

The glimmering lights of the city reflect through the curtains, pinpoints of light breaking the dull grey ambience of my room. The ceiling light is off, and only the background illumination of the city keeps under darkness at bay, the infinite glare of neon storefronts and streetlights piercing the night's veil. I sit, my deck resting on my lap, the discarded razor blade dirtying the many-stained carpet. I run my hand along the ridges raised on my arm, across the scars until they become sticky from the newest addition. The chilled, damp air clings to my body, exposed for the lack of a short sleeved shirt, and I shudder in the quiet of the room. My deck sits powerless, its cable connected feebly to the side of my head, creeping behind my ear, but unable to take me even to my own private net.

Somewhere in the background the door slams shut, and I pretend that I am surfing the vast digital frontier, blissfully unaware of the world around me. The clink of a bottle and slurred speech lets me know who is here, but I don't want to meet him like this. Neither of us would, in our right minds, want to be seen, but I can already smell the alcohol from the next room. He paces back and forth over the threadbare, faded carpet, oblivious to the rusty stains, monologuing in indecipherably slurred syllables. His voice grows gradually louder and more bitter, the dulling effect of the alcohol either fading or being overpowered by rage.

The bottle crashes against the wall, shards of glass and droplets of booze raining across the soiled floor, scattering like a breaking wave and settling into the tapestry of trash and grime. I cringe, and close my eyes, my gaze still directed out the curtained window, pretending to be lost in another place, perhaps another time, and hope he leaves to find more alcohol. I hear him scrape around the floor, grabbing something from out of the glass shards. His cursing echoes against the bare walls, and I silently pray that he'll give up and go out to find another bottle.

His angry muttering is punctuated with violent sobs, and he paces back and forth. Every time his footsteps drift closer, I hold my breath, fear flooding into my sense and threatening to drown my consciousness. A sick thread twisting through my mind wants to

simply dive through the window, and in a shower of glittering glass fall down to earth, free, but I simply sit in the grey ambivalence of the room, anxiously praying that my he would ignore me. I hear the worn springs of his mattress in the other room groan under his weight, and he continues to sob into the stained sheets, sleep eluding his bellicose mind.

As soon as his sobbing begins to quiet, I crawl onto the stained sheets covering the pad I use for a bed and sprawl onto my side, yearning for the light of day and morning when I can go somewhere, anywhere else.

I am jolted awake as I am lifted by my neck through the air before I'm slammed against the wall. My head aches from the impact and I brace my feet against the floor to try to keep my neck from breaking as I gasp for air. He stands there, completely drunk, fury in his eyes. The dull grey light of the slumbering city glints off the broken bottle and he lifts it to my face, letting me see the jagged edge.

"Why did you leave me?"

I stand for a moment struggling to catch my breath. His fingers loosen, and I fall towards the floor before he grabs my shoulder and presses the jagged glass against my neck.

"WHY DID YOU LEAVE ME?"

I glance down as I take a sharp breath, readying myself.

"I didn't leave you. She died, and you were the one who killed her. Don't act like you don't remember what you drove her to do."

He gasps painfully and staggers back, the sharp edge of broken glass slicing along my neck. The pain is familiar, and instead of clutching my neck I run my hand along the ridged scars on my left arm instinctively. A single rivulet of blood runs down my neck and across the Roman numerals, **II**, tattooed in the center of my chest.

“You might want me to be her and think she’s returning to you out of love or adoration. But you’re trash, and I’m nothing but a fake, a duplicate. I’m sick of you.”

He falls to his knees, the broken bottle rolling into the shadows where even the city’s last tendrils fail to illuminate the amber glass. Ignoring him, I stand up and pull on a long sleeve shirt, toss my deck into my backpack, and leave the room. I walk into the kitchen, grab a knife from the drawer, and carve, with violent strength, my initials into the wall, **II**, and then leave it protruding from the ruined drywall. The apartment door swings open, unlocked by sheer lack of caution, and I walk out into the hallway.

“Wait! Wait! Come back!”

I slam the door, and walk down the stairs. I glance at a mirror in the lobby, and the gentle trickle of blood has dried. The door slides open as I walk into the cold night air, a melancholy rain welcoming me into the depths of night.

I am free.