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Senior Entry
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Author: Ariel Townsend

Memoir of a Dead Girl

The day Dolores died was less eventful as she'd anticipated. Instead of the nervous jitters corollary with nerves, her day began with the same monotonous rhythm that marked any day in her life: dull, mundane, and uneventful. She had risen late, slouched through her morning routine like a zombie, and slumped into her homeroom desk at Wake High School, second row, fourth seat back, just in time to catch the morning announcements. Now, standing in front of her bathroom mirror, Dolores began to reflect the gravity of her situation.

Dolores, until then, hadn't been sure if she would follow through with her plan. Her day had passed in a haze, without the jitters and nervous bubbling in anticipation of the events to come. So maybe, Dolores reasoned, she wouldn't go through with it. Maybe, she didn't want to. Maybe tomorrow, her desk, second row, fourth seat back, would be occupied by its rightful owner. How strange it was to think of tomorrow though, and to consider how tonight may be her last. With a sigh, Dolores rested her forehead against the dirty, yellow-tinted glass. She couldn't explain how fast her life had gone downhill. It began the day she buried her parents and sister after a fire destroyed their home, the day Dolores watched as her life, past and future, turned to dust beneath her fingers. Because of her family's wealth, suddenly great uncles and long lost first-cousin-twice-removed whom she'd never heard of before appeared. In the end, she was sent to live with Uncle Ramirez. At first, Dolores hoped she would find herself again at Ramirez's vineyard in Napa, California. Unfortunately for her, although Ramirez was the closest blood relative available, he didn't give a damn about her. The side benefits, including access to her family's wealth, got Dolores a room in the basement, and a few hot meals a day. Besides that, she was invisible. Looking into the mirror, Dolores found her reflection. "*I really am invisible*" she thought. Her face blended into the molded walls of the background, white washed in the flickering yellow light. Only her freckles remained, spots of pepper speckled across her nose. Dolores reached under the rusty sink, shifting through the cardboard box of cosmetics she kept. Pulling out a container of cover up, she quickly applied the cream to the spots on her face. The effect was almost immediate; the remaining bits of color vanished in the dying light, and the blurred outline of her face ceased to exist altogether.

Shadows scared her. So did creepy noises and drunken strangers and anything else out of the norm. Needless to say, walking alone by the train tracks at one in the morning was almost enough to make Dolores hyperventilate. Already, her breathing was short and shallow, and her heart racing in her chest, as if it could sense the end was near and wanted to pulse as long as possible. Dolores cut through the woods, coming to a clearing overlooking a stream. Moonlight reflected on the water, bathed everything in a silvery

glow. The wind whispered softly, sending chills up her spine. Glancing down, Dolores shuffled forward until she stood in the center of the tracks. In the distance, the faint sound of an approaching train echoed chillingly. Closing her eyes, she tried to calm her throbbing heart. Taking deep breaths, she rocked back and forth on her heels, feeling the vibrations of the train pulsating through her torso. Turning her head slightly, Dolores opened her eyes to find the faint light of the caboose, swift and tiny as a baseball, was rapidly expanding. It grew at a frightening rate, swallowing the silvery night as the sun swallows the stars; closer and closer it came, the whistle now piercing her ears; the sun reflected in her wide eyes; closer and closer it came, racing down the tracks to where she stood; her heart frantically tried to beat out of her chest, to avoid the crushing blow, but Dolores stood frozen at the sight of the oncoming juggernaut; it was too late to change her mind now, tomorrow her seat in the second row would be empty, and forever remain empty. She wished her family was still alive and someone could've seen her evaporating before she lost herself entirely, and maybe she didn't want to die but still she stood, hopeless and empty and defeated and ready for everything to end.

They never found the body. Police speculated Dolores had tried at the last second to dodge the train, but knocked herself unconscious leaping out of the way, tumbling into the water where she drowned. At first, they thought they would find her body, that it would appear, soggy and morbid, from its watery grave. It never did. Dolores had disappeared.

California summers are among the most beautiful time of year. The day wakes to a harmony of waves and sand, the salty smell wafts through the rolling hills, invigorating brightly colored flowers to spread their petals and decorate the soft, green hills that paint the horizon. Brightly colored rays pierce the sky, beaming upon the golden sand and lush gardens. Here, life grows. And in the community garden of the *Winged Souls Women's Center*, a young woman threaded her hands through the rich earth. Lifting her head slightly, Dolores gazed across the lush plants that dotted the soil. Inhaling deeply, she breathed in the earthy smell, relishing the feel of the sun on her skin. She was home.

After the train had halted at the last stop of its midnight route, Dolores boarded in a daze. Leaning her head against the glass window of her compartment, she finally allowed herself a smile. Dolores was free. No longer would she live under the shadow of grief that overwhelmed her. No longer would she linger, a ghostly presence, in unwanted territory. And no longer would she wish to die. She didn't have a plan or know where she was going. But Dolores was free to choose her own path, free to live her life, and free to rediscover the invisible girl who was coming back to life.

Escondido, California. Present.

Dolores digs her hands into the soil, until she's removed a reasonable amount of earth. Reaching behind her, she grasps the young apple tree she's purchased earlier that morning. Placing it in the ground, she covers the delicate roots, replacing the soil she'd removed. Sitting back on her heels, Dolores gazes at her work, admiring the tiny tree. It was a feeble looking tree, as if it was maltreated. But in a few weeks, it will recover. In

a few years, it will bear fruit. Smiling contently, Dolores stands, dusting the dirt off her hands. As she headed back to her room, Dolores catches her reflection in the glass. Her image gazes back, smooth as glass, eyes bright and clear, and her skin flushed from working. With a small giggle, Dolores continues the walk to her room. Scanning the row of steel covered doors, she finally reaches the one marked with her name. Only, Dolores chose a new name for herself upon arriving at the shelter. By shedding her old name, she shed the skin of her old life, and morphed into a new woman. Now, she was known as Esperanza. Hope.