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Grief

Bridget Scott-Shupe

You've haunted me since the day you died. I stood in the kitchen that night and stared into the living room. The lights were off, and nothing moved in the house. The chair you used to sit in had reclaimed the space of the bed you died in. The silence somehow felt more alive with your ghost stalking the halls than when your living body was still here, withering away. Even then, I could feel you behind me, watching me as I remembered you. The skin would prickle along my spine and I'd move on without looking backwards. I was afraid you'd somehow reach out and touch me, afraid that turning around would call you into existence again.

I would lie awake in bed and wait for you to find me. You'd crawl in through the empty space between reality and dreams until you were a vision rather than a feeling. My heartbeat would pound in my ears as dread dragged me down into the bed. I prayed you wouldn't speak, but you'd call my name anyway. Tears ran hot into my pillow as I struggled to remind myself that you weren't really there.

In the wake of your wake, I moved back to my apartment. I hoped you were bound to the house and wouldn't follow me. Of course you did. It didn't matter where I was, or who I was with. You'd search the streets and slowly creep up from behind. I'd choke, stutter, and run from the memories that drew you to me. You were everywhere.

Eventually, you grew weary and slow, found me less often. A day without you became a week, one week became two. I relaxed. That had been a mistake. You were still looking for me, but you had changed your tactics. My phone began to chime with texts of how your day would be going if you were still alive. How it was about the time you should be getting hungry or ready for bed. How today was the day you were supposed to meet your friends for lunch, but never would again. I stopped looking at my phone. I didn't know how to reply to a ghost.

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I finally went to claim your ashes. I knew you would follow me back, but it didn't matter anymore. You would get in no matter what I did. Frustrated with my own fears and grief I buried myself in work. It seemed best to leave myself no time to think, and if I collapsed at the end of every day, all the better. At least some of those nights were dreamless. I had finally found the pace I needed to run at to keep you away.

Run. Yes, that's exactly what I did. Ran to a new life in a new state to a new calling. That's when the letters started. They were written on blank cards the hospital had sent as thanks for our donations to the cancer fund. Each one was printed with little paintings children in the cancer ward had made. They had sat in your home for years as you struggled alongside

them, two floors up where the adults were kept. I guess we never got around to throwing them away. You would be so proud of me, they said, you would be so happy. I dreaded going to the post office to pick them up, but they appeared every week like clockwork. You came along with them.

Now, when you're not waiting by the bed again, you reach me by phone call. Every insignificant accomplishment met by saying how much you'd have liked to see this, experience this with me. As my skin crawls and tears turn me glassy-eyed I just nod, my throat too tight to speak. You do see it, see me, every day. You haunt me still. No matter how hard I try, I just can't argue with your ghost.



Suckle Brianna Teafatiller