

Who She Was

Everything you've ever felt or dreamed is nothing. Hope, greed, anger, love, pain – it's all in your head. Your emotions are only imagined. That's what they tell everyone, and that's what everyone believes. That's what they'll tell you. That's what they told me.

This is the story of how I died.

The Society runs everything. You can't even be in your own house without an all-knowing, all-seeing eye watching over you. That is just the way it is. That is the way it has always been, ever since we came out of the Dark Days. The Society protects us from ourselves. They believe that it was our emotions which brought about our destruction. Jealousy, love, hate, greed – they had the power to start wars. Man couldn't handle their emotions, so the Society decided to dispose of them forever, for our own sakes. It is for the best.

On one's sixteenth birthday, he is required by law to report to the Lab, so the Doctor can perform the Procedure. Then, you become perfect. And you are welcomed into a world without pain. This is how it is. Life becomes simple and easy. You are assigned a mate for life. You live peacefully and go about your day doing your assigned job- the one you always wanted, the one you are meant for. When it is time, you may apply for a child, and the Society will create one for you in the Lab, a girl or boy, whichever you prefer. You will have to deal with this emotional little brat, and raise him or her to the best of your abilities, until they themselves can have the Procedure and become perfect. Thus is the circle of life.

We are dolls, living out the commands of the Society. We do as they wish, and believe only what they tell us. All we know is what they have told us to be true. One day, the scene is set and the dolls are ready. It is 3013 in City Number 3712, about the place where New York City used to be. The story begins as I am sitting at home staring out a window...

She is watching helplessly out the window as a boy her age is dragged across the city streets. She knows he is turning sixteen, and this is his terrible march to the Lab. He is one of the rebels who refuse to have the Procedure. His head is bloody and beaten, and his hands are cuffed behind his back. He is walking dejectedly, but there is still one last burning hope in his eyes of

freedom. Two officers grip him on either side as he screams out for mercy. His voice is hoarse from anger and desperation but still he cries out for anyone to hear him. He hopes for anyone, *anyone*, to help him. They grip him from either side and force him to walk towards his fate. She wishes with all her heart that she could go to him, comfort him, and be by his side. She feels his agony like the handcuffs cutting into her own wrists. They continue past as she presses her nose to her hard, cold prison window and yearns with all her heart she could do something to save him.

The adults of the city sit in their own secluded little houses and watch the poor man with cold detachment. Everyone just looks on with deadened gazes that don't understand or care. People go through the ordinary motions of life, watching impassively out the window, robots who cannot feel. Watching the poor boy as if he were a show on television, outside their window having nothing to do with them. Yet they know exactly what is going on and choose not to do anything.

"Mother," the girl pleads. "We have to help him!" She presses her nose against the glass willing someone, anyone, to save the poor boy.

"Nonsense," her mother replies. "He is going to be helped. This is what is meant to happen. He will be perfect now." The girl looks at her shocked, thinking: *Does she truly not feel the pain that boy is in?*

"But Mother!" she exclaims with disbelief. "They are killing him!" But her mother only shrugs her shoulders and turned to keep washing the dishes. Her mother's stiff, cold back is an unreachable wall which she cannot possibly comprehend.

"I've about had it with you and your emotions, young lady" she says firmly. "Go upstairs and finish your homework." The girl gives one last look out the window with her heart aching and turns away from the poor boy, her eyes glistening with tears. She cannot believe her mother. She does not understand how they possibly choose not to help him.

The girl cannot stop thinking about the boy in the street. She can't help thinking if what the Society does is right. *How can anything be right if it hurts people?* If this is what is allowed to happen, there is something wrong. The boy's suffering has made her outraged. She looks around and sees nobody, no one at all trying to help. No one even cares. Suddenly she feels trapped, surrounded by these robots that will not even raise a finger to help one of their own. *What are these things?* she thinks, *they're barely even human.* Suddenly she is frightened by the

droid-like people around her who aren't even fazed by a poor boy in pain. She wonders for a moment about the Society. *Is it really for the best to remove all emotion, if this is what we end up like?*

She needs someone to talk to about the boy in the street, someone who understands. She needs someone who she can be herself with, who will listen to her doubts and help her. She needs him, the boy she's known since forever, the boy she loves. She needs to be with him. He has been there for her since they were children, and she knows that he will always be. Forever.

She goes to him.

They sit across from each other, eyes connected. His, a warm chocolate brown; innocent of the world. Hers, coal black and piercing, reading his soul. Both, searching for an answer. Her heart beats in her chest like drums; she swears everyone can hear it. She's never felt anything like this before. Thoughts that had been racing through her head: all gone. All she can think of is him. Her stomach hurts, she feels dizzy, as she stares in to his eyes. What is he thinking? What is he feeling? She knows this could never happen. This, between them, it could never be. It is prohibited and forbidden at all costs, above all else. But she can't help hoping, dreaming, wishing. She doesn't believe what they say, what they've told her: that emotions aren't real. If anything in this desolate world is real it is how she feels at this very moment; she is vibrating on the edge of life, balancing on a diving board ready to jump. He leans closer to her, his lips brushing her ear. She shivers.

"I love you" he whispers. She turns her head slowly towards him, trying with all her heart to believe it. Trying to believe that love is more than the imagination. Her eyes close, and he kisses her. Her world explodes and she jumps out into the dark waters of the unknown.

She loves him; she knows in her heart that she has always loved him. She has fallen for him, jumped off a cliff, with no end in sight. She knows her life will never be the same; he means so much to her. All her life he has been by her side; through everything, he has been there. He is her everything. She loves him more than her own life. This is something she's never felt before and it terrifies her, but she never wants to lose him. She knows her life will never be the same if she can't be by his side. Love is a war and she is not giving up. She will fight for this, for him.

Time passes, as it does. It chases her, nipping at her heels nagging her about how little time there is left until she herself will no longer be able to feel. She feels the weight of time like

a stone sitting in her stomach, always there and a constant reminder of how little time she has left until everything changes.

They sit on an abandoned bridge, above a highway. Cars, monsters on an endless chase, rumble beneath them. She looks into his eyes. “They say, after the Procedure, that you are the same. That you are still who you’ve always been, but without the feelings in your head. That it’s simple now.” she paused, “That it won’t hurt – you won’t feel a thing. That you never changed, only the world did. I don’t believe them.” He looks into her eyes and nods solemnly.

“They think it is better this way,” he says “But the ones saying that, they’ve all been through the Procedure already. They’ve forgotten what it is like to feel.”

They look out at the sun, fading on their last day together. Tomorrow, she is scheduled to have her Procedure; it is her sixteenth birthday: the worst day of her life. She still holds desperately on to a hope that tomorrow she will still love him. That afterwards, their love will be the same. That the Procedure won’t change anything, but she knows in her heart that it will.

“I won’t be myself anymore, if I can’t love you. That’s part of who I am” she sighed. “And if I can’t be myself, I don’t want to be anyone at all” she says to him darkly, urging him to understand what she can’t voice aloud. “Promise me something” she asks.

“Anything” he replies.

The next morning, they walk together through the streets, hand in hand. Her parents were aware that today was the fated day, but didn't even care to see her off. They hardly even noticed when she left home. She is nothing to them. They are just giving her a house to live in until she has her Procedure and becomes someone worth living. Not until she becomes perfect will she be worth anything to the world. Not until she becomes perfect will anyone care who she is.

“You'll be fine,” Mother said. “It will be better now” Father told her.

But better for whom? she wonders. Better for you, now that you don't have to hear my opinions? Better for me to be shutout and locked up inside myself?

They stand in front of the cold, looming building, a statue of love and defiance. Their hands clasped tightly, afraid to let go. She leans into him; in that moment she wishes they could last forever. They look across the pavement at her inevitable fate. The Lab stands against the sky like a dreaded omen. Men in white lab coats hurry around behind the glass eyes of the monster, bustling about as if there's not enough time in the world. Time stops for no one; she knows it as

well as anyone else. She lets go of his hand, their fingers brushing - wishing goodbye – for perhaps the last time. She breaks their gaze and turns to face her fate. She walks toward the building, slow steady steps, determined not to show the overwhelming fear pressing down on the back of her eyes. The monster swallows her whole, slamming shut in a sound of finality. Ending something that never was. Ending something that never could have been. He stands there for hours, watching the closed doors intently: a vigil of love.

He waits.

He stands outside the doors of the Lab, now a statue alone, and waits for her. As sunlight fades, the doors open and she comes out. Bare feet, she looks so vulnerable in the white hospital gown, her hair in a scraggly ponytail. He is watching her. Her chin, lowered, her eyes are downcast. She stops and looks up. Their eyes connect. His heart reaches out for her, hoping, daring to hope that things will be the same between them. His heart aches, straining towards her with all his life. Hoping she will be the same. Hoping against all else that they will find a way to work everything out, even if they must go against the will of the Society. He would do anything for her, to be with her.

But her eyes say nothing.

There is nothing there but two dark, empty pools. They are now dull black, unfeeling and bored. Not even a flicker of recognition is found in there. He is devastated; he has given up all hope for her, for them. Something inside him breaks. He knows for sure now that he must do what she asked him to. He promised. He steps out from the throng of people as if in slow motion. He feels like he's in a blur; like he is watching a movie. He reaches his hand to his coat pocket. Everything in him is screaming out *NO, don't do this, you can't*. But he promised her. He promised her that he would, if he must. This girl standing in front of him is not the girl he loves. Tears are streaming down his face as he pulls the trigger on his angel.

She falls to the ground. She lays still, her hair strewn across the pavement in a halo. Her face is peaceful, as if she was dreaming, and this horror has not yet happened. He wishes with all his heart that he will wake up from this nightmare. Everything that is him breaks down and dies.

He looks into the eyes of the crowd around him. All these people who just stand here and look on with boredom, people who have been anesthetized. People so numb to emotion; they're barely even human anymore. People who just witnessed a murder and feel nothing but disappointment that they didn't get to see her become perfect. The crowd that had gathered to

watch the new and improved “perfect” girl come out and join the world. To them, it was like a christening, a new birth. Finally, she would be like them, and they would welcome her gladly. But they welcome someone who is not her, who would never be the girl he loved again.

She is not herself anymore, and neither is he.

He is disgusted with all of them. This world he lives in, he hates it. Who is to say what is wrong or what someone should be? The Society has no right to do what they do, not to her – not to anyone. How dare they make her change just to suit their own opinion on what is best! His hands clench into fists.

He is a blank void, everything he had is lost. He cannot go on without her by his side. She was his everything, and now he is nothing. He has nothing to live for. Anger courses through his body, it runs in his veins. He will do something about how this world is. He must. As he stands over the body of the girl he loved more than anything else, he makes another promise. He promises to her that he will find a way to make everyone feel emotion again. He watches the crowds of people methodically making their way back to their rows of houses, back to their scripted lives, their lives unchanged.

He will not rest until everyone is able to feel the pain he has endured.