

Alice

I look around the room. It's dark in here, just like it is every night. It's my room. It *was* my room. Now it's just a room in an empty house on the corner of a random street. It's not my house anymore. It's not my street, either. I look out the window. There's dust covering the window, left from years of neglect. There is a weeping willow in the front yard. The branches swing back and forth. I loved that tree. It was my favorite place to play when I was alive.

Luke

*She's dead. She can't possibly be here,* I think to myself. Yet, I can't shake the feeling that she's here, watching me. I hold my head in my hands, my legs shaking uncontrollably as I try to breathe. When that fails, I stand abruptly, nearly knocking back the simple wooden dining chair. I pace, back and forth, my feet carrying me as my mind continues to drive me mad.

*She's dead,* says the rational part of my brain, yet I can hear her laughter, a small flutter of sound at the corner of my conscience, just loud enough to hear. I swear I can see her out of the corners of my eyes, her long, silver-blond hair just disappearing as I turn my head. And those eyes. Damn it, those deep blue eyes have driven me to the edge so many times, I've lost count.

"I killed you, so why can't you just leave me alone?" I collapse on the couch, my head in my hands, as fresh tears start to fall.

Alice

I remember the night I died. It was the same date as today: November 27. I couldn't sleep. Our parents had been yelling, and they kept me up. They had fallen asleep, I went outside to the willow. I always went outside to the willow when I couldn't sleep. I climbed the tree. I sat in the branches. They were swaying then, too. I closed my eyes, enjoying the cold breeze as it swirled my white nightgown. I remember wishing for snow.

Luke

It's snowing, I realize, as I look out the window. *Just like that night.* It has snowed on the anniversary of that date every year since that night. I can still remember how gently the snow fell as she hung there, the light in her eyes gone, her body swinging gently as the snow covered the

ground. *Those eyes...* The same thought has run through my mind for the past ten years since that night. The same memory of those eyes, looking up at me, has driven me to the point of insanity.

*No, it wasn't the eyes, I remember. It was the look in those eyes.* She wasn't scared when she saw it was me. She wasn't angry, or sad. She didn't cry or struggle. Her eyes were full of kindness and understanding, even as I let her fall.

*It was the fall of my freshman year of high school. We had move the summer before to a town that had a program for my sister. At thirteen, she was officially considered a special needs child. Our parents didn't know what to think. Our mom cried and our dad was in denial. Before long, they started arguing constantly, little things setting them off, like Alice leaving her toys on the floor or me forgetting to take out the trash or do my homework.*

*It was a Tuesday night. I was studying for a math test on Thursday. I had always hated my math classes, and I needed to pass this test or I'd fail the quarter. Mom and Dad were screaming at each other downstairs, something about Alice leaving her coloring book on floor when Dad had come home.*

*As I stared down at the jumble of numbers in my Algebra book, I heard my bedroom door open. "Luke?" It was Alice. I clenched my book tighter. It was her fault our parents were fighting right now. If she had just put her stuff away, everything would be just fine.*

*"Luke?" Alice was beside me now, tugging on my shirt sleeve. The screaming downstairs was only getting louder, and the numbers weren't making any sense. "Luke? Luke, I'm scared." Alice only tugged harder on my shirt, the number beginning to swarm around in my head, as the yelling downstairs continued to get louder still. "Luke"*

*I don't remember closing my eyes, but when I opened them, Alice was on the floor, clutching her cheek in her hands, eyes staring at me as tears pooled within them. I sat in shock, my hand stinging from when it had made contact with her face.*

*I instantly fell to my knees, grabbing Alice and holding her close. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry," I chanted, tears streaming down my face. I didn't mean to hit her.*

*Her hands grabbed onto my shirt as I cradled her, rocking her back and forth, brushing her hair soothingly. We stay in my room, both of us crying as the yelling downstairs carried on.*

Alice

I remember suddenly opening my eyes. A hand had covered my mouth. I tried to struggle and cry out, but the hand kept me from doing anything. I felt something rough and scratchy wrap around my neck. I was lifted from the tree branch, the hands holding me out over the open air. I looked up at the owner of the hands. I saw his short brown hair, those forest green eyes, and all my struggling stopped. The hands were my brother's. They were Luke's.

Luke

*She deserved it*, one thought says. *She was only fifteen*, another chimes in. Why? Why does she do this to me? My parents had taken my lack of emotion as shock, and to an extent, it was. I didn't realize what I had done until after it happened. We moved after that, leaving the house and the memory behind, but I never got over what had happened. I tried to justify it by telling myself that she was in a better place, better than the home we grew up in. There was no yelling, no abuse. She could be happy, but those thoughts did little to ease the guilt I felt. I took her life, and nothing could ever justify that.

*She was nothing but a problem*, another thought pipes up. *She was your sister*, yells another one. I grip my hair in my hands tightly as I rise from the couch, shaking my head back and forth, willing these thoughts to stop but they only grow louder. I scream, my hand clenching into a fist, knocking something over as it swings around and connects with the wall. All my thoughts disappear as I hear glass shatter. I look down at what had fallen. It's a picture frame. I lean down to pick it up, glass falling as I turn it over in my hands. It's a picture of my family, one of the few I kept when I left home. Mom, Dad, me, and...

*Alice*. She looked so happy; we all did. I can feel the hot tears falling down my face. I never meant to hurt her. I might have gotten angry at her, yelling at her, one time even hitting her, but I never meant to hurt her like this.

I drop the frame and quickly leave the room. I can't take this anymore.

Alice

I remember seeing Luke on the tree branch above me. He looked scared and confused. He looked angry, too. I always seemed to make Luke angry. I didn't always know what I did to

make him angry, but he was always yelling at me. "Get out of here," he'd say, or "Why are you so annoying?" he'd ask me. I never figured out the answer.

*It was my birthday: April 19. I was turning fourteen. Mom said we would go out to eat as soon as Dad got home. I was so excited. When Dad got home, he looked tired. He walked slowly past me, no hello, no hug, and sat at the dining table. "What's wrong?" Mom asked him. "I was laid off today," he told her. "What? Why?" she questioned.*

*"They had to cut back on employees." He let his head fall into his hands. I could see him shaking. "Well, I could always go back to work part time," Mom offered. "No, I'll find another job. I just need a little time."*

*"Yes, and I can go back to work in the meantime," Mom persisted. That was when Luke walked downstairs. "I said no. You need to stay home with the kids. I can find a job."*

*"Luke's old enough to watch Alice."*

*"Yeah, Dad. I can watch Alice if I have to," Luke chimed in.*

*"Besides," Mom continued "I'd be back by the time they come home."*

*"Why are you so insistent? I said I'd find a job and I will. Do you not understand?" Dad's voice rose as he stood up from his chair. "I understand perfectly. I was only trying to help, and you don't need to raise your voice at me."*

*"Oh, I don't..." I stopped listening. They were starting to yell at each other. I hated it when they yelled. I walked over to Luke. I clutched his shirt. He had gotten taller; my head only reached his chest. I felt his hand run over my hair. "Why don't you get your shoes and we'll go for a walk, alright?" I looked up at Luke and nodded. I loved walks.*

*I walked with Luke down the street, away from the house and the yelling. We soon reached the town center. I loved the center, especially the park, with the green grass and playground. "Luke, can we play on the swings," I pleaded, pulling him toward the playground. He laughed. "Sure, Alice, whatever you want. It is your birthday." I smiled and pulled him over to the swings. "Push me, Luke." He smiled and began to push me as I started to pump my legs, getting higher and higher.*

*I felt like I was flying.*

Luke

As I walk back into the living room, I can feel the weight of it. The rope, its coarse surface scratching my palms, hangs limply in my hands. I have brought this same rope out countless time. Each time, I've walked so close to the edge, come so close to falling, before I pull back. This time, I won't pull back.

After ten years of guilt, of regret, it all ends now. I tie the rope around my neck, feeling the roughness around my throat. I drag the dining chair from the table, placing it underneath the ceiling fan. I work on tying the end of the rope around the fan, the slack disappearing.

As I stand here, the rope taut and pulling at my neck, tears pouring down my face, I smile, because I feel, for the first time in ten years, at peace.

Alice

I never got upset when Luke yelled at me. Even when he hit me one time, I cried, but I wasn't upset with him. I understood Luke wasn't really mad at me, just frustrated, like Mom and Dad. Besides, I knew he would say he was sorry. Luke always said he was sorry after he yelled at me.

Luke

I stood on the dining chair, one step away from the edge. It has taken ten years for me to live up to what I've done. Now, I would finally make things right. I let my right foot hover over the ground, my left foot kicking the chair away. It clattered to the ground and I was falling.

*I'm sorry, Alice,* was the last thought I had before the world went dark.

Alice

"It's okay, Luke. I forgive you." I reached out for his hand, and he took it.