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Some people call me haunted as they look into the glass case. They may step away and say that I'm an evil spirit. But let me tell you, all I am is a friend whose soul got stolen in order to protect, *her*...

I walked through my new school with my head down wishing that I wasn't alone. But unfortunately, wishing during the day isn't the same as wishing upon a star. The long hallway seemed to be endless. I looked around and saw all the souls which were cursed to roam the earth; I couldn't stop seeing them; all I wanted was to be normal. Was I crazy? This gift...no, scar, I somehow inherited got me kicked out of all my previous schools. "Ziiing!" The tardy bell snapped me out of my daydream when it buzzed throughout the school sounding its cacophonous noise. I trudged through the hallways of the school looking for my classroom, until I came to a shabby looking area of the building. The worn out doors had a sign hung on them which listed the room numbers behind it: 2000-2030. Although I was hopelessly late, I cautiously tiptoed into the ominous hallway as the door creaked closed. Silently, I counted off the rooms until I had finally found #2023. My knock echoed through the ancient walls when a friendly face welcomed me in. The blinding light and indistinct conversations flowed out of the room as I entered. "Everybody listen up. This is our new student, Annabel!" announced the teacher with his booming voice. I stood in front of the whole class, feeling vulnerable and self-conscious. I began to walk toward the only open seat in the back of the room, all eyes pierced on me, judging my every move. While everyone was busy shooting me unpleasant glances I slugged down in my seat, and tried to pay attention to the overly-excited teacher continue on with the lesson I had disturbed.

The day dragged on without a purpose or a destination. Finally, the discordant noise released everyone from this prison. I skipped outside ready to go home and purposefully speed walked toward the crosswalk when my phone jingled. Quickly grabbing it, I answered my best friend, Lauren's call. I've been living with her family since I was about five, when my parents died in a car accident. Lauren's family took me in as their own. Sadly, about a year ago, Lauren was diagnosed with cancer and had been battling it ever since.

"Hey Lauren! I'll be at the hospital in about 30 minutes. How are you? Is everything okay? Will..."

She cut me off.

"Listen I don't know how to say this..." she trailed off.

"Say what? Did something happen?"

"I'm not going to make it."

"What are you talking about? You've been doing great these past few weeks! The doctors told us..."

Cold tears began streaming down my face like rivers as the wind picked up and almost on cue it started to drizzle. The wet, bitter droplets of the crying clouds taunted me.

“ I’m not going to make it!”

My head began to spin, my body slacked, and I collapsed to the floor.

The maze of people continued to move as though it was Newton’s Cradle, never coming to a stop.

“I’m not going to make it!”

My sobs loudly sounded around me as her words repeated themselves like a broken record in my head.

“I’m not going to make it!”

Lonely weeks went by. Lauren’s health continued to deteriorate. Every passing day became harder to bear. I walked down the long hallway of not my school anymore, but the cold, sterilized hallways of the hospital. I saw the spirits again and would occasionally watch them float out of this clinic. No one could help them, so how would I save my beloved Lauren? I reached the room, gave a gentle knock on the door, and made out a thin, raggedy response instructing me to come in. I sat there next to her on the hard, wooden chair for hours listening to the steady beats of the heart monitor. I was about to head home, when suddenly there was a ceaseless beep which sounded like a train was trying to stop quickly and blowing its whistle in an emergency. The door opened and I was ready to jump out of the way when dozens of doctors rushed in to save Lauren. But there weren't any heroic experts ready to rescue her precious existence. Instead a dark, eerie figure, impossibly tall, floated in with uneasy calmness and began to extract the soul from her body as if it was normal. I stared at him in horror as my best friend slowly ceased to exist. “Wait please!” I screeched. The demon looked straight at me, then paused for a moment before continuing on with the task. “Please, take me instead!” I begged. He glared at me with unimaginable intensity and jeerily laughed. “That’s what they all say.” he mumbled under his breath and turned back to Lauren.”I’m talking to *you* Mr.Reaper!” I spat out, desperately trying to get his attention. Mr.Reaper focussed on me, not knowing how to react. We stood there for a few seconds as he judgmentally gawked at me. An evil grin spread across his face as he smoothly responded back “ As you wish.” With an elegant twist of his hand in my direction, I felt a tingling sensation in my own hands. I looked down and panicked as they gradually faded away. I rushed up to Lauren and admired her glowing, tear soaked skin as I said my final goodbyes.

Three years passed since the incident. As soon as I disappeared without a trace from this world, I swore to return to my best friend and be her protector for eternity. I had found a way. Lauren was blessed with a gift as a celebration of her survival: a beautiful red- haired doll. Lauren named this doll after me, Annabel. I had been marked as missing and never officially

found after I gave up my life for hers. I fought through all of the heavens and below to return my spirit back to this universe, which resides in the doll now.

Lauren snuggles in bed under the toasty covers, on the cold winter nights. She affectionately hugs me, the doll. I can feel her warm, peppermint-vanilla breath on the back of my stringy hair and I think...

she can feel mine.