

Aislynn

I wrap the black cloak tighter around me as soon as the snow begins to fall. Snowflakes melt upon my cloak, and I feel its icy touch sinking through into my skin. Mother notices me shivering and clasps her icy cold hand around mine. *There's no warmth in magic*, I realize.

Maybe that's why Aislynn killed herself.

Her ash was left from the cremation. No one yet knows how she killed herself, but there are some ideas that have circulated. Some believe she may have tried to bleed herself to death, though I believe it's highly improbable because she wouldn't have taken the hard way out of this life.

Then again, what do I know? She left us.

Others say that she may have attracted a creature, one who practiced dark magic, into her midst. It's a more likely possibility, but even *I* never saw Aislynn as the type to venture out. She was too meek, too quiet, too warm and happy to do that. *But she left us*, a quiet voice in my heart reminds me.

Still others suggest that she may have met a human and that they may have threatened her with death, leading her to kill herself. But this is definitely unlikely because they went extinct years ago.

So what's left? Who's left to blame for Aislynn's death?

Her.

Her father gathers us in a semi-circle. He stands in the center. "This is a time of mourning." His voice doesn't sound mournful. I'm not crying either. "Though a dear soul has departed from our world, we have a duty to guide her into the next world. The gods will decide where she shall go next."

The wind blows, whipping against my cloak. The tears haven't crossed my eyes yet. Mother's hand is like ice, her face still as a portrait.

"As is customary with all deaths, though rare, we must gather and toss her ash into the wind." His words remind me of the last death, which occurred around a quarter century ago. We don't die easily. So how did Aislynn perish? "The gods will take it as our offering of continued peace and worship."

He then approaches the urn sitting near him. He reaches in. Hesitates. It's the first hint of emotion I've seen from him since Aislynn died. He finally reaches in, pulls out a handful of ash, aims high into the

wind, and thrusts her ash violently into the breeze. We're silent. He doesn't turn back to face us. He stares into the wind, watching the ash dissolve in mid-air, and the acknowledgment of her death begins to settle over us.

His wife, Aislynn's mother, reaches into the urn and then tosses some of the ash into the wind. The wind howls loudly, and snow strikes my eyes. I wipe it off quickly, opening my eyes to see that her hand is now upon her husband's arm. It's almost a comforting gesture, yet eerily silent.

The next person grasps a handful of ash and follows suit, and I'm immediately in line to toss Aislynn's ash into the wind. I must have done something wrong. *We* must have done something wrong. I don't know how else she could have made the decision to let go. She was always the emotional one. I could never understand how someone could contain a whole bottle filled with emotions. And on a daily basis? Even more so. She always tried to hide her emotions from us, always tried to be like the rest of us. Maybe those emotions sunk into her after holding them in too much.

At least that's what I think.

I'm next in line. I stop before the urn and dig my hand deep inside, scooping up as much ash as I can. *Her ash*. The thought is enough to tingle throughout my body and send shivers down my spine, shivers not brought on by the cold. I lift my hand, feeling some ash slide through my fingers and back into the urn. I quickly toss her ash into the air, and a blast of wind strikes it. Her ash almost immediately vanishes upon sight. My hood slaps against my cheek until the wind dissipates.

That's when it really hits me. *She's gone*. I can't change that. Tears cloud my eyes, and I blink them away quickly. Of all the times emotions could possibly hit, it hits now, and I still feel the need to keep away the strong, powerful emotion.

My mother is the last to approach. She grasps the last handful and thrusts Aislynn's remaining ash into the wind. The wind catches it and allows it to float for a while before it, too, vanishes. Mother places a hand over her heart, silent, before walking away.

I watch as she walks away, while Aislynn's parents and I still stay, staring at the wind, never expecting to hold Aislynn's ash—she who was always joyous and happy and satisfied and warm and everything sweet—in my bare hand.

The snow blinds the world around me, and I wonder why, *why* did she do it?

Classes resumes as usual, and I still think of Aislynn's death. Each day, I swear I see Aislynn's ghost following me. It haunts me how it *feels* like she's still around. How I heard her dorm room's door slam behind me the other day, only to find no one behind me. How I could hear her own voice echo down the hallways, calling for me, only to find myself in an empty hallway.

Yet her ghost is enough to propel me to research more about suicide. Apparently dragons would commit suicide in olden days, but as a survival tactic so they could avoid another person killing them. Not exactly useful for me, but at least I know of magical creatures who would take their lives. Still, I can't figure out why Aislynn would. Dragons did it to save themselves, but what would Aislynn be trying to save? Her life was all right, in some sense.

I begin considering reasons why she would do it, thinking of past scenarios she may have grown angry or sad about. I can only recall one specific instance where she was angry at the girl who took her music notes and used it to get special lessons from a musician. But that happened ten years ago. Surely Aislynn wouldn't hold a grudge for that long... would she? Besides that, I know little of what could have caused it. Sometimes, I guess, she *looked* sad. But she always said nothing was wrong, and so I thought there was nothing wrong. Besides, Aislynn had never mentioned—not even subtly—her desire to commit suicide. And we were pretty close friends.

During one of these moments of heading over to one of my classes, I hear Aislynn's voice, only to find her nowhere. Before long, I find myself taking a long walk towards her parents' home amidst a snowstorm. By the time I arrive, my cloak is wet with snow, but her parents welcome me into their home

and bring me before a fire to warm up. They give me a warm cup of cocoa, and I drink it as the snow whizzes against the windows, threatening to shatter the glass that keeps the wind out.

“What brings you here?” Aislynn’s father asks.

I lean back in my seat. “I don’t know.” I don’t want to admit that Aislynn’s ghost might have been following me around. I can’t even remember what her ghost had said to me earlier that brought me here. What was it? Was she actually speaking, or was it the fact that I felt less emotion that I was going insane in other ways?

Is a faerie going insane even possible?

“Well, you’re welcome in our home,” her mother smiles at me. It looks akin to my own mother’s smile: cold. They are welcoming and warm enough to keep me out of the cold, I guess. But it wasn’t like Aislynn’s warm smile that seemed to ignite something inside each of us. I never understood it. Aislynn was like the odd one, the one who could bring some warmth into our lives and make our magic seem truly magical. It wasn’t like our magic on its own, protecting us against the hazardous snowy weather and used to enhance our abilities. She brought something different to it, something warm and enlightening. But then she was the one to kill herself in cold blood, an act the rest of us would have never considered.

What happened to the Aislynn I once knew? Or, at least, *thought* I knew? If she could take her own life in this way... will one of my classmates do the same, too? Will they feel the cold seep into their bones and be gone the next day? I’m not even sure what to expect from my own life anymore.

“Thank you,” I tell them. “I... I hope you don’t mind, but could I visit her room? Just one last time, I mean.” I think of her warmth and how I’d like to feel it once again: the warmth she brought into each of us somehow. I haven’t been into her room since we both entered the same boarding school for excelling magical beings, which is around five years ago now. Maybe by re-visiting her room, I will end up feeling a part of her soul instead of this cold place.

“Sure,” her father says, scratching the back of his neck. “Why not?” He and his wife then guide me down the hallway, the familiar bark of wood marking the walls. I feel it with my palm, the way it scratches against my skin but never pierces it.

Her father points into her room, and I enter. Her room is silent. *Too* silent. A few webs mark the corners of the room, but for the most part her room has been left untouched.

“We’ll be in the den, should you need us,” her father informs me before leaving.

I nod as I settle onto her bed. Dust has collected upon it, and I find myself swiping it away. Some memories come to mind at the memory of it. Aislynn and I playing with her wooden dolls. Us collecting snow and trying to pile it into the room. I would have never done such a thing without her. Her father peeked into the room, telling us to keep it down and clean up, but she and I laughed and laughed and laughed. Her father caught onto the game and brought in tons of snow for us to create snow creatures.

“Aislynn,” I whisper, softly. I lie upon her bed and close my eyes. I don’t realize I’ve fallen asleep until I hear my name whispered into my ears. I jolt awake at the sound, worried that I have slept for too long.

But no one has come in. Only a short amount of time has passed.

Maybe I may need to consult a scholar to see if anything like this has occurred to anyone else before. Has anyone else ever been haunted by a spirit before? Are there some historic documents on that?

I rise from the bed, the springs creaking against my weight. I rub my eyes. When I’ve opened them, I see a book upon her nightstand.

I squint my eyes and pick it up, quickly flipping the pages. I expect it to be one of her favorite novels, only to find her handwriting within.

I don’t know what to do. Father keeps telling me things will be okay. But it’s not okay. And I can’t tell anyone about this.

I lift my eyebrows. Is she talking about her plan to kill herself? I turn to the next page.

He lied to me. I can’t believe he did. I don’t know if I can even trust anyone after this. Who can I trust?

Nobody understands me anyway. I feel like I can’t say a word without being looked at.

“You can trust me,” I want to tell her, and I instantly feel an urge to reverse time and dive through the pages to reach out to her past self jotting this down. But there’s no one to tell it to, and no one has ever been able to reverse time as far as I know.

I flip on to the next page.

I met mother. She’s beautiful. She’s like me. I don’t feel so alone.

Confused, I turn a few pages back.

I’m not her daughter. His, but not hers. So who am I? I asked, but they won’t answer.

Nothing else on it, I realize, and so I return to the last page and continue.

I’ve changed my mind. She’s still different. Even humans don’t have powers.

“Human?” I ask quietly. They’re extinct, aren’t they? At least I think they are. I shift my eyes to another page.

I’ll die if anyone reads this, but I’ve fallen in love with someone, and it’s not a faerie like my father. It’s a human. Why is my life so cursed with this confusion?

It seems like confusion to me, too. Humans are extinct. Aren’t they? Unless she found proof that it’s not true. Is that even possible?

Failing school. Can't say hello to anyone without worrying they'll find out the truth. I'm not one of them. Never will be. Not human either, so where does that leave me? Lost. Lonely. They've become my companions, all because my father made a terrible mistake.

I want to run away. The boy I love said I could. That father would understand. But not even he understands me. Not even he understands the cruelty of the truth sinking deep within me.

I need an escape.

"I'd have preferred you ran away," I whisper. The wind wails outside and I turn another page, marked with water stains.

Father read this. I don't know what to say. I'm crying so hard, I can barely write this. There is so much shame in being half-human, half-magical. It's like you can never be one or the other. You'll always be both, yet always so different. No one even gets it. I can't speak to anyone about this, and I'm still crying and don't know why I can't be like others who are so un-emotional or who have no magic. There's no joy in being different. You'll always be too different to fit in anywhere. Stuck.

Maybe it's not worth it. Maybe love isn't worth it. Maybe my life was a mistake. Or an experiment. Which is worse? I'll have to stop this strange creature I've become the only way I know how.

"No," I whisper, flipping through the next pages. Nothing else written. This was her goodbye to all of us, and I am one of the few to read it.

Now I know the truth. She's half-human. That's why she was so different from the rest of us. Did that give us the warmth we felt around her? And yet, she didn't feel that warmth she spread. Instead, she felt the cold we all feel in our hearts. And then one day... she was gone. I didn't see her in class. No one saw her around. A hiking group found her in the woods, with her blue face buried into the snow.

I didn't see her then. I only received the news shortly after her body was found. Classes cancelled. A bustling village quickly turned into a deathly silent one, where the empty sound rang in my ears so loud and tears did not prick my eyes. All I heard was silence. All I hear now... is silence.

I still don't know what exactly killed her, even though I now know her motives. She wasn't like us. She was beautifully different and unique and even if I don't usually feel anything, I feel her emptiness. I... I *miss* her.

But it's too late to tell her that.