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### The Invisible

I am invisible to all except myself. Lying in the shadows witnessing those who act as if I don't exist. It is easier for them to pretend I am not here to hide their guilt. It's easier for me if they don't look at all. When they eventually work up the courage to look at me, they pull away knowing the guilt they feel and the uncertainty in their decision. I don't blame them. I wouldn't want to look either.

Every day begins and ends the same. I lay there waiting for the possibility of salvation. Knowing it will never show its face. I am to blame for the state I am in. I used to drown myself in self-pity and lies claiming that I had no support, and I had no way out. The truth is I've burned all my bridges and pushed all the people out of my life who only wanted to help. I could've listened. I should have listened.

She was only trying to help. Mother raised me and comforted me through childhood. She held me when I was sick, rubbing my stomach through the night so I would be able to sleep. Her priority in life was me and only me. She juggled two jobs just to keep me fed. If dinner was sparse, she gave me all there was and gave herself a cigarette instead. It was the two of us against the world. She wanted only the best for me and somehow, I needed more. I needed something to fill a void in my soul.

I hung out with the wrong people. She always told me I could never find the right friends, but I needed some semblance of excitement in my little life. I found an outlet and I was able to

share this addiction among my friends. We all were in a trance and once we had a taste of it, we couldn't stop. The dragon had a hold on us.

I betrayed my mother and stole from her. I stole things from her that could never be replaced. Heirlooms that she cherished and held on to even though selling them would've put us in a better financial situation. The money that she was working so hard to earn disappeared every week because of my selfish Friday night benders. She had no idea that she had been killing herself everyday so I could kill myself every night.

I am the reason that she was pulling her hair out for months on end trying to help me come back to reality even though I never desired to. Every day she brought me a new rehabilitation brochure. Each day I threw them out. She knew but never stopped. She always had faith in me despite what anyone said. Every morning she knelt beside her bed to pray. With each day the prayer was longer. I knew she was praying for me and the possibility that I would make it out alive.

Mom was all I needed, she could have helped me, but I slapped her hand away and pushed her as far away from me as I could. She knew I needed help. I didn't understand that until now. When she came to me with solutions I didn't even listen. I was in denial about my health and my addictions. I screamed in her face and called her a "manipulative whore." After each fight I would cry and profusely apologize and without fail she would forgive me. She loved me. I thought my mother's love was unconditional. After each fight we would spend the day together and talk about ways we can get through this without hurting each other.

I told her, "I won't let this happen again, Mama."

She always believed it.

I was the reason that she couldn't sleep at night. I'm the one who stole her money. The same money that she was scraping together every day to eventually help for my future education. My happiness and my future were everything to her. She believed that I was meant for great things. She knew I had the brain but wasn't aware that I didn't have the drive. I didn't want to be a doctor or a lawyer or whatever the hell she wanted me to be every other week. I was too much of a coward to tell her that.

I had convinced myself that my mother resented me. This made it easier for me to leave. I will never forget the day I left home. As I bolted out the door my mother ran after me sobbing. She grabbed my shoulder, and I pushed her off. She fell to the ground on her knees. She wore a black t shirt and skirt with a small apron tied around her waist. This was usually what she wore for a shift at the diner. Her panty hose was ripped at the knees, and her feet were bare. Her hair was up in a loose bun with a few of her shorter hairs sticking to her glistening skin. Her mascara was dripping down her flushed cheeks as she looked up at me with snot and tears covering her chin. She grabbed my hands begged me to stay. I looked her directly in the eyes and I saw the light in them snuff out as I pulled my hands from her grip and turned away.

"If you leave...Don't come back." She spoke.

I froze in my tracks. My gut was screaming at me to stay. Don't leave your mother. She has given you all she has. I pushed through the debate in my mind and proceeded to the car. While I drove away, I saw her still kneeling on the front porch watching our relationship tear to shreds.

Now I lay here wishing I had a second chance. I did have a chance, but I threw it away. Now I lie to strangers. I tell them I have three kids to feed, and I need the money. Even if I get money, I don't prioritize food. My body wants me to, but my brain wants another fix. I want that sweet release. The winters are the worst, but that is when I beg for cash the most. Hoping to get

my hands on some smack, so I don't feel every nerve dying. When I'm high I can't feel the winter air freeze my body from the outside in. I stop caring about how hungry I am and how my ribcage is clearly visible through rags that I call my clothes. The dragon is the only thing I can depend on now.

This piece of sidewalk I lay on has become my home. It is much different than the home I used to have. My old home was warm and full of love. Someone was always looking out for me even if I wasn't looking out for myself. I miss that comfort and the security. I have nobody left in my life except this piece of piss-stained concrete and the dragon.

Today, I feel a presence standing over me. I look up and for the first time make direct eye contact.

“Mom?”

She looks at me with a heavy stare. I can tell she is thinking but not sure what. I rise and rest on my knees gazing up at her. The hustle and bustle of the world around is silenced by this singular moment in time we shared. It feels like it's just the two of us again. She is wearing a gray peacoat with a chunky knit scarf. Underneath she wore a pair of burgundy heeled boots and skinny jeans. Her hair has some gray dispersed throughout and her eyes are the same. Always warm and loving but instead have a few crow's feet at their corners. I couldn't believe it was her. Was this my second chance? Will I be able to come home?

“Mama, it's me,” I croaked.

She looks me up and down. I see tears beginning to well in her eyes. Embarrassed I try to cover myself with my thin boney arms. I know what she is thinking. She is thinking how her poor baby boy could have ended up on a street corner looking like this. Maybe she feels as if she has failed as a mother. The truth is, I have failed as a son. I never wanted her to see me like this.

I have failed in that regard as well. Desperate to feel her warmth I reach out to grab her hand.

She quickly pulls away. She angrily wipes the tears from her face and gives me a familiar look.

The same look strangers give me when they see my starved body lying on the pavement.

Sympathetic but stern. The light leaves my eyes while I watch her walk away. She turns the

corner and disappears. She didn't even look back. I sink backwards onto the sidewalk. Melting

into a puddle, I lay my face on the cold cement. I close my eyes and wait for the dragon to return.