Our Before and After

Dear Luna,

 I haven’t written to you in a year. After the last letter, courtesy of my therapist’s suggestion, I didn’t want to have to write to you again. But now I’m writing to you again, also courtesy of my therapist’s suggestion. I wish I could say the lady’s working for me but she refuses to see you as a person. More so a murderer than a teenage girl. She says writing letters and talking about how I feel that day is gonna solve the “problem” of me missing you. It’s as if pills and words are going to fill the empty feeling I have.

Some days are harder than others. The hardest day was our high school graduation though. They called the names of your victims as if they were still here. One by one the names Grace, Derek and Kristen rang through the air followed by a silence so deafening that we might’ve as well been on the moon. There was an empty seat on stage that was supposed to be for Mrs. White. The one name they didn’t call was yours. I think it’s because your name might as well be blasphemy in this dried up town. They don’t know how beautiful your name truly was. Is. Sometimes, I’ll lay in bed and let it roll off my tongue. The picture you painted of the moon on water is still hanging on my wall. I left it there so you’d still be with me on the nights I wanted you there the most. I wish you were still here. I wish you hadn’t killed 5 people. I wish it was now like it was before.

Before

 You moved in across the street when I was 6. I remember being outside when your moving truck pulled up. My parents never told me we were getting new neighbors and a spark lit up inside of me with anticipation of another friend to play with. When you hopped out of the truck, ballerina skirt and all, you looked like a doll my sister would play with. The only difference was the straight, black hair that fell down your porcelain skin. Back then, I didn’t know what scoffing was but that was what I did before turning my head back to the toys that lay in front of me. It wasn’t long until I heard a patter of feet coming up behind me.

 “Hi! I’m Luna!” your voice was energetic, but to me it sounded like nails on chalkboard. You were just another little girl trying to play with the boys.

 “Jason.” the tone of my statement surprised even me. “I-I mean, I’m Jason.”

 “Hi Jason!” You must’ve took my answer as an invitation to sit next to me because that’s exactly what you did. “We just moved here!” I would grow to love the enthusiasm you put behind every sentence but at that moment, it was too, well, girly. I must’ve stayed silent for too long because you shifted your body so it was directly in front of mine. “Hey! Did you hear me? I said I just moved here.” I looked up to you and blinked, shocked by the new body that was currently sitting on my trucks. That couldn’t have been comfortable.

 “Wh-where from?...” Your outburst surprised me and it was clear that I couldn’t get out of this situation. You demanded to be heard.

 You took a deep breath, making it seem like you were about the greatest tale a 5 year old could ever tell. “Wellllll…. I was born in Western Yorkshire, do you know where that is? Probably not. But I was born there and then we moved to Cambridge, then to London, have you ever been there? It’s pretty. But I came from London and now I’m right here!”

 I still was shocked at the fact you were sitting on my trucks. “Uh.. my trucks…”

You jumped up, “Oh! Sorry! Can I play?” I didn’t know how to respond, I nodded and you sat a foot away from me, grabbing my purple truck. We became best friends from there, mostly because I couldn’t get rid of you.

When the time came around that we started Primary Schooling again, your parents requested that you be in the same class as me. As hard as I tried, I couldn’t get away from you. We became practically inseparable once I gave into my fate of having you as a best friend.

 I’ve been clumsy all my life. And kids were finally starting to catch onto it. They called me things like clutz and spaz, I spent half of Primary School on the floor. In year two, we were playing during recess when one of the bullies came over and pushed me to the ground. The group of them laughed and walked away. You helped me up and discovered my hands and knees were bleeding. Tears began forming in my eyes as you gently took my hand and lead me off the recess yard. I don’t know how but you managed to get us off the yard without being caught. Our houses weren’t far from the school yard and that’s where you lead me. You took me upstairs into your room, not caring that I was still crying or that your parents were gone. It was the first time I was ever in your room. Your walls were bright pink, along with everything else in your room. But I could tell you liked to mix it up because you had different shades of pink here and there.

 “Stay right here please,” your tone was soft, I nodded and wiped my eyes. You took a concerned glance and left the room.

 As you were gone, I took the time to study the variation of pink things around your room. On the top of the walls there was a border of different pictures of ballerinas dancing. They all stood in different poses but still all had the same beautiful, graceful look. I was sitting at a table that sat in the corner of the room, also pink but gold embellishment decorated the edges. You returned, a box in hand.

 Gently, you spoke. “My mommy and daddy use this when I get booboos.” You placed the box on the table and opened it to reveal the various bandages that were neatly assorted. You looked down at my knees, discovering the blood had dripped off my leg and fell to your white carpet.

 “I’m sorry,” it didn’t even feel like I said that. It felt like an echo, coming from a hollow and sad shell.

 “It’s okay! It’ll make pink!” Your excitement put a smile on my face. As you tended to the cuts across my body in the best way a 7 year old could, I let my eyes wander your room until they rest on a small box sitting on your dresser.

 “What’s that?” I asked, letting my curiosity drag me out of my empty shell.

 You jumped up from the floor, “it’s my ballerina box!” Grabbing it off you dresser, you brought it over to me. “It’s where I keep all my happy things.” You lifted the lid and a small ballerina popped up. She began spinning while graceful sounds came from the box. Inside lay 4 things. A seashell, a pearl, a plastic star and a small pink bow. You explained to me the origin of each object. “When I was born, the nurses gave me a hat with this bow on it. I’m not sure where the hat is but here’s the bow!” You picked it up oh so delicately and offered it to me to hold. “This is from when I broke my mommy’s pearl necklace! She was upset but she let me keep a pearl before she got it fixed. This is from when we went to the beach! I thought it was the prettiest one there. As for my star, well, you’ll never believe it but a real ballerina gave it to me! She gave it to me after one of her special shows! She was the prettiest and most graceful one on stage!” You continued to tell me of the ballerina you met onstage but my mind had flown elsewhere. Now I was thinking about the bullies on the playground. How I could never go back because they’ll hurt me again. I must’ve begun to tear up because you stopped talking.

 “I-I’m sorry. I keep thinking about the bullies.” I spoke quietly.

 “Hey, it’s okay! If they touch you again, I’ll knock em in the head!”

 You kept true to your word because the next day the bullies returned and before I even got off the ground you had punched the biggest one in the face and were being dragged away by the teacher, but that didn’t stop you from giving me a thumbs up as they pulled you away.

 In year twelve, our favorite and only class together was English. Mrs. White was a modern teacher who wore pretty dresses and skirts that flared. A quarter through the year, we entered the class to discover a strange, young looking man standing besides Mrs. White. When everyone had taken their seats, Mrs. White introduced the man to the class.

 “This is Mr. Iscariot! He will be joining us as a student teacher till the end of the year. Mr. Iscariot, would you like to tell the class about the rest?”

 “Sure thing, Mrs. White,” he began.The whispers among the class broke out as we discovered his American accent. “Hello guys, I,” he gestured to himself, “am Mr. Iscariot. If you’d like to call me Mr. I that’s fine too. As you can probably tell, I am from America. I came here as one of my first countries to study as I go around the world to learn the different teaching techniques in various places.” The girls basically swooned. A good looking guy who’s smart and loves to teach? Basically catnip. “I want you guys to be as comfortable around me as you are around Mrs. White. Please feel free to ask me any questions or just to say hello.”

 I heard your voice next to me almost instantaneously. “Hello!” You yipped. Girls giggled at your usual greeting,

 “Hi!” He greeted back, “what’s your name?”

 “Luna! As in the moon,” your voice was sweet and innocent as always.

 “Nice to meet you, Luna.” The look he gave you put an unsettled feeling in my stomach. I looked over to you only to see your delicate smile in return,

Over the course of a month, he’d grow more fond of you. I don’t think it was because of your black curls. And there’s no way it was because of your blue eyes. He grew fond of you over you ballerina like body. You asked him questions, like any student would, but he took it as something else. Any time you would raise your hand to answer, he took extra time focusing on your answer. That extra time for him was spent staring at the way your clothes slipped off your shoulder that day.

Mrs. White didn’t even think twice when Mr. Iscariot had asked her if your desk could moved closer to his.

“She asks me a lot of questions and I think it’d be beneficial if she was closer to

me.” I overheard.

Mrs. White nodded, “Okay. Luna could you please switch spots with Daniel?”

Confused, you got up and obliged, saying something funny as you walked past Daniel. Your new desk was right in front of Mr. Iscariot’s in the corner, I was happy because you were closer to me but at the same time I was terrified of the look Mr. Iscariot gave when he sat back down at his desk.

We neared Christmas Break, no one could stop talking and discussing Kristen’s huge Christmas party. You pulled out your phone during class to look at a text from Kristen.

“Hey can u come early to help me set up?” it read.

As you were replying, Mr. Iscariot came over and took your phone away. Saying it was too much of a distraction from the assignment. “Yes” is the text you sent back in a rush.

Your phone lay on his desk, screen up. Messages flooded the screen,

 “Cool, can u stop by Balloons and Fun to grab some Christmasy plates b4 heading over here? Luna? Come on I need to know. Lunaaaaaa”

 Mr. Iscariot became annoyed and took your phone, texting out a message himself.

 “Hello Kristen, Mr. Iscariot here. You are distracting my student from class and I’m sure you should be focusing as well.”

 Kristen was fast to respond, “haha heyyy Mr. I. You should come to my party too! It’s on Roedan Way!! You’ll see it.”

 He didn’t answer the text. He shouldn’t of picked up your phone. Kristen never should’ve given him that address. You never knew about that conversation but you should’ve.

 I came with you to Kristen’s party. Only because you said something like ‘it’d be weird if I went by myself. We can wear matching sweaters!’ When we walked in the door, everyone cheered. You’d been the life of parties since we were kids. Derek handed us each a beer that tasted of cherries and something stronger.

 He threw his drunken arms around us, “Merry Christmas ladies.” I laughed and you took a little sip of the beer.

 I tried to stay with you the entire night because I didn’t really know anyone at this party besides our two best friends who were off by themselves. I was nervous and I drank, you took it slower. Easing your way around the cups of beer and shots of vodka at the party. You told me you were going to step outside to get some air but I was too dizzy to go with you. I stayed on the couch as you stepped outdoors. Had I known that, at that moment Mr. Iscariot had showed up, I would’ve gone with you. But he came and asked for you so he was given your exact location. You took a long time outside. I passed out before I could come looking for you. But it seemed okay to me because when I woke up the next morning, you had put yourself in my arms on the couch.

 You were quieter than usual when we left. I just thought it was because you felt as awful as I did. I guess you did, but for a reason different from mine. My head was pounding and I held your hand on the walk home so I could stay upright. I told you I’d text you when I woke up. A hug was my response. I wish I was sober enough to realize the wetness I felt on my chest was your tears, not a spilled drink. You told me goodnight even though dawn was starting to kiss the tip of the roofs and walked into your house, so I turned and walked into mine.

 In the morning, well afternoon, I woke up to my mother banging on my door. It wasn’t a pleasant sound to wake up to with a hangover but I know you heard worse that day. When I opened the door, my mother looked frantic. She told me I needed to go across the street right now. So I found a clean shirt and walked over the cobbled road, unsure if I still reeked of liquor. Your dad opened the door, which was unusual. And he looked frantic too, also unusual. I knew at that moment something was wrong.

 “Where’s Luna? What’s going on?”

 I was answered by a loud bang from the first floor. I pushed pass your dad and ran upstairs. Your mom was sitting on the floor outside your door. Another bang sounded. She looked at me, tears in her eyes.

 “She’s been like this for hours. She won’t talk to us. She won’t open the door.”

 I walked over and helped her off the floor. I told her I’d talk to you and that she should go make herself a cup of tea downstairs. She nodded, defeat hanging over head like a stormcloud. Once she was down the stairs I carefully knocked on your door.

 “Hey, Loo? It’s me. Can you open the door? I’m alone.” There was no response verbally; instead I was answered with the sound of a lock clicking open. I slowly opened the door and was greeted by broken glass, wood pieces and torn clothes. You stood facing the window. I stepped around the shattered pieces and made my way to you.

 I didn’t want to startle you so I tried to speak gently. “Hey, what’s up?” You turned to me and nearly collapsed in my arms. I sat down on your now naked bed with you crying into my shoulder. “Hey, hey, shhh I’m right here, Loo what’s going on?” Nothing but sobs. I lay down on your bed and pulled you closer. I began rubbing your back, hoping I could sooth you enough to get an answer. You spoke into my shirt, mumbling at first.

 “He raped me, Jason.”

 I froze. “Wh-who did?”

 My question haunted you, hanging in the air, trapped by a spider web.

 “Luna,” I tried to lift your blue eyes to meet mine, “Luna who raped you?”

 The life that you carried in those piercing eyes seemed extinguished. You didn’t answer me.

 “Hey, you’re bleeding.”

 “Oh,” is the only response I got.

 “Stay right here, please.” I began to shift to get out of bed but you grabbed my shirt, stopping me. I leaned over to whisper in your ear, using the same tone you had used on that day back in Primary School. “I’ll be right back, Loo.” Your grip released and I left to get the same box you got for me when I first came here.

 When I came back you were sitting in a ball on your bed. “Hey, look familiar?” I made my way through the maze back to you and sat down once more. You stayed silent as I cleaned the cut on your hand. “Luna, we have to go to the hospital okay?” I took your nodding as a cue to help you up. We walked downstairs and I told your parents I was taking you on a drive. Down the road you began sobbing again. “Hey, it’s okay,” I took your hand. “If they touch you again, I’ll knock em in the head.”

After

 Mr. Iscariot won that trial and the jury decided not guilty for the account of rape. He quickly returned to America after that. Following the trial, you stayed in your room for months, redecorating it into something darker than who you were. No one could convince you to come out. They didn’t know what you’d been through. Halfway through our 13th year, you came back; but you weren’t the same. You tried to be like you were before but everyone saw through your shattered smile. Everyone now looked to you with pity, the girl who was raped by the student teacher. Towards the end of the year, you began acting different, angry even. It wasn’t until you came into school with a pistol in your hand did I realize you knew something I didn’t. You shot Grace first. Then it was Mrs. White, then Derek, then Kristen. I was the one who made you drop the gun. And I can’t think about what would’ve happened if I didn’t. Everything was over within 5 minutes of the start. You grabbed my arm and begged me to take you away. So I did.

 I never told the cops your motive. I never told them how after you were gone I read your journal and it’s where I found all the answers. You never said how you found out but you blamed all of them. Mrs. White moved your desk and made you sit right in front of him. So you killed her first. Kristen told Mr. Iscariot the address. Derek was the one who told Mr. Iscariot where you were at that party. But Grace, she was the one who saw Mr. Iscariot raping you. And she was the one who stumbled away and did nothing about it.

 I don’t understand why you couldn’t forgive them. I don’t understand why it gave you the right to kill them. I hope you found it in your heart to forgive them. I hope you find it in your heart to forgive yourself, Luna. You were never a killer.

 From the boy with the trucks,

 Jason.