it's yers after all." Nick is standing there. And his hand falls down the curve of the wooden quarter-circle to the bottom where it meets a solid slab of beat up wood. He presses his fingers under it and just as quickly as my fingers seek out the surface, it whips up and disappears into an opening I had not previously noticed. Now, there is a desk. With lots, and lots, and lots, of paper.

"You do much writing at school?" When I seldom reply, he pats my shoulder and leaves for Linny.

The desk has a smile, one created by the strange holes in the back panel, accompanied by slashes. Then, there's a smile on the paper. It's the only thing I can understand in the sea of markings in a black ink. My pointer fingers tugs at it, and reveals more of those beneath. The smile recedes with every page and the black ink has been cut open to run of something red.

My hands are fortunately at my side when Linny hides away the smiles. She says I should go find my room. There is no mattress. I scold Linny that we should've saved ours from the dump and she says I should hold my tongue. I slept in her bed that night. I woke up to her on the couch.

The itching is louder. I hear them. They must be trapped in the walls, but the bars aren't holding. I hear them, rubbing themselves against the bed posts, in the night, in the day, in the garden. But what terrifies me most is I feel I hear them now in my own heart. I've felt a warning for some time but it seems this pestering disease will be with me forevermore.

While I sleep in Linny's room, my room is still mine.

"You had better get yourself together," I tell the wallpaper, bending due to the ceiling crying. "That is not any way to look," I reprimand while folding a paper over and over. A girl at school said it was impossible to fold paper more than seven times. I am devoting myself to proving her an idiot. After failed attempt and failed attempt, that becomes my little mantra, my religion, my heart beat.

"She's an idiot, she's stupid, she's gotta stand straight, she chews too loudly."

I run my fingers under the page, imagining for a moment she's standing there, seeing her stupidity. Tears escape the corner of my eyes as a sting is sent from the broken tip of my finger and to the back of my neck. The paper falls to the floor, unfurling as it does so. It opens to show a red blood splotch over a smile I don't remember drawing.

"Idiot, idiot, idiot," I whimper, holding my own hand. I sniffle, pushing the door open with my back. "She's just an idiot, such a little dumb girl."

Our bedrooms are upstairs, two floors up from the kitchen. I heard Nick saying beyond the three floors is an attic. He gave Linny a key. I'm pretty sure she threw it out.

My throat becomes tight as the ravine of the stairs is before me. The temptation to peel off my socks comes over me but I decide to just take it slowly. I'm inching towards the bottom of the mountain when the muffled noises that had been background music to my day, become clear.

"Oh I am not being dramatic," comes Linny's voice in that crackingly stern sense.

With feet of a mouse, I tiptoed to the doorway. My eyes gently look over the dark green painted frame.

"You have gotta listen to me I-" Linny's lips are still parted but nothing passes by. I wish I had a snake and could petrify this moment. She looks like an idiot. The frozen statue of her lasts little time; for her jaw tenses and words come to fruition. "No, we have never once had a cat, but we had fleas where we lived before. Now, we move into this new place to escape them and they've come here too. It's as if the little boogers are following us."

Her knuckles pale around the phone but her face crispens like the apple on the table and the blood trickling from my thumb. She looks funny.

"Oh sure, I'll have a bloody fan-tas-ti-c day!"

She's quite dramatic. Mummy was always quiet on the phone. Though, Mummy was rarely on the phone, only one time when Linny wasn't home and my teacher called. We had conferences the next day, and Linny was quite angry coming home from them. She said I needed to put some effort in. She's so infuriating.

"Linny." Her eyes snap towards me, a sharper, more personal tension filling them and her features.

"What? Why- why aren't you ready-my god, we've gotta get going in ten minutes."

I squeeze my own wrist. Linny turns and closes the strange wooden desk. The smile slips away.

"The paper," my words sound pitiful. *Idiot, Idiot, Idiot, Idiot.*

Linny strokes her hair back, the deep auburn poking out through her fingers. "What?" Her sigh switches to something fearful and I stiffen as she falls to her knees and takes my hand into her own. "Oh god, what happened?" I find it silly, how she asks questions but is always rushing off before I could answer. In movies, people seem to normally listen. Linny is back with a bandage.

"It could be the ghosts."

"What?" Linny's eyes assault mine.

I look down, watching her cover the blood. "Nothing."

"Don't start like that. This place is a wonderful home we are lucky to have gotten. Now, keep your chin up, smile, be a good girl, and don't wish for bad things that haven't happened..."

My lips thin and I nod. Linny walks somewhere. Probably to get my school clothes.

I rub my eyes clean, opening them to find the fridge smiling back at me. The magnetic letters Mummy liked have been stuck to it and arranged. The letters E, T, and Y are arranged and ordered... Y, E, T.

I should probably learn how to read.

They are showing themselves. Slowly, surely, and sequentially, they keep showing themselves; and this fickle calm we've sowed is being called to arms. I've been told to wait it out, that all will return to as it was. But was before

anything I'd ever want again? I think not, and as I clear away and try to salvage anything good we had, I am only being beckoned by this. It's no longer just scratching. They're revealing themselves. They are no longer invisible, but a haze, an outline of someone familiar. And they stretch a finger, motioning for me to join them.

I think the house and Linny aren't agreeable. If we could free the paintings and clocks from where they're bound to the wall, they would flee in a puff of dust. Nick oughta do the same.

But no. He sits with me, passing the broken wedges of chalk between his hands.

"Ya' know, this place was quite a looker in its heyday. Just a few decades ago..."

Nick is weird. He uses words and I feel like my mind is scrambled. We use the same words, right? My new teacher says I should practice sounding out words I am used to hearing while looking at their letters. I think she's annoying.

"... and if I know right, from the listing I gave to your sister it said a little girl who lived here would perform for the guests. Maybe we should start doing those funny shows again," he said, sporting a smile that seemed to want a reply.

Why were movies so simple but life so complicated? Why did Linny never want answers to her questions but Nick wants answers to his non-questions?

I sighed, taking one of the broken white chalk pieces from Nick. I pressed it into the cracked pavement, moving it back and forth and sawing away at the white flecks.

"Whatdya want for dinner? Lin said we could order out, or check out a new place in town. I don't think you guys have gone around all too much but there's a good place with-"

"Where's Linny?"

Leaves roll past our feet and to a pile of rubbish Linny and Nick created. Linny had been mumbling to him, saying how a fresh start needs a fresh garden. It's sad. Nick kept the plants alive for so long, and I can't help but wonder if he's sad too. I want him to get away from here. There are probably plants for him somewhere else.

"Lin just has some stuff to take care of."

"What stuff?" I place my chin on my knees, frowning as the white chalk rolls away into the grass. The long blades swallow it up.

"Just stuff. Adult stuff that isn't something a kid should put any thought to."

Nick orders food to the house. We eat the pizza and Linny doesn't come home. He puts me to bed a few hours later than normal. Nick says Linny should get a bed. I don't understand his persistence. I decided to ask him why and he says people sleep on beds, it's the way it's done. Why? Linny has always slept on the couch.

She's dead. She's dead. She's been dead nearly half a year. She died. She died. We buried her. We've visited her grave. She no longer exists. She's dead. She's dead. She's dead. She can't move. She can't speak. She can't go near me. She can't speak to me. She can't speak to her. She can't. She can't. She's gone.

Forever.

She's not coming back.

The letters began to arrive at my door periodically once Linny had enough of my ‘crap’. She used bigger words. Meaner ones. Ones that I don’t understand, but Nick translated, saying she was just upset. I don’t know why he explained, Linny’s never been anything but upset. Concern would find me if it were anything else.

The letters must have been coming for a while. Hidden under my own. Stuffed in a garbage bin. Laid across our dead fireplace. Now, I can always rely on sliding open the wooden quarter-circle to find more of them. The paper smells old, and I want to fall asleep in it. I’ve started keeping them with the clean papers Linny supplies for doodling.

“Dumb, dumb ink, you oughta move yerself,” I scold the paper, bothered when the yellow of my felt tip pen was swallowed by the darkness of the ink. The author has bad handwriting. It’s just as bad as my teachers.

I fold the paper in half, wanting to rid it off its past. Who hurt it with such a horrid bleeding black? Why can’t I just cover it over with my shining yellow? When I ask Nick, he says some things can’t be erased. He asks to read the letters and I hand it over. That’s how I figured out it’s not a letter.

“Look like a diary... confessional...” he mumbles to himself, thumb floating over every deranged and beaten black letter.

I press my lips into a thin line, puffing my cheeks. “This is a dumb diary.”

“Why do you say that?” He asks, following the lines I’d imprinted in order to fold it again.

“Diaries are little books; locked up.”

“Oh, I suppose most are like that.” Nick folds it once more, and I wonder if he’s beat the record. “Do you have any more of these?”

I raise my shoulders up and release them just the same. Nick is boring sometimes. He plays the rule of asking a question and expecting a response but he isn’t always literal when I want one. “I dunno. They have the bad stuff on it.”

“The ink? Here, show me.”

I ask him again if he can get rid of the ink. His face looks really dumb as he reads them, like it’s the wax of Mummy’s candles, drooping. I wanna laugh when his eyes get all wide. “Can you get rid of the ink?”

“Um, here, let me take them. And... and I’ll do my best to get rid of it.” He pats my head and takes the letters. Linny is out late again so Nick takes me out for dinner and we get clean paper.

I’m supposed to think of good times and the good times I currently have. Manifest destiny is why they fled West, and manifest happiness is why we live here now. But all the bad things of the east eventually found them in the west. I would be worried, wondering how long it would take for all the bad things from our past to find us again. But I’m not worried it’ll happen- it already is.

When I ask where they are going, Nick says he’s taking Linny dancing. Nick must like the house a lot; he stays around quite a bit. When I ask him about his house, his things, his job, his life, he always brings it back to this house. We’ll be on the staircase and he’ll smooth his hand over the wood; he’ll be avoiding the cracks on the

driveway and I'm jumping on them just for his eyes to settle on them all, as if they're pretty; I'll be lurking on the staircase and when it's a time he should be at his own home he'll be washing our dishes. He's a strange person. Do his plants miss him?

He has lovely plants. I'm sitting in his house, spoiling perfectly good paper with no annoying diary entries and no sloppy smiles. His plants, some small, some big, some loud, other quiet, are good companions and even better models. His home is so quiet, it's nice.

"What for?" I query him in regard to their evening dancing, but with me are ulterior motives.

Tonight I am being babysat which is normal. Before it was Mummy, then it was Nick, but now someone new? Mummy was cut from the strands of gravity; that's why she can't be my babysitter. But Nick is here, wearing a strange fancy suit that looks like something from a magazine cover and is fastening a little bracelet of flowers around Linny's wrist.

So, why again, is my babysitter leaving me? Linny says to stop asking so many questions; the prude. I resume my questioning once she slips away to find her heels that are actually Mummy's, only Mummy never wore heels except in the photo where she stood with a strange man in strange not very fancy suits. I think the man is ugly. Linny says not to speak mean of our father.

"How about I bring you back some flowers?" Nick asks, his words luring a reply from me. Only I thin my lips into a line, unsure what he's even suggesting. He leans a little closer. "Don't tell your sister but they decorate the venue with very pretty flowers and if one turns up missin' and ends up on your kitchen table... well, I don't know what happened."

Nick is weird, but I'm intrigued. So I smile and accept his new offer to draw (quietly) while we wait for the babysitter. I ask him if the flowers he taped to Linny's wrists have names and he says dumb stuff like aster, red carnations, baby's breath, and red chrysanthemum.

I suggest a change. He asks to elaborate. I suggest Ella, and Sophia, Molly, and Hannah. He smiles and agrees with me.

Off to the corner of the table is a little napkin; a morgue. Some of them Linny has picked away because they got bruised. I ask their names, and Nick provides more silly answers: azalea, bells-of-ireland, and white heather.

"You oughta buy more."

"Why's that?"

I scan his home, almost wondering if he is being serious. "You need more color."

Nick is quiet and I am wishing I emphasized I want a response. Our conversations should go on and on until we're both silly and tired. They can't end so soon.

"I suppose I should. I've got some photos I've been meaning to hang up." Nick brings out a little box of photos, some framed and some indecent. We shuffled through them and I rest my nose on the cardboard box, inhaling a damp, old scent.

"This is pretty," I offer, running my finger over the frame of one picture. It's a gold and yellow frame that twirls about, finding some semblance of reality in the corners where the spirals cling tightly to one another.

A smile that belongs to another person falls over Nick. My face tightens and I want the normal smile of my normal babysitter; not this sad one, so small and so gentle, it's as if the happiness it feels is already out of reach.

"This is one of my favorites."

In the photo is a young woman with her head turned slightly and deep hair tossed by a breeze. A small smile is revealed as a flower relaxing on her ear holds her hair back. I ask Nick what the name is. He says it's Linny. I ask again since I want the flower's name. He says it's a cleome and a white carnation.

Before I can offer new names the babysitter is here and Nick's sad smile persists and Linny's telling me to be good and I am watching them as they walk away, and the breeze pulls back Linny's hair and a smile of all things is pinning her cheeks up and such a deep anger is festering within me.

When I wake up, I'm back in my (Linny's) bed and Linny is asleep on the couch and Nick must be elsewhere with his plants and Linny's smile is reduced to the normal sterile thing some people seem to think is a face and there is a centerpiece of flowers on the table.

Nick tells me later that begonia, belladonna, and butterfly weed are their names. I think I ought to pick new ones.

They are trying to trick me. I hear them tiptoeing around, getting closer and closer closer closer so so close but will they get me? No! I hear them; I'm too cunning for them. I've soldiered myself with a cup of tea and the eyes of a cat. I wait and wait and wait and wait and wait and when I hear them coming they'll get it.

Nick moves in the night I start to hear screaming.

Frilly clouds have died. The birds might've gone too high up too, because their singing and the cawing of a recent murder are lacking. Some wall is cracked when the sky rattles and my own eyes widen in the glory of so suddenly appearing and dissipating light.

My skin crawls then my body jumps as a flea would when the door booms open. Instantaneously, voices begin to quarrel and I sink myself against the wall. To listen or avoid? What a question that gets my heart giddy. I pull on my socks and dip my toes into the ice cold river of a long hallway; which, then divies up into tributaries that run down the mountain. I creep down the mountainside with bated breath, holding it in my belly.

"Will ya just butt out, okay? We're still new here and I don't wanna throw her into all of this new stuff so quickly."

"Lin," is accompanied by a sigh. "Me and her get along and it'll take a lot of stuff off of you. It'll make things easier. Really, you don't have to-"

"Fine. Fine, just- can you go get the groceries, I just need to cool off."

"Yeah, yeah, of course."

I flatten myself against the wall, enough so that Linny didn't notice me as she passed and pushed her way into the bathroom. My body relaxes and I peel myself free, then slink into the kitchen. The door remains open, the wind whipping inward and bringing with it leaves and bits of rain. Nick seemed unconcerned, gripping the counter and hanging his head forward. The bubble lodged down my throat pops, and with it come words.

“What’s dinner?”

Nick jumps and I scuttle backwards, no calmer when he snaps his head back, eyes almost crazed. He curses, then covers his mouth. “Sorry, sorry, I didn’t see you.” After inhaling a single breath, I watch as the seams and thread, the fabric and stuffing that make the happy, plant saving Nick I know, come together. And yet his eye is stuck on a twitch that he can’t seem to get rid of. “We just got groceries, so what do you want?”

I shrug my shoulders, and Nick seems just as unsure. “How about uh- I’ve gotta bring them in-” he turns on his heels, flicks on the stove and pulls three mugs from the cabinet, “-while I do that, you can watch for when the water boils. ‘Kay?” He offers me a thumbs up that I surmise demands a reply. So I bend my hand to mimic his own and he is slipping outside immediately.

The kettle is not ours, nor from the Inn. Most things we seem to be making ours, which is quite pitiful. Everything is dust and smitten with themselves, all fancy and old. Linny yells when I try to climb on the old, ground level thing that’s apparently a vanity. Mummy always let me sit on her vanity. The kettle, and most things that were a part of the kitchen, were thrown out. Nick must’ve brought this, one of the many things he’s been bringing.

He showed me one of his plants from his apartment. It’s called a monstera; all big, deep green, and pretty. I want to see more of them.

“Move it, move it, such a slow, lazy thing,” I scold the teapot, causing it to sweat.

Its little hatch mouth gives a bit, teasing a cry. So slow; it should move it. I tighten my balled fists and feel slight satisfaction as the mouth extends like those funny ocean birds and a whiteness begins to pour. The scream penetrates my ears and I’m about to go after Nick; but he’s rushing in, snapping the door open, tossing the bags aside, and running down the hall. My eyes soar from him back to the rush of clouds, fluttering away from the spout. They almost escape out the door and yet they are destroyed before they’re freed. I eye the nob Nick had turned and gently pass my finger over the ingrained buttons. The one always facing up is paired with a little red dot, but right now it’s turned all the way down. Keeping my arm held out and my body backed away, I twist the knob and like magic the flames are expelled.

The screaming continues.

Louder. And louder. And louder. And I oughta learn how to pour a tea kettle because I’m sure it’s cooled off enough that it’s not hot for tea. And it’s still ringing. And the wind is trespassing. And the house shakes. And the screaming continues on and on and on and on.

More words Linny will yell at Nick for using fall from his mouth. And with a sluggishness, he carries me up to my room. “I’ll bring up some food,” he says, and it’s then I notice his pants pockets are stuffed. One is full with tissues and the other has a cylindrical tube. I can see the strange letters: o, b, e, u, r, n, t, i, i again, and n once more.. They’re ordered like b-u-r-n-o-i-n-t-m-e-n-t. I wonder if it’s a word our teacher would expect me to know.

Thunder continues through the night and I wonder since when did Nick and Linny like tea so much because the kettle keeps screaming, on and on and on.

He’s in on it. I know it. He sneaks in here, stays here, but I know he’s possessed! They conspire, such clandestine beings. Those demons, ghouls, ghosts are after me and are building their army. But no more! No more will they

entomb me and my soul! Freedom is now evermore, and my will of life will not be stopped! I shall flee as I always have!

Linny is scolding me to hurry up when I first notice it.

There is a whisper about this old house, one Nick says is brought about by its age. Years of rot and use have worn down and hollowed out the house, breeding creaks and whistles, bangs and pangs. I am apparently running late when I catch the sound of a gentle scrape, a thing as normal as the birds gossiping with the dewy grass. I run my hand against the wallpaper, listening as my own fingers mimic the sound. When I look up, Linny is in the doorway.

She looks disgusting.

“Quit that,” she manages through her face that’s pulled tightly in a way any person would want to hit it. “Come on, we’re already runnin’ late.”

The whispers of the house have been a nuisance since we first arrived, but one I’ve grown used to. I know which floorboard on the stairs creak, which walls make that hollow echo, where the wind hits the windows to create screams. Only now, do I realize the noises aren’t just in the house; they’re everywhere.

The broken road we live on spits us out into a more modern scene, but one still worn. A short school, flat topped that looks like the pan for the rising, puffy clouds, awaits me.

And nothing is there, nothing is jumping through the cracks of steam where a bright light teases itself. And yet, a noise brings itself down, and my eyes linger on the absence of light. But it is there. I can hear it. I can feel it.

“Got your stuff?” Linny asks while I fight with my buckle and the straps of my backpack; all the while, an itch crawls down my neck and something tells me the light would kill it. “Hey,” she snaps with her words, “answer me.”

“Why?” I snap back, face heated, my gaze flame colored to rid it of any of the danger in Linny’s face.

She says my name is like a curse, and looks at me with a squint as if her view is of something that hurts to see. “Don’t, it’s too early for this crap. Just be-” she lilts and sags her head forward. “I’ll see you in a bit.”

I take that as a sign to leave, and she pulls the car away, not waiting for my reply.

Idiotidiotidiotidiotstopstopstopstopitthey’re going to get you it’s all over it’s all done you can’t escape running running i want to run I need to escape but they will simply follow oh my god I’m trapped it’s over I’m stuck I’m stuck I’m stuck

This diary is something horrible. Nick seems to think that much; whenever I give him new pages, his face looks all silly, like he’s eaten a lemon or watched a dog die. I pile up the couple of few new ones I found stuffed in the desk and am saddened that there is so much darkness. Barely any light remains now.

“Come on, come on, stupid, selfish, idiot,” I say to the marker, the yellow tip now starting to blacken. A pout creeps onto my face, but not as quickly as those pestering whispers and scratches find their way to my ear. They’ve been incessant. Nick likes to hear about them, almost as much as the diaries. Linny overhead once, she gave him a look, all mad and pulled, and dumb.

I'm on my feet a few seconds later. The deep wood panels pass under my unclothed toes as the whisper wraps its finger around me. A giddiness sinks within me, enveloping my heart in its allure. The pull weakens though, but the whispers do not. The whispers of something grand and important shift to those of such an ear bleeding sound, any giddiness is lit up like a firecracker, brewing a stew in my blood.

"Nick, I just- I can't deal with this anymore. There's something- I feel it. It's gonna hurt someone- it's- it's calling out and I- I have no idea what I can do." My teacher taught us a new word today: pathetic. I don't know how to use it, where it belongs in the sentence and what order the letters should go in but somewhere, it fits in the description of Linny's voice; shriveled, watery, broken. Pathetic.

"It's just like with *her*."

A sigh parts Nick's lips. "It's not."

"After dad, *she*-"

"Lindsay, you aren't her."

"But what if I am? And I- there was nothing to do then and now-... now..."

"Now, we'll get you the help she couldn't find."

"What if it doesn't work?" Nick opens his mouth to reply but she, like always, doesn't expect one. "What if- I can't have her here for it. I just can't. I could hide it with Mum, but not with this... you have to take her." My name passes by her lips like a bad one, and anger finds a new dancing partner within me, a deep, horrible feeling I would never grow to be able to name.

Nick's eyes are wide and frantic, but not crazed and stupid as Linny's. "Lin, that's really not-"

"I can't! Not anymore and not- I can't handle it with *her*, with, with-"

Linny's eyes catch my own, and I wonder if once upon a time there was a fairytale time, where Linny listened for answers and Mummy was anchored to the ground and we were smiling. Where she didn't look at me as if I were one of her fleas she could never shake away.

"You're leaving?"

I can no longer stave them off. They offer such comfort; these revenants of my drab eschewal. Perhaps it is a lovely thing to accept them, to accept their presence that will be everlasting; or perhaps it is nothing more than succumbing to one's own pathetic melancholia.

I need to escape them. But my feet won't bring me now, anywhere but to their bright light, parting the shadows of my own existence, and to their stairwell that I can't know if the golden rail will ascend me, or drag me down.

Linny stood there blinking and while I mirrored it, something broke within me then that had long been dust within her.

"Why-" The question reverberated in my thoughts: "*Why do you hate me so much?*"

"You're leaving me?" I say with the accidental implication that I want a reply. I want anything but that. I can see her lips shake, a hesitation all more telling than any response could've been. "You're the worst!" I scream,

rushing at her. My hands grip around her wrists and I angle my nails to dig deep into them. “Why- Why are you so-so awful!”

“Stop it! Stop it,” Linny manages out, her mind pulling her elsewhere. My eyes are snapped up to meet hers and red haze, the cruelty of them spill with long tears, “just stop it you- you selfish, selfish child.”

My arms go slack at my sides and then I feel her fingers are now digging into my sides. Her hands slowly let go and she stumbles back, wrapping her own arms around herself. She hangs her head over the sink, being dramatic and sad at whatever she sees in the metal and reflective sink. “Idiot, idiot, idiot, idiot,” she scolds herself over and over and over and over until it’s just another sound like those whispers and the wind and everything clicking and whirring and Nick’s heavy breaths behind me.

“You’re so- so mean!” I yell, digging my fingers into the front of my shirt. A hiccup blooms in my throat.

Nick says my name softly. “Stop please, okay? Everything is going to be okay. It’s just adult stuff-”

“No!” I scream, pulling away from his warm hands. With all vigor and strength I turn to Linny. “I hate you! I don’t want you!” Water is running, somewhere, everywhere, every second, and now my words spill like them. Something warm passes over my cheeks, and it causes Linny’s horrible face to look all red and puffy, her own water rushing along the sides of her face. “I want Mummy!”

“I know you do!” She screams as my last breath is squeezed away and two arms hold me back.

Red rampant unbridled rage has finally stopped its calm saunter through life; no it breathes now, breathes in me, my bones, it pulses and pushes and I’m prying myself from Nick the entire fight up the stairs.

In my room, or Linny’s, or one of those many old rooms now inhabited by whispers, he puts me down and holds my shoulders. Over and over and over he whispers my name and the out of tune chorus that has been pulling at me begins to sing too. “Why does she hate me?” I ask, bowing my head forward and expressing more tears.

“Oh kid, come on she doesn’t hate you-”

“Yes she does! She- Mummy never hated me- Mummy never yelled- Mummy... Mummy was always there.”

Like any emotion, rage takes energy and that is rapidly depleting. The high has come to die and Nick hugs me, saying a variety of things I couldn’t care to listen to. The whispers are louder than him and one feels so nice and comforting. I look over his shoulder and while nothing is there I can feel the voice taking form, taking my tears and turning them to a beautiful light. It’s hard not to smile at such a pretty thing. Such a sad, tragic, but living thing.

“Lindsay?”

And then I close my eyes, and let this sad music, so beautiful yet heartbreaking wash over me. And then I can fall into its arms, something to replace the arms that can never hold me again; and Nick runs and screams and there’s some noises everywhere but they don’t matter. Nothing matters. Except that she’s gone, has been gone, will be gone forever.

And it’s okay to cry, I think the whispers want to say. I start to think I’ll sink myself in a pool of water if I keep at it and yet I am kept afloat.

Sirens reach the house at one point.

Nick takes me to a neighbor's house at one point.

We visited another gravesite at one point.

Too many tears and yet I never drown.

Nick reminds me to be nice as we head to the school. He also reminds me he's put fresh paper in my bag. I hate how hard he tries at that. No matter how much I clean or how many papers I replace, they always end up bent, or scratched, scribbled, or spoiled. And sometimes, there will be little smiles.

Especially on the paper bags I bring for lunch.

I like to ask Nick about the places we've lived. About where he's lived before he met Linny, and my Mummy, and me. He says he tried many places, but it always rained too much. I would laugh and ask why he came here. He said there were things here, that even on the darkest, stormiest days, bring light to his life. Or used to.

I ask often, in numerous ways, with numerous angles, what Linny was looking for when we moved to the green Inn. He says she was trying to escape the storm, but that it's not so easy for everyone. And some people get stuck, and drown. Then, after somber moments, I'll ask why he came to the green Inn.

"I had found my light, and I wanted to help bring her back to hers."

And I always ask, if he did. He always says no.

Mummy's been overhead for years now. I wonder how far Linny is below.