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The Shattering

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The Shattering

Bri Wilson

I'm dead. But I'm still here. My soul got left behind. I didn't believe in souls but now I have to and

I don't remember when I was last alive. My memories have been blurred, shaken, chopped. I can't recall how it ended, there was a lot of pain, then it stopped. Suddenly.

(how did I die.)

I can't talk. I can't write. I can't hear. Not the leaves skating the sidewalks, not the bright conversations students have as they drift from class to class, not even the cars rushing away and back to campus.

I can't leave.

But I can watch. And I watch my friends because I killed them in a way, I can see it in the way they walk like they're made of glass. When they talk their mouths make stilted shapes like speaking full words threatens to crack the glass and when they pass by my room they falter like they're about to shatter. And I'm left imagining the crushed glass pieces of my friends' bodies scattered in the hallway and the horror that I did this to them.

(how did I die.)

I try to escape my wicked guilt but it's stitched into me with hot biting thread and the only way I can hope to untangle it from me is to walk, to wander in this infinite hour around the lawns and paths and

every day I see the same man reading a newspaper under a big tree hidden behind the gym. He's familiar somehow, my empty brain knows the essence of him and it's comforting. Being with him makes the stitches loosen their grip.

My familiar alien.

He reads the paper for only a little while - his hands shaking and his head jerking up to glance around every other second - and then he leaves in a whirlwind. I pause on my

wanderings to sit on the grass across from him and watch his eyes move across the words and his fingers turn the pages in the way that mine can't. Always the same, this man, the only habit in my strange non-life until the day I wander over to the big tree and he's

not there.

I can't find him; he was my anchor and now I'm drifting into waters that I shouldn't be and how did I die.

I run through the possibilities again and again: accident, murder, drowning, burning alive, suicide, accident, murder, drowning, burning alive, suicide... it goes on and on the way

time breathes on and on and I float on and on in the same rhythm I always have, my anxious thoughts running like some kind of panicky background music. And I keep circling back to the tree just in case my familiar alien is there but he isn't, anymore.

Gone.

So I watch my friends nearly shatter and I watch small platoons of security guards accompanied by policemen make their rounds and I watch girls cluster together to walk to their dorms when it's late at night, fear fighting to surface on their faces and

I still keep coming back to the tree because he was my habit and then

out of nothing

he appears, he's back, my familiar alien is back, reading the newspaper and this time I sit down next to him, close enough to touch. He's shaking badly today so I glance at the headline and

College Campus to Close Temporarily After Murder Incident

My picture plastered on the front page.

Me, alive and smiling.

Unprecedented tragedy at this university... discovered by neighborhood woman...perpetrator not yet found... police working on list of suspects...

My familiar alien clenches the newspaper into a broken ball and I can't read anymore but that doesn't matter because

I was killed.

Killed...

How did it happen what did I do wrong no no it's not my fault people should know to not kill each other. Right? Right it wasn't my fault but who did this to me?

My familiar alien stands up suddenly and I do too and then he falters, he trips and something like shock and repulsion ripples through me, he's standing in the same space that I am — I didn't realize he was taller than me — and I feel the way a candle shivers when a breeze rushes through it and

my memories are jolted into perfect clarity from their blurred, shaken, chopped fragments... my familiar alien...

opens the door for me as I leave class, I nod thanks and rush to catch up with my friends. Later he asks me for dinner, I tell him no, I'm not looking to date right now. He asks again and again and my answer always the same, I'm sorry, I'm not interested, I'm sorry.

My familiar alien with his hands wrapped around my throat, slamming the back of my head against the ground, my fingernails slicing into his arms, my legs writhing beneath him, trying to throw him off.

No one can see us, we're under the big tree hidden behind the gym and

my familiar alien rails his fists into my forehead, my ears, my eyes, my jaw and I can't see his face anymore the blood is a blindfold and the pain a straitjacket

just kill me

He does. Eventually. It feels like it takes years.

I stumble backwards, buzzing with a newly awakened terror as I stare at my killer's face as he stares at my picture in the newspaper and I have to get away I have to leave I run to the edge of campus and

