

I Found You

By

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I admit, forcing myself into your body is not the most, should we say, ethical way of returning to the living, but when you've been dead as long as I have, you'll do just about anything to live again, to end the loneliness.

I guess you can say my obsession with you began last month, when your family first moved in. It didn't take a genius to realize that your step mother had cheated on your father, and this way his way of sort wiping the slate clean, starting over. That was what he said, right? The first night? Here's to our new start?

You were always looking in the mirror, infatuated with your blue eyes, crimson hair, a body that was more developed than it ought to be in fifteen years. You had the most jovial smile, always brightening up the days of everyone around you. Yes, one look at you and I knew you were the one. At any cost, I had to have you.

Growing up, I wasn't beautiful. Not like you. According to my peers, I was a touch too masculine. Maybe I would have grown up to be a knock out, left them all agape when I returned to Milford Mill for the ten year reunion. It's fun to think about sometimes, but it's really no use. All of my classmates are dead by now.

Please don't take this personally, as if I befriended you for the sole purpose of snatching your body. To be honest, any vessel would have suited me. But I always waited too long to make my move, and the families all moved away. Once, I even tried entering the body of a round, hairy guy who I think kind of smelled--but beggars can't be choosy, can they?

Trapping me in a mirror must have been a cruel joke, I always thought. Everyone in school never shied away from voicing their opinions, most of it unwanted, on my appearance. I don't know who, to be exact, cursed me, but suspect it was Sarah Masters. There were rumors circling around campus that she was into witchcraft, really dark stuff. All the time, people would spot a powdered jar in her locker, or a chicken leg sticking out of her backpack. But looking at her, you'd never think there was even a possibility that she could be into such a thing. She had bouncy blonde hair (unlike mine, which was thin and brown), and a smile sort of like yours. If I didn't know better, I'd swear she'd never sinned in all her life. How could someone who looked as sweet as she did commit any wrong doing? It's like they always say, can't judge a book by its cover.

Guys of all sorts clung to her like ants cling to food on a sidewalk. There was one boy in particular she had set her eyes on, Jack Hamilton. Oh, Jack. Tall, dark, and ever so handsome. How I miss him. He might have looked like a shallow jock with nothing going on upstairs, but he was the kindest, warmest person you'd ever want to meet. He loved me. Anyone who saw us together could see that we were destined to grow old together, the way we'd laugh at each other's jokes, sat together at lunch, the intimate manner in which I tutored him about chemistry, something we had in spades. Yes, had I been allowed to live a little longer, he would have been mine. I wonder how his life turned out.

Anyway, it never failed; Sarah would somehow surface each and every time we were together in school, sitting across his lap, twirling her fingers in his hair. The way Sarah would stare at me when she showed up, full of contempt, there isn't a doubt in my mind that she had something to do with my death.

The last thing I remember--alive, at any rate--was coming home and finding no one there, which I thought was unusual but didn't see it fit to question. I went to my room, undressed, and turned off the lights. Then a ring of green flames circled me. Shrieking, I stepped back, into the skeletal arms of a man in a black cloak, maggots crawling along his face, which consisted of patches of rotten meat clinging to the skull. Never have I seen anything so frightening, so horrible, so devoid of humanity or goodness!

Attempts to get away were as futile as would have been any attempt to fight it. My visitor's strength far surpassed my own, or any human I had known. Drowning in fear, all I could do was stare into the pits of his sockets, agape, eyes all pupil. Had time been in my corner, I would have cried. Why would God allow me, allow anyone, to meet their end this way? What was the reason for my existence, if it was all going to end like this? I bet you're having a similar thought.

I was expecting to be stabbed. In its place, I was thrust into my mirror, which shattered. I felt as though a truck had rammed into me. My body slid to the dresser. I had only enough energy to reach out toward my killer, pleading with my eyes for him to end this torture. Which he did. Little did I know, the worst had yet to come.

My body transfigured into a type of ooze, jade in color. I cried out until my voice was gone, until I was incapable of producing sound. When all of me was gone, had turned to ooze, I was sucked into my mirror as though it became a vacuum. Piece by piece, I watched the glass return to its spot on the mirror until the mirror was whole again. Blinking out of existence, my executioner was gone, and so was I. Except I wasn't really gone, which was the point. If Sarah did have something to do with my death, I know she'd want me to suffer--suffer for as long as you can make a person suffer.

The next day, when I failed to return home, daddy tried everything he could to look for me. Talked to detectives, classmates. While the investigators carried out their investigations, he carried out his own. I guess my mom helped, too. No matter what he did, who he talked to, where he searched, I knew he would never find me. Seeing him shed a cascade of tears each night in my room shattered my soul. All I wanted to do was hold him. I would never hold anything again.

By the end of the year, my parents moved elsewhere. They lived in Virginia still, in a neighborhood not too far from this one. But he couldn't live in this house any longer. Can't say I blame him, really. I heard my parents talking about it for months. When they left, daddy took a final look at my room, as if trying to find me through the walls. He was crying, and so was I. Never have I been so despaired. I didn't deserve this. He didn't deserve this.

In a few days, police flooded my home. I screamed at the cops until the soreness in my throat intensified. I'm right here! Right here! But they would never hear me. How could they? I couldn't even hear myself.

That's when I discovered that I was taken to a place about which no human were meant to know. Here it was dark, cold. At first, this place drew up a fear inside me I didn't know could exist. As I worked up the imitative to explore this world (what else does a dead girl do?), a windless barren of a world, replacing my fear was a kind of curiosity. I always thought planet Earth was the only one of its kind. Oh, how wrong I was. In this place, I was able to glimpse at all kinds of Earths, inhabited by human beings or...other creatures, like looking into a mirror. There were portals leading to other worlds here. I would look into the portals, but didn't step into one, out of fear that I wouldn't return (yes, foolish as it was, I still clung to the hope that I could be saved). I even saw myself a few times. Once as an entrepreneur, owning numerous

businesses, calling the shots in a way that would make my mother proud--just without all the beating and name calling. Then I saw myself as a popular cheerleader, skinny. On a sour note, there were a few worlds where I was a user--not just a user but strung out. As to be expected, I never looked into those worlds for very long.

I realized what happened. Somehow, I was cast out of reality--my reality, at any rate. Where I was living now was a reality between realities, connected to every reality that had ever been and ever will be. Has this world always been behind my mirror, I wondered. Could I enter one of these worlds? I suppose I could. I did try a few times, but always got cold feet. Something would always hold me back, maybe fear. I didn't know how these worlds "worked," so to speak. What if I entered a world where I was a hot-shot business lady and ruined everything? I just couldn't risk it. Besides, I wanted to live in my own world. I wanted to find my parents.

That didn't matter much at the time. What mattered was that I couldn't speak. Well, I could; I just couldn't hear my voice, nor could anyone else. And I had no body. But I could make noise, I learned, when I banged hard on my mirror when Jack showed up once. He had been in my room lots of times. Of course, I never dared tell daddy or mother, who would beat me unconscious if she ever found out I had a boy in my room. He didn't stay long; I guess he couldn't bare it. A stream of tears on his cheeks, all he said was, "Goodbye, Laurie." Sobbing, he turned around and left.

It broke me. Everybody was moving on. First my parents, then Jack. I remember screaming at him until I thought I would never scream again. Banging on my mirror didn't help my case at all. If anything, it drew Jack away. I was a mask of misery. Who was going to help me now?

The investigation must have carried on for at least a year. Police were in and out of my home as though it was type of a museum. Each time a cop was in my room, I banged hard on my mirror, trying to get the police to notice me, notice something, and they did, but they didn't help me at all, as if they could. All they did was scurry out of my room. Investigated elsewhere. More and more, I felt the shadow of hopelessness shrouding every inch of me.

One time, a police officer was investigating my room for clues on my disappearance, writing things down in his pad, his back turned to my mirror. Desperation seized control of me. I didn't want to be a specter anymore! I wanted to be whole, real. Existing. So I had concentrated harder than I ever had, and reached out to the cop. Trying to see if I could enter him, assume his shape, I closed my eyes (even though I couldn't see myself, I could still feel myself doing the motions), held in a deep breath, and forced myself into him.

I was only partly successful. He must have felt me tapping his back, felt something, for the cop ran out of my room screaming before I could finish. Once again, I was the meaning of hopelessness. Years later, families started moving into my house. My room was always given to a girl. I guess it was a lot simpler to give my room to a girl than changing my pink wallpaper. It was wrong--it was beyond wrong--but with each family that moved in, I felt I was closer and closer to living again.

Then I met you, Emma. After decades of not existing, roaming the outskirts of reality, I found something of a friend. At first, crazy as it sounds, I thought something inside you was somehow broken. I was a ghost. People are supposed to be afraid of ghosts! Indeed, the first night I made my presence known to you, you screamed and cried for your father. Of course, he came rushing in, but your step mother could not have been bothered to disturb her slumber. I must confess to you that she was my initial target. You may think this is crazy, but I believe she

sees you as competition, sees you as the obstacle soaking all of your father's attention. All the grief she caused your father and you reminded me of the pain my own mother caused daddy and I. Someone that selfish should be punished! I guess I underestimated the depths of her selfishness. Not once did she come in your room to check on you. Believe me, the moment she did, I would have taken her.

Weeks into our friendship, long after your father made it clear he was not leaving his new--and expensive--home and thought your accusations of the house being haunted were cries for attention, I recognized the same loneliness drenching me was brewing within you. I bet you thought being a city girl would help you build friendships with ease. Wouldn't small town folks be interested in someone from the city? Would want to know what it was like? All you seemed to do was scare people away, didn't you? I understand that, too.

I like you, Emma. I really do. Tell you what, and I know this won't, in any way, make up for violating you this way, but I'll grant you control of your body for half of the day. We'll be sisters! Kind of. Okay, not really, but we are bind together now, so crying to your dad about moving away won't get rid of me. I'll just tag along wherever you go, so none of that, okay? The good news is, and I'm not sure on this, but I think I can jump from body to body. I haven't tried this at all, but I think if I really put my mind to it, I can make it happen. I do have a target in mind. You know who. She isn't your real mom, anyway. Surely you won't mind if I live inside her a while--if I could? She won't die, not unless I make it so. She'll be forced to do things my way if she ever wanted to sit in the driver's seat again. If I lived inside her, you'd be treated with the kindness and respect you deserve. Both of you would.

Twilight spreads over the sky like spilled paint. Almost morning. Almost time to relinquish control for the next twelve hours. Like I said, nothing will cast me out of your body

unless I were to find a new vessel, so telling people about me won't do you any good. As if they'd believe you anyway. I get that telling you I won't be intrusive must be the ultimate irony at this point, but it's true. If you happen to find yourself in an intimate setting with a boy, I would leave. Retreat somewhere in the background of my mind, reflect on the many Earths I saw. I would not obstruct your chance at finding true love. I wouldn't dare.

"Emma! Get ready for school! Bedtime's over!"

That sounds like your step mom. If the footsteps are to be believed, she's coming this way.

You can't see it, but right now, I'm wearing the biggest smile.