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## Faded

I could still hear it. The sound of life fading. The sound of terror. The sound of my feet hitting the ground thump after thump after thump. I could still feel it. The monster waiting to swallow me whole. The hungry arms of the monster grasping for me. The heat smothering and suffocating me like a blanket I couldn't shake off. I ran, and ran, and ran because there was no escape. There was no way I could shake it off. It kept following me and following me. I ran until my feet bled. Until the heat turned into bitter cold, snapping at me from all around. But I could still feel it. It clung to my skin, seeping into my bones until my entire body was filled with the scorching, torrid fire. A river of tears washed away my vision. I couldn't see anything except the terrible, terrible monster. Its yawning mouth just waiting to consume me as well. I stumbled and fell to the ground. Snowflakes swirled around me, and the world whispered into an eerie silence. But I could still hear it. I covered my ears and screamed into the ghost of the world. I screamed to block out the laughter of the monster. I screamed to make the monster hurt as much as I did. I screamed so I could get lost in anything other than the cackling and taunting of the monster. I screamed until my throat ran dry, and there was nothing left in me to continue. But I could still hear it.

The world slowly unfolded before me. White coated everything, and the silence was ghostly. It was cold. So, so, so cold. But I could still feel the heat crawling under my skin. It bubbled underneath me, clinging to every surface the cold couldn't touch. It was so hard to imagine that only a day before, I still had a chance of being happy. I closed my eyes and let the siren's song of the past encase me until I drowned into it.

Snowflakes waltzed, pirouetting and spinning with one another. My eyes traced their graceful descent. "Dagny!" startled, I broke from my trance, and turned away from the window.

"Yes mamma?" I said, sliding down from the windowsill and abandoning the frost crusted window. The worn wooden boards creaked beneath me as I walked away from the window. Our cabin was an old, humble little thing. It has been in our family for generations, and the wheezing of the wind often caused it to sway around us. Cradling only three rooms, it was cozy almost to the point of suffocating. I exited the room me and Pine, my little brother, shared. Mama's back was turned away from me while she stirred our dinner. Pappa sat at the only table in our house, meticulously carving a small wooden sculpture. You never knew what pappa was carving. It was only after he had finished that you could finally connect the dots and realize what it was. Pine, my little brother, sat on our threadbare carpet, playing with wooden toys pappa had carved. I peered over mamma's shoulder to see what we would be eating for dinner. "Is that the rabbit pappa caught earlier?" I asked, wrapping my arms around her slender figure.

"It is," Mamma said, turning around to look at me, "so you better eat a lot today." Mamma had blonde, white hair that fell in wispy waves all around her waist. My body glowed with warmth as I stared into her amber eyes. Her rosy, thin lips settled into a small smile. There are no mirrors in our house, but I sometimes caught my reflection in the windows. Pappa says I have her amber eyes and wispy hair. From what I could see, my hair crowned my shoulders, and I did have mamma's amber eyes but I do not think I possessed the same warmth mamma did. Unlike mamma, pappa is not very beautiful on his face. But his gentle hazel eyes and permanent beam makes the viewer filled with happiness that no beauty could challenge. Pine was a facsimile of father. You could see the joy shining through his young face, just as joy shone through father's. Pappa named him Pine, because it was the pine trees that grew in the forest around us that supplied us. Mamma says Pappa and her named me Dagny because I was their first blessing. After speaking with mamma, I walked to the table, where pappa sat. His brows were

furrowed with concentration, full lips pressed into a thin line. I peeped over his shoulder quietly, careful not to break his concentration. Wood shaving littered the table, as he slowly carved line after line, stroke after stroke. It was a mesmerizing sight, to see nothing be made into something. Silently, I slipped away from him. I walked all but three steps before I cried out in pain. I looked down and saw one of Pine's toys lay in my path. A blackbird stared up at me innocently.

"Pine!" I shouted, "come here ugly, you left your toys on the ground! Again!" Pine popped out from under the table, his curly brown hair obscuring his view.

"What do you want, Doggy?" he asked, making his voice high and nasally in a bad attempt to mimic my voice.

"Well, Puny, next time you play take all your toys with you! Because of you, I now have the imprint of a black bird on my foot, stupid!" I said, brandishing the blackbird in his rosy face.

"Yea? Well next time, you-"

"Enough!" Mamma shouted, hand on her hip. That was a dangerous sign. "You guys shouldn't be using that language! And can't you see your pappas trying to work right now?" she said, shaking the ladle in both directions.

"Ok" we both said, submissively. But once mamma turned her back, I made sure to stick my tongue out to Pine just for good measure.

"Dagny, can you go outside, and get some wood from please? There should be a pile next to the door under the blue blanket." Pappa called.

"Ok!" I said, skipping to the door. As I pulled back the handle, a blast of frigid, Norwegian air slapped me in the face.

“Close the door Doggy! You're letting in the cold air!” Pine’s voice screeched from under the table. “Whatever, Puny!” I shouted and stepped outside, shutting the door as I went. I squinted around me, and the only thing I could see was endless snow and woods. The trees looked like they were covered in soft down. During winter, Norway would get buried with snow. It was always cold, harsh, and merciless. I looked around for the blue blanket pappa was talking about, but it was nowhere in sight. Pacing around our house, I kept an eye out for any splash of blue among the crystal snow. My eyes darted back and forth across my path. The whistling wind sliced through my hair, clawing at my face. I stared intently at the ground, immersed in my task. I searched and searched until my head throbbed. I looked up and turned back, planning to head back in and tell pappa I couldn’t find it. As I turned around, I realized I had wandered quite a distance from the house. Desperate to reach back to the warm embrace of our home, I ran against the wind. I stared at our house longingly. It was so inviting it almost seemed to glow. I was nearing our door, when suddenly the walls started caving in, covered by a fiery hue. Startled, I slowed to a halt. The golden color bubbled and swelled until flames licked the walls, smothering the roof, stretching towards the sky. Heat slapped me in the face. It singed my hair, stung my skin, slashed my clothes. I burrowed deep within me, surging into every crevice it could find. Fire raged all around me. I could hear screams coming from inside the house. They were loud, loud, so loud. It made my eyes sting, it made my hair stand up, and it woke me up from a trance. “MAMMA! PAPPA! PINE!” I screamed for their names, but my shrieks were drowned by the sound of the hungry fire and their screams. Their screams scratched my ears, etched themselves into my memory, clawed until it resonated and reverberated around inside my head. I screamed back. I screamed and screamed until the fire almost touched me. I ran. The fire couldn’t touch me. I saw what happened when the fire touched them. I ran. The fire couldn't touch me. It couldn’t take me. I didn’t know if it was their screams I heard, my screams, or if the screams were merely inside my own head. I ran, and ran, and ran until my head spun and the world swayed before me.

It was cold. So, so cold. The numbness swept through me, taking away everything else until I could only feel the cold. I was so tired. So, so tired. Slowly, I tried to open my eyelids. I was so tired. The brightness of the world stung my eyes. I lifted my head, looking around me. I was so tired. There was snow and trees and trees and snow. The trees towered over me, casting me in their cruel shadow. The sun didn't smile, but the clouds laughed, crowding over the sky. I sat up. I was shaking. It was cold and I was tired. The only thing on my mind was the cold. Until the monster came back to me. I remembered. I remembered the fire, how it laughed and sneered as it ate up everything I loved. But it never happened. I must've simply fallen asleep when looking for the wood and everything was simply a vivid dream. That must be it. What was happening, how could I dream something so terrible. There was no fire. Mamma, Pappa, and Pine were still waiting for the wood. I looked around, but our home was nowhere in sight. There was snow and trees and trees and snow. And there was fire. Its ashes cloaked me. Seeing it seemed to shake me up until my brain rattled inside my head and my breath was trapped into my lungs. The fire sneered back at me, not ever loosening its hold on me. I needed to see it. I needed to see what the fire had done. I needed to know how I could erase it, forget it, revert it. So, I stood up. I only got up on one knee, but the world swam before my eyes, and I had careened back onto the ground. I tried again, but stars started obscuring my vision. I tried and tried until it came to me that there was no way I could stand. So, I walked on my knees. Following my foots steps, I traversed back to the monster I had run from. Day passed, yet I had not yet arrived. Soon, night fell, and with it came all the horrors of the woods. Animals started awakening, and shadows danced through the haze. My knees couldn't move any longer, so I crawled. I crawled and crawled until I could no longer crawl. Snow started to fall. Lightly, and gently. The clouds left, revealing a bright, luminous moon. Stars sparkled like diamonds across the night sky. Blue, Purple, Black and everything in between layered together. Amid the swirls, the moon shone brightly. Calm, and steady, it seemed to be crying. The light was its tears, the stars droplets. Tears welled

in my eyes. It finally struck me, the severity of the situation. There was no home for me to go back to. No mamma to make me dinner, no pappa to carve me beautiful sculptures, no Pine to make me laugh. A pang of longing and sadness crashed over me until my heart flooded. I cried for the future I had lost. I cried for the love I had lost. I cried for never appreciating just how lucky and beautiful this world was. And now, I would lose the world too. The snow was falling on me now. It layered me like a blanket. A blanket that would soon become still, and silent. I would sink back into the earth, like the so many countless people who had before and surely will in the future. All our generations, our grandparents, and their grandparents, and their grandparents would disappear the moment I left. We would get lost in the maze of time, with nothing to remember us and there was nothing I could do. I cried with the moon, letting its soft lullabies swim through my ears to drown the fire's cackles. I cried. The snow fell, the moon sang, and, slowly, I faded into the earth.