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English IV

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The Pale Friend

“Hi.”

“What the fuck is this? This better not be a stupid joke, because it’s not at *all* funny.”

“Wait… you can see me?”

The girl sitting on the park bench nodded. “What? No one else can?”

“I don’t think so. I walked by several people on my way here, and none of them seemed to notice.”

“Then why am I able to? Wait, no, scratch that. Better question. *How* are you even here, Alice?”

The pale girl shrugged. “Honestly, I don’t know. I’ve been asking myself the same question for a while now.”

Silence fell between them.

The large, blue eyes of the girl sitting on the bench started to water. “I have been *pissed* and *miserable for months* because of you.”

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Lily.” Alice’s voice was soft and quiet.

“If you’re sorry, *why* did you do it?” She stared Alice straight in the eyes.

“I….” Alice sighed. “Because besides my sister, you’re the only other person I’m really close to. You’re like a little sister to me.”

“We’ve known each other for almost all of our lives. You’re *going to* have to do better than that.”

Alice glanced around at her surroundings. “Can we talk about this somewhere else? People are beginning to stare at us. I don’t like it. It’s making me feel uncomfortable.”

“They’re not staring at *us*, they’re staring at *me*.”

“Well… yeah, but it still feels like their looking at me. So can we *please* go somewhere where there are fewer people?”

“*No, so sit down.*”

“Okay, but can you at least make it look like your talking on the phone or something?”

“*No, I already said no, so just sit your ass down and tell me why.*”

Alice sat down on the bench and turned her body toward Lily and brought her knees up to her chest. “I just… didn’t want to lose you. When that guy--”

“You mean the piece of shit.”

“When he came onto the campus with a gun, I just reacted.” Alice looked down at the ground. “I’m still surprised that I was able to jump in front of you when he began shooting.”

“There’s something else you’re not telling me, isn’t there?”

Alice shifted her position so her feet were on the ground. “I was just tired of living.” Alice looked down at her translucent hands resting on her lap. “I didn’t really see a future for myself.”

Tears rolled down Lily’s cheeks. “Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“Because I didn’t want to make you worry. At the time, you had enough going on in your life with your parents getting divorced.” Alice looked up briefly at the sun. "Besides, I wasn’t going to just kill myself. I couldn’t do that to you or my family.”

“You *still* should’ve told me.”

“Maybe, but there’s no going back now. And as for as I know, time travel doesn’t exist.”

“Do you wish you could take it back?”

“I do sometimes miss being alive. I miss being able to speak with people, and I especially miss the hugs and sleep. So if I could, I… no, I wouldn’t. It was still worth it to save your life.” Alice looked back at Lily. “And I think I always knew that if I was going to die, it was going to be saving someone’s life or dying in my sleep.”

Silence once again fell between them.

Lily wiped away her tears with the palm of her hand before gesturing toward Alice’s whitish-blue body. “How long have you been like this?”

“I guess it must’ve been right after I died. I vaguely remember looking down at my body and seeing all of that… blood.”

“Did you come to the funeral?”

“Don’t worry, I wasn’t expecting you to give a eulogy. I know you’re not good at that mushy stuff.”

“Definitely for the best. I would’ve fucked it up.” Lily looked out at the park. “Your sister gave a really good one.”

Alice fiddled with her knit sweater. “Yeah, she did.”

“So what did you think of the funeral?”

“It was nice, but I’m just glad my parents remembered that I told them once I wanted to be cremated. I would’ve been a little mad if they’d decided to seal in a box and bury me six feet underground where I would never feel the sun, rain, or wind ever again. By the way, have they decided on a spot to spread my ashes or are they just going to keep them in a jar?”

“I think they decided to spread them around the house you were born in.”

“That’s perfect.” Alice smiled. “If I was still alive, my eyes would be tearing up right now.” She looked up at the clear blue sky. “Man, I really thought that there was nothing after death. I mean, I did think it was possible that there was an actual afterlife, but… I don’t think I expected *this*.” She looked out at the people strolling in the park. “It’s… lonely.”

“So I’m the only one you’ve talked to?”

“Well… the only one that’s been able to talk back. I hung around Skylar for a while since I thought I would able to talk to her because she said she saw a ghost once. But until now, I’ve been going kinda crazy.”

“But aren’t there other ghosts you can talk to?”

“If there are, I haven’t met any.” Alice touched the locket that was around her neck. “But if they are out there, I really want to find my grandma.”

“Your grandma’s cooking was *amazing*.”

“I really wish she was able to teach how to cook like that. I regret not spending more time with her. I should’ve paid more attention to the stories she told about her grandmother growing up on a farm in Sweden because now I really wish I knew those stories.” A huge smile spread across Alice’s face. “Also, as weird as this may sound, I want to hear her say *oofta* at least one more time.”

“Why *oofta*?”

“It’s the one word I always remember her saying. I should ask--”

“*Alice!*”

“What?”

“Look at your hands.” Lily’s eyes had grown wide.

Alice raised one hand and examined it. “*You’ve got to be kidding*. The universe picked *now*. I finally get to talk to you, and *now* I’m fading away. I was just getting used to the idea of staying like this.”

Large tears welled up in Lily’s eyes. “This is bullshit. I *can’t* fucking lose you again.”

“Come on, I’m sure we’ll see each other again. And until then, you’ll always have the memories of everything we ever did together.”

“I just can’t fucking lose you.”

“I’m sorry, Lily. If I knew this would happen, I would’ve never come to see you. I don’t want to hurt you again.”

“I don’t want you to go.”

Alice wrapped her arms around Lily. “I never got a chance to tell you this before, but I wouldn’t want any other person as my best friend but you.”

Lily leaned into Alice’s hug, but she just fell through Alice’s wispy body. “I’m glad I met you.” Rivers of tears ran down her face.

Lily sat there alone while everyone stared at her.