

*The Ghost of me*

I grit my teeth into a half-hearted smile at the girl sitting next to the door in the front of the class. She's been watching me all period. Oh how I wish that time would fly and I would be free of this torture. The girl smiles brightly and looks away; is that really all it takes to make people leave you alone? Though, I noticed that smile never reached her eyes. Maybe she knew I didn't give a shit that she was staring at me; better yet, I don't care if she is dead or alive. Yeah, I know. I'm a total asshole.

"How was your first day at school, hunny?"

I stand in the doorway staring dumbstruck at the baby straddled in my mother's arms as if it has been there all its life. She doesn't seem to notice the boy is there even though his hands are painfully tangled in her hair. When the boy realizes my mother isn't speaking to him, he shifts in her arms to look at me. As soon as our eyes lock he gives me a goofy grin and waves wildly. I just stare at him. (It's as if a strange man was standing in the kitchen with his hand outstretched to me saying, "Hey, son!" and "I am your father" like I'm supposed to gladly open my arms and embrace him. If that were the situation, what would I say? "Hey dad, long time no see,")

The kid's maybe four years old and has hair so blonde I can hardly decipher between hair and scalp. He's still got that goofy grin on his face, and it's really starting to creep me out.

"Mom?" I ask, my voice flat. I'm really getting tired of this. It happens a lot. I walk in the door and there is a new kid in her arms. It's scary really. No one notices that their child is missing. The first time this happened I was scared. I thought cops were going to show up and take her away for kidnapping. Then I was just irritated. Now, I'm just fucking pissed. Sometimes I actually pray that the authorities will pick her up and take her away for lunacy.

My knees shake as she cocks her head at me, "What's wrong sweetie?" her eyes are desolate and clouded over and her voice sounds distant. Fear creeps into my chest, swelling until it consumes my lungs. It takes all of me to swallow the lump back down. *This isn't the first time*, I remind myself.

"Whose kid is that mom?" I ask softly. Her expression turns sickly as she realizes what is in her arms. Her skin pales and she nearly drops the child. The boy goes from grinning like he has just found his long lost brother to crying like a, well, a baby. All of a sudden mom starts screaming at me to take the baby from her like it's the devil himself. I take it. I take the boy like the damned dog I am.

*The Ghost of me*

I move into the living room and set him on the ground. Tears stream down his frustrated face. His hands are so small...

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Huge hands are coming toward me. My face is wet. Am I crying? The hands scoop me up into their warm embrace and I feel safe. I grin and bury my nose into the man's broad shoulders. I don't know who he is but he's comforting. I can feel the rumble of laughter in his chest before I hear it. His laugh is deep and crisp. It's so familiar I can almost touch it.

I know who this is. His face is hidden from me, but it doesn't matter. I know it's *him*. This is my dad. I remember this; I was five maybe.

I remember the scratchy feel of his scruffy face brushing against my forehead making me giggle and laugh with glee. He spun me in a circle and lowered his lips to my ear and whispered,

"Don't tell mommy. This is our little secret."

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The boy is still bawling. I kneel beside him and comfort him until he calms down. I ask him what his name is and he snuffs out that his name is Tad and that he lives down a few blocks from us. He also tells me that mom said he shouldn't have run away from home this morning, so she led him home and he ate milk and cookies all day.

Well, that's not creepy at all. Thanks mom, kidnap the kids right when we move in so people can label you as the neighborhood creep. Maybe if you waited then they wouldn't suspect it was us. I take him into my arms and prop him on my hip. (Man, I'm actually getting good at this.)

"Let's go find your mommy, okay?" He nods vigorously and that clownish grin spreads across his face again.

It's only four thirty and yet the night sky is already sprawled over the town like a blanket with millions of tiny glittering holes. It's chilly, and of course, the new guy is not used to the climate change. So here I am, in the middle of the street with a kid on my hip, wearing shorts and a tank-top on a freezing night. Now where did he say he lived?

"Tad, Tad, where are you?!" a woman's voice yelled.

## *The Ghost of me*

Well that certainly makes things simple. I stood staring into the night waiting for the approaching huntress, with her prey in my arms, Tad. The figure wagged dramatically from one spot to the next in search. Her footsteps slowed and grew more hesitant as she approached. As she came into the light I could see that it was the girl from this morning, the one with the fake smile. She seems startled to see me, big shocker. But she doesn't look at the kid in my arms. She's gawking at *me*. It takes a few moments, but she recollects herself and stammers an awkward hello. I jerk my chin upward in reply.

Her eyes drift over me and freeze on Tad.

"That's my brother, Tad." She whispers almost inaudibly. I can't help but smirk, "We've met."

She flushes and shifts on her feet. I'm still holding Tad and can feel wet slobber trailing down my arm. *Gross! He's drooling on me!* I want to shove him at her and be on my merry way back home. But, before I have the chance to put action to my words, she mutters quietly,

"You're the new kid right? I-I'm Kyra."

I don't know why, but that shy smile of hers is seriously ticking me off. It makes me feel uncomfortable- people don't smile at *me* unless they want something. When I don't reply, she shoves her hands into the pockets of her jeans. Up close and in the streetlight, I'm able to see her features more clearly.

She has long blonde that hair flows in waves every which way. A small hot pink bow is clipped in her hair above her left ear.

She's tall and skinny as hell. Her clothes are all brand name; they don't suit her. I bet she even has fancy undergarments. I can just imagine skimp, lacy...

"Umm, so, what was your name?" she asked a little louder than necessary. Hmm, I must have been staring. I swallow once and glance at the sky. I think it's time to go home. I move closer to hand off my burden and she flinches. Her face turns beet red and she plants her gaze on my feet. I think she has the wrong idea. How insulting. Just because I'm a guy doesn't mean I'm going to try anything.

"Your brother," I say sharply. Her eyes pierce mine as if I had just slapped her across the face. She reaches out and pulls Tad toward her. When he is snugly in her arms, I turn abruptly and walk away. I hear her mutter a farewell and can feel her eyes on me as I turn the corner.

## *The Ghost of me*

All the lights are out in our house. I hesitate as I stride up the walkway. *Deep breaths, it's all going to be okay.* I jiggle the handle, but it doesn't turn. Damn it. It's locked and I don't have a key. I guess I need to look into that. I take the bypath to the backdoor and slip in with ease. Man it's like an icebox in here. I'm invading the refrigerator when I notice her. Her body is slumped in a chair facing me.

On the table beside her sits an overturned bottle surrounded by pills.

"M-mom?" My voice shakes as I look upon my mother. Shit. I knew she was screwed up, but I never thought she would attempt suicide. I dash to her side closing my hands on her shoulders I shake her, desperately probing for a response.

*No! You can't do this to me! I don't care if you're a nut case, you're still my mother! I need you! You're all I have left, please, mom, please don't leave me! I-I'm scared.*

"Lylli."

My hands dropped from her like cinder blocks. *That's right; she never cared about me to begin with.*

"Lylli's not here, mom. She's dead."

In that moment, if the pills had any effect on her body I couldn't tell. In a flash my back was flat against the marble topped island with her arm across my throat. With her free hand she reaches over and pulls out a chef's knife from the knife block.

"Mom!" I snap. My body shakes with incredible force. She presses the blade to my neck. I stare with wide eyes as a thin smile crosses the lips of my mother. I swallow once and feel the sharp edge bite into my flesh. In a swift movement, the blade is flicked upward and knicks my throat. I take shaky breath and try to calm myself.

Through chattering teeth I fight out the words, "It's not my fault." The knife drops from her hand and she brings her head to my torso. I flinch as she places a hand on either side of my waist. What the hell is she doing? She inhales dramatically and slowly moves her hands up my sides. She lifts her head and licks her lips at me.

"M-mom," I whimper as she lowers her lips to my neck and licks the thin trail of blood at the nape of my neck. "W-what the hell?!" I hiss. Her tongue glides over the cut and I wince as she bites down around it. I don't know what's going through her head but I know I don't like it. She makes a sound like a feeding beast and sinks her teeth into my flesh. I cry out as pain shoots throughout my body in sharp

## *The Ghost of me*

waves.

I edge my hands beneath her and attempt to force her off. I don't want to hurt her, but as she's gnawing on my gullet, I find that there are not many options. I'm at a bad angle to do much more than knock the wind out of her, but that's all I need. With as much power as I can muster up through the pain and adrenaline, I slam my fist into my mother's sternum.

Wheezing, she stumbles backward, giving me just enough time to spring to my feet. I side-step to the right and cuff her upside the head. I watch in silent horror as she falls, unconscious, at my feet.

A drop of blood drops on my mom's bloodstained face. Whimpering, I close my hand on my neck pressing on the wound to stop the bleeding. *Shit!* My vision begins blurring as I dash into the bathroom. I rip open the door to the medicine cabinet and grab hydrogen peroxide and a wad of gauze. Wetting a towel, I glance in the mirror. It looks like someone snacked on me. I slowly brought my hand to my mauled neck. She tried to *eat* me.

After bandaging my injury, I wrap my neck with black vet wrap to keep it in place. I can't take this anymore. Leaning against the door, I flip the lock and slide to the floor.

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It's so cold. Everywhere I look there is a thick fog, blue black and threatening. It is impossible to see. Someone is calling my name. The voice is soft and faint I step forward and the fog clears beneath my foot revealing a clear sheet of ice. The black waters below lap at the surface with killer intensity. Taking a step back I stare into the water's depths. My name is whispered somewhere close by. I turn to see behind me, and then, something thumps against the ice. A tremor roars down my spine with chills as I listen closely.

*Thump. Thump. Thump.*

I'm afraid to look. I'm uneasy what I'll find. Slowly, I rotate to face the reverberation. I look through the ice and see a little girl watching me. Her skin is pale blue. She grins at me with dead eyes. She pounds on the ice with lifeless movements.

*Lylli.*

"Why didn't you save me, big brother?" The ice around her hand breaks, then her hand stretches

*The Ghost of me*

out toward me. She smiles eerily and claws the air in front of me. "Won't you save me?"

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"Get away from me!" I jolt awake in a cold sweat. Gasping for air, I investigate my surroundings. I relax against the door of the bathroom and regain my breath. Lylli was three when she disappeared. Some sick individual left her body on our front porch a few weeks later. It was mid-winter and the pond was slowly thawing. It seems she had somehow drowned in the water and someone passing by found her body. When my mom found her lying there on the deck, something snapped. She went berserk and hasn't gotten any better. That's why we move so much, and why she takes kids. She honestly has no idea what she is doing.

You see, it wasn't my fault. At least as far as anyone knows, I had nothing to do with Lylli's death.

----- To be continued.