

Paper-thin Angel

It had to be done.

The cards were still lying on the table; ornate roses, delicate lace, hints of shimmering silvers, and a blend of watercolour pastels. They were supposed to be delivered by now. Instead they had been collecting dust on the kitchen table. Organized in symmetrical rows and lingering like tombstones along the tablecloth.

She had put so much effort into those cards, those paper thin angels haunting my kitchen. Today was the day, marked on the calendar and the cards, almost mockingly repeating.

August twenty-third, our wedding day.

I forced my trembling hand to touch the cards; it had been months since I had even garnered the courage to look at them. I stacked them one on top of the other and held them close to my chest. It was almost as if I was hugging her ghost, paper thin and frail just like when she left me.

The subtle embrace took me back to that night. In the confines of a hospital bedroom she slept like an angel. I had brought her flowers as usual; white lilies were always her favourite. Holding them in my hand I couldn't bring myself to look at her.

She was once so full of life and laughter, slowly reduced to breathing through a tube and chained to the medicinal mercy of pain killers.

I loathed seeing her like this.

I dropped the flowers onto the dresser and the noise woke her up. She gave me a faint smile, "Hey Warren," she whispered.

She had become so weak that even talking was a struggle. I sat beside her and held her hand. Back then I believed she would get better somehow. That childish hope was all I had to keep going. I kissed her hand and she giggled.

"Looks like somebody missed me," she teased.

I rubbed circles into her palm, "of course I did, we have more planning to do you know."

I meant the wedding; by then it was still several months away. At the mention of the wedding her

smile faded.

“Warren...” my name quivered from her lips.

I held her hand tighter, as if she was my own life support.

“That’s enough,” I snapped.

“You’re going to be fine Catherine. The doctors are doing everything they can, I swear we’ll get through this we’ve just got to fight it,” my fingers intertwined with hers.

“I promise you, we’ll get through this.”

Tears streamed down her face and nothing could hold back the misery that had built up inside her.

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep,” she whimpered.

I didn’t listen.

“I mean it, I promise everything will be fine,” I said.

By then she had already known but she couldn’t bring herself to tell me. How could she? I wouldn’t listen. I was still pretending. All she could do was cry in my arms.

She felt like a paper thin angel, wrapped in white and desperately sending me the message I never wanted to hear.

She was tired of waiting for a cure that would never come.

She wanted to die.

August twenty-third, I finally understood.

I took the cards over to the fireplace. It was killing me to keep pretending. I ripped apart the first card, shredding away the empty promise of our lives together.

I needed to stop pretending.

Rip.

Pretending this was all a nightmare.

Rip.

Pretending we would still be together.

Rip.

Pretending she was still alive.

As I tore those angels apart I felt my anger rise up to the surface. Why couldn't I see she was in pain? She was in agony because of me! For so long I had begged her to fight for me. How could I have been so selfish?

My hand hesitated on the final card; the last remnant of our future together.

Maybe I could keep one, just one, just a tiny scrap of hope that we'd still need this card. My fingers trembled against the white lace and my tears were landing on the card in splotches of glitter. Could I please keep a little white lie alive? I wanted to, so desperately I wanted to keep this one card with me.

I placed it on the mantelpiece and took a step back. The card was beautiful, the date scrawled out in blotchy glitter as if it was still coming. I had to destroy that card eventually, or else it would destroy me.

It had to be done, but not today.

Not today.