Fatal Truths

The cemetery wasn't an uncommon place for me to visit. It felt as if time were frozen, and the future didn't exist. Besides the occasional rustle of leaves, it was always quiet. And quiet was something the world needed to stop and listen to more often. Every time I visit, I walk past the willows and evergreens, and past the wilting flowers and freshly dug graves, all the way to the back. Mama always told me to visit the rotting graves, which wasn't on my everyday bucket list, but I did anyway. I never could understand why she felt pity for the non-living.

I carefully sauntered past the mossy tombstones and overgrown weeds; my thin jacket didn’t help much against the cool breeze and the blisters on my heel worsened every minute, but I couldn’t help but gaze at the beautiful hue of the leaves. Autumn had finally come, and even though the temperature wasn’t very nice, the scenery was always beautiful. The bright orange leaves from the sugar maple tree always reminded me of mama’s hair. That would explain why all the leaves were starting to shrivel, nature could always sense when a tragedy had occurred.

Mama was dead, and I didn’t know how to feel. In fact, I didn’t feel anything. The thought just kept getting pushed farther back into my head, and I feel guilty for not crying or feeling sorrow in any way. Ben says it hasn’t set in yet, but I think he’s crazy. I don’t think papa cares much either, he doesn’t feel much these days. I think he’s just mad about the bills she left us with and how he must pay for her death. I don’t feel sympathy towards him though, drinking is the only sign of grief he shows anymore. It would be nice if he showed any emotion, just a single tear and I would forgive everything he’s done.

I wasn’t at the cemetery to visit her though; we couldn’t afford a funeral and just went with a direct cremation. Now of course that wasn’t my idea, I would much rather have her buried underneath a black cherry tree, those were her favorite. But papa insisted that we couldn’t spend any more money and I insisted he jump in the fire with her. I won’t make that mistake again, sleeping in the garage is not my cup of tea. Now I mustn’t get carried away, I always try to catch myself before spiraling down that hole of insanity. Luckily for me, I have a great distraction today, Ben.

He was sitting against a large tree with his head buried in a book. His golden curls covered the top of his new Windsor glasses, practically glowing under the sunlight. He lifted his head lazily towards me. “Geez don’t look so excited,” I said, taking a seat beside him. The book snapped shut and he straightened his posture, making him almost a whole head taller than me. “Don’t try and intimidate me mister,” I said scooting up closer. He stared at me for a moment more and then burst into laughter. I glared at him blankly, “*This idiot.”* After a few seconds, he stood up and put a hand to his heart.

In a triumphant voice he declared, “I, Benjamin Arthur Tucker, offer my deep condolences for intimidating the weak and fable Katrina. I had no intention of frightening you madam, I beg you to bathe me with forgiveness and offer me your womanly compassion. If yo-”

“Oh, cut it out!” I said laughing, throwing leaves at his face. I dug my hands into the cold soil and scraped up anything I could find to throw at him. He stumbled behind the tree for cover.

“Ok, take it easy,” he stepped out with his hands up in surrender, “I’m in no mood to get my new trousers dirty.”

“Trousers?” I scoffed. “What are you, British?”

“I have a job interview today and I must expand my exquisite vocabulary if I want to seem like an intelligent person.”

“You’re smart idiot! And aren’t you too busy for a job right now?”

“First off, don’t call me smart and apply the word idiot right after. Second,” he said taking a seat beside me, “I have a ton of time. I just spend it with you, and my books.” He patted the thick novel next to him. I dramatically sighed and leaned my head back against the bark. “Oh, don’t be that way, we all must work at some point. And that point for me is right now.” He hopped up and held out a hand to me. His grip was firm around mine as he pulled me to my feet, and I felt a minuscule amount of satisfaction when I noticed the mud on his behind.

As the two of us weaved in between tombstones and stepped over dying bouquets of roses, I couldn’t help but think of home. Going back to my father was something I never enjoyed, so I spent my time in town doing who knows what. Ben being gone meant I was alone, and making friends wasn’t a strong suit of mine. As we reached the main pathway, I began to veer left, away from Ben and towards home. Next thing I know, he grabs my arm and pulls me backwards. I stumble over my feet and land hard on the ground.

“What was that for?!” I asked angrily.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” he said, frantically trying to pull me back up. “You’re so light, I didn’t mean to make you fall.”

“Well then what did you mean to do?”

He swatted the leaves off my back and held out his hand. “I meant to take you with me.” I stared blankly at him for a moment before I grasped his hand. “I know you’ve been…struggling, so when I saw the spot open up, I knew you’d like it.”

“Spot for what?”

He grinned nervously at me. “There is a job opening in town and I… I might have… scheduled an interview for you.”

“You what?!”

“Come on Kat, you’ve been saying how you guys are struggling after… you know. And you need to do something with your life. This will help.”

 I couldn’t believe it. I knew deep down he was right; we would eventually be out on the streets if we didn’t get money soon. I just didn’t think that time would be now.

“Trust me.” He said in a husky voice.

I could feel his gaze burning into me. “Fine.”

His face lit up, “I knew you’d agree. Now follow me.”

I followed him down the cobblestone path into town. By the time we reached our destination, my legs burned and the blisters on my heel stung painfully. In front of us stood a small antique shop. Vines corroded the brick walls and weeds took over the pathway. I slowly turned toward Ben.

“Is this a joke?” I asked.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” he said smirking.

 “This is the only place that agreed to see you. The people here don’t seem very fond of your father, but this old hunk didn’t even ask any questions.” He strode up to the door and opened it. “Ladies first.” I wanted to slap that goofy smile off his face. Deep down I knew I needed this. When Ben gets hired, it’ll just be me and my thoughts. That’s something that I try to avoid at any cost. So, I took a deep breath and walked in. The door slammed behind me. “*I’m gonna kill him.”*

I squinted harshly trying to adjust to the sudden darkness, the only source of light I could see were some small candles flickering on the shelves. It was a lot larger inside than it appeared from the outside. To my left stood an ancient grandfather clock and a wall full of classical paintings. To the right was a large piano, melted candles littered the top of it. It stood on a large velvet rug, its edges fraying away. I took a step towards it, the floorboards groaned under my weight. I ran my hand across the top, wiping away the dust an inch thick. The piano practically pleaded me to play, its keys crying to sing their beautiful melody again. My hands drifted closer, *“it wouldn’t hurt anyone to pla-”*

“Ah, there you are.”

I jumped back from the old instrument. Out from behind a corner hobbled an old woman. Her frail hand gripped a wooden cane as she staggered into view. The candlelight certainly wasn’t helping her appearance. Large bags hung under her squinting eyes, her thin lips were pressed tightly together as she looked me up and down. I could sense some sort of disappointment in her.

“The last thing I expected was a Bates to walk in here.” She spat.

I could feel a muscle in my neck twitch. I clenched my jaw to refrain myself from spitting a nasty remark back.

“You know my father I’m guessing?” I sneered.

She scoffed, “your father?” The woman shook her head, “I know *you.*” She pointed a wrinkled finger towards me. “Last year, you killed my cat.” She took a shaky step towards me. “I found her bleeding out on the curb one night. And I know it was you.”

 I raised my eyebrows in confusion, “I’ve never even met you!”

“You murdered her!”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about lady!” I could feel the thick sensation of blood dripping down my hands. The pain of my nails digging into my palms was only a dull throb compared to the rage I felt. I needed to get out. This was a trap. The antique dolls seemed to laugh at my stupidness, I could hear their chuckling in my head. “*Stop! Please!”* I staggered backwards, my hands covering my ears. The air was suffocating me, wrapping its icy fingers around my throat. I pry myself away and stumble out the door. The sunlight bites at my skin in greeting but I can only run. My legs pound against the cobblestone at a rapid pace. My ragged breathing quickly smoothens into an even pace. The familiar sting slowly makes its way up to my thighs and spreads to my abs. “*God this feels good.”* I can only run, run far away from that humiliating, mocking store.

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Papa wasn’t in the house when I entered, a small blessing. I hobbled over to the kitchen sink and turned on the faucet. I lowered my mouth to the frigid water and drank. The door slams open behind me, I quickly spin around to face my father. He’s slumped against the door frame, if he’s thinking about something, it didn’t look it. His face was unreadable and there was a light haze over his eyes. He stumbles towards me, his hands gripping anything that will support his weight. My feet move out of the way just in time for him to vomit in the sink. I quickly scramble out of the kitchen towards my bedroom. I shut the door behind me and locked the door.

I could hear his footsteps coming down the hall, “Shoot, *what did I do?”* He pounds on the door. I can only stand in the center of my room, frozen with fear.

“Tell me why the people downtown are saying your little friend murdered someone?” He shouts. I kept my eyes fixed on the ground, frozen with guilt.

*“Guilt? I didn’t do anything.”*

“A search party was sent out for him an hour ago.”

“*He deserves it.”*

“*No! Ben didn’t do anything. He would never.”*

*“*Just thought I would let you know in case he stops by.” He said teasingly, “And if I catch that psychopath with you, I’ll kill him.”

“*He can’t do that. He CAN’T ruin my plan!”*

*“****Kill him”***

*“No, no, no! Get out!”* I fall to my knees beside my bedframe, clutching my head, grasping for any sense of sanity to come back. I glance down at my trembling hands, dried blood still under my fingernails. “*I need to breathe; I need to get out.”* I crawl towards my bed and blindly reach underneath for my telephone. The small device was one of my only sources of communication that I bought at a secondhand store 2 years ago. I held down the power button and watched as the screen slowly brightened, but something peculiar caught my attention. I had received a text message from an unknown number. I’ve never given out my information to any strangers before, let alone receive texts. My fingers were already typing in the familiar passcode.

“*I know what you did*.” It read.

I can only stare in disbelief. *“Who sent this?”* I scramble over and close the blinds. *“I didn’t do anything. I didn’t do anything!”* I threw the phone on the matted carpet, my vision blurred as I frantically looked around. The room spun around me in circles. My hands found hold of something, heavy and sharp, perfect. I shakily raised it above my head, blood pounding in my ears. I could only cry out as I plunged it through the phone.

The room stilled suddenly; everything was quiet, the only noise coming from the crickets chirping outside. My chest tightens, bile rising in my throat. I lowered my gaze down to the shattered screen, glass shards littering the ground.

Everything was fuzzy after that. I remember the heat and rushing out the window. My left hand stung painfully, blisters forming on my arms. A strong aroma still lingered in my nose. Maybe motor oil or gasoline. But that was all in the past now. I could only watch as the world rushed past me. My legs pounding on the pavement. To be honest, I didn’t know what I was running from. My body just told me to run, I could feel it in my gut, something bad. That’s when I heard it, in the distance. Sirens. They wailed with wrath, calling out to me. The threatening sound wrapped around my head. It was coming for me. I could feel it.

The slanting rays of the sun gave off a purple hue just above the horizon. Night was falling fast but I needed to be faster.

“*The cemetery.” It whispered.*

And so, I ran. I ran as fast as my legs could take me. A chilling fog lingered just above the soil, concealing all obstacles that might try to drag me down with them. The moon loomed above the tree line, surrounded by an ethereal glow, giving me the smallest bit of light for guidance. At least *something* was on my side.

The familiar gates embraced me with welcome, the rusted metal groaning as I pushed it open. My finger traced the carved engravings, everything was so old, so beautiful, so…

*“Turn around. Finish the job* “

A bead of cold sweat slid down my side as I spun around. It took me a second to see the dark figure standing in the distance. I didn’t have to look twice to notice the lean figure and surprising height.

*Ben*.

He stepped towards me slowly with frightening grace. I had never seen a human move with such smoothness before, as if each step was calculated. I could notice more and more as he emerged out of the shadows. He had a lifeless expression on his face. I could see no thought, no warmth behind his eyes.

“Ben?” I quaked.

His gaze met mine, drained and bleak.

“You set me up?” He spat. “Didn’t you?!”

“N-no.”

“I knew you were catching on. You’ve heard me talking. Haven’t you?”

“No.” I smirked. “You were talking about me?” It was true, I didn’t hear him talk behind my back, but I didn’t need to. “The book you were reading is limited edition, the author signed it. It was in perfect condition, meaning you got it recently. And after doing some digging, I found out that author was recently giving out signed copies in Philadelphia, and where do your friends that hate me live? Philadelphia!”

“You are insa-”

“And, when you left me in the antique shop for the job interview, you kept glancing at the supermarket across the street. The supermarket where almost all the teenagers work, including your old crappy friend group that you told me you left! I’m not stupid Ben! For *months* I’ve known you were conspiring behind my back. Months!”

He gaped at me. “What?” he asked, perplexed. I could see a hint of a smile on his face.

“What are you smirking at?”

He scoffed, “You. Your ideas. How you think you have the whole world figured out.” He took a step towards me. “Maybe, just maybe, you should figure out all of this,” he grasped my head, “before you go and try to outsmart the whole world.”

I jolted back. “What do you mean?”

“I thought you figured it out. I thought somebody would’ve told you by now. But you blamed me for murder, because I was talking to my *real* friends!? Now that’s messed up.”

“What are you talking about?” I begged, “What do you mean Ben!?”

His eyes slid toward mine, all amusement gone. “My mother.” He towered over me, casting me in darkness. “Now, you’ve never asked me about my parents, have you?”

I shook my head.

“Well, that’s because they’re gone! My mother and 2 siblings died in a car crash caused by a drunk driver. And who was that driver? Your father!” He fumed.

I couldn’t breathe, I couldn’t move.

“Your father killed everyone except my dad. And my dad isn’t the forgiving type, so of course, he had to take everything your father loved too.”

*“No.”*

“I don’t know if you knew, but my father works at the hospital. And your mother was getting better by the second. So, there was just a *tiny* accident with the medication she was given on her last day, ultimately, killing her.”

“You’re lying.”

He grinned. “My dad wasn’t stupid, and he knew he would be caught sooner or later, so he left. Ran away.” He took a deep breath, regaining himself. “One rule that I always follow, is to always finish a job. So, Katrina, I’m going to kill you. And get rid of your wretched family once and for all.”

This time I couldn’t run. I didn’t even have time to move before the blade plunged through my heart.

I fell on my knees, coughing, wheezing for air. I tried to swallow, but the saliva was too thick. I spat on the ground.

*“Blood. Not spit.”*

My cold hands shook as I clutched the bloody knife in my chest. I looked up. Ben was gone, running away just like his pathetic father.

 *“Coward.”*

 I closed my eyes. Mama was waiting for me, calling my name. And papa was far away. He died in flames. Maybe I killed him, maybe I didn’t. But, if I did, it was just preparation for the Hell he would be burning in for the rest of eternity.

And suddenly, the world went quiet, even the crickets. The pain, the sadness, the fear, it was all gone. Darkness crept over, numbing the pain, numbing my throbbing heart. Freeing my tired soul once and for all.

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 The snow was like a white blanket, covering everything in sight but giving no warmth whatsoever. The gloomy winter was always the same in this crappy town. It was a grim night, the frigid air biting at his rosy cheeks. Perhaps the weather was punishing him for his mistake decades ago, or it was just plain old bad luck, but as he stumbled through the ancient cemetery, the wind seemed to push him away, howling to turn back.

 Maybe visiting her grave will make him feel something, help him remember that night so long ago. He inspected the snow covered grave for a moment and then carefully sat down. He brought his knees to his chest and buried his head in his hands. Regret and guilt and anger swept over him, digging into his heart, untouched for so long.

A single tear fell down his cheek. Quickly, he wiped his watering eyes with his coat sleeve and sat up, rubbing away the slush on his old trousers. Pulling up his hood, he glanced at the lonesome grave once more, before walking away on the familiar cobblestone path, leaving his old town once and for all.