

BROKEN

"Don't touch that."

Anna jumped as the sullen voice invaded the quiet of the bedroom. Sunken emerald eyes gazed at her from the doorway, obscured by dark, limp hair.

"You aren't allowed to touch that."

The fair-haired girl sank from her tiptoes, a slender hand pulling away from the tall bureau-top to slip into the pocket of her faded yellow sundress.

"But it's broken. I was only going to fix it."

The boy said nothing in reply as he moved to his desk, laying a schoolbook down. Anna stepped out of the warm sunbeam that poured in through the closed window, treading cautiously. The carpet was such dark blue that its unlit corners looked nearly black.

"Don't you want to fix it?"

"No."

The boy opened the science book. The soft sound of pages turning was deafening. When he stopped on a page titled METAPMORPHASIS, Anna's sigh filled the silence.

"Why not?"

The boy only grunted, his pencil scratching at the paper he had set atop the book.

"You can't play with it if it's broken."

"I don't want to play with it."

The soft lines of the girl's face furrowed in frustration as she turned to the window. She moved around the impeccably made bed, the covers devoid of personality or color. She pressed a pale hand against the cold glass and watched russet leaves fall from quickly baring branches. A sorrowful looking tree house gazed back at her.

"More leaves are falling in your yard than mine. I bet your dad would rake them together for us."

"No."

"No?" Anna turned from the window, leaning against the sill. The sunlight brightened her golden braid as it fell over her shoulder.

"I don't want to, it's too cold."

Another sigh broke through the room, followed by the sound of Anna's bare feet on the carpet.

"You really should let me fix it."

"No!"

The boy turned in his chair, his eyes widening as Anna plucked a wooden train from the back of his dresser. He jumped to his feet, his chair colliding mutely with the carpet.

"Put that back!" He snatched at the toy. Anna yelped as it fell from her hands, bouncing at her feet.

"Now look!" The boy grabbed the body of the train, reaching beneath his bed to find the chimney that had rolled away. "You made it worse."

Anna cradled a carefully carved wheel in the palm of her hand. "Is it because Jamie broke it? Is that why you won't fix it?"

The boy stopped halfway to his desk. His shoulders slumped and his head dropped forward, his hand tightening around the body of the almost fire-red engine. Anna didn't see the blow coming. The crack cut through the heavy silence like lightning in the dead of night. Tears clouded aquamarine eyes as she closed her fist tightly around the wheel.

"He would want you to fix it."

"You don't know what he would want!" He raised his hand as if to throw the train at the barren wall. There were faded lines where posters had once been. The corners were all that remained of some, jagged and pinned in place by imperfect squares of double-sided tape.

"Don't-" Anna's slender fingers wrapped around his wrist, holding his arm back. "Don't."

"It's just trash! It will never work anymore."

Anna shook her head. She dropped the loose wheel in the pocket of her dress and reached up. Her hand approached his as if she were reaching toward a frightened animal, cornered and caged. His hand tightened, knuckles whitening as his eyes bored into hers.

"Is Jamie trash?"

His skin turned pale, his eyes widening and his fingers opening as he exhaled abruptly. Their knees hit the carpet the same moment. Anna did not sway as he fell forward, his face falling into her braid.

"No."

Anna dropped the train into her lap and hugged him.

"Jamie would want you to fix it." She pulled back, meeting his eyes.

The boy took the toy from her, running his thumb over the empty wheel well. SH shook his head. Anna could not see his tears in the darkening room, but she felt them falling on her bare knees.

"But the doctors, they don't think they can fix him."

Anna shook her head, sliding her hand into her pocket. She offered the wheel to him. He opened his other hand to reveal that he still held the broken chimney.

"They just don't know how, yet. That doesn't mean they can't help him." She took the train from him gently and stood. The desk light clicked to life as she set the train down, looking up into emerald eyes. He offered her the chimney and she smiled reassuringly.

He closed the science book and she picked up the desk chair. It creaked when she sat down. Desk drawers slid open and thudded closed until they found a sticky old bottle of glue abandoned in the back of one.

Anna dabbed glue on the end of the chimney as the boy adjusted the light. She pressed the slender column against the

stump on the top of the engine. A line of glue seeped from the fracture, marring the once smooth cylinder.

"It won't be pretty."

One shoulder lifted and fell, and two fingers plucked lint from the desk. "That's okay. I can paint the glue."

She dabbed glue on the underside of the train, placing the wheel in the empty indent that had been its home. It wouldn't be mobile anymore.

"It won't be perfect."

His shoulder rose and fell again, a soft exhale ruffling her hair.

"It never was."

Anna's soft smile drew his gaze. He blushed and fidgeted, diverting his eyes.

"I guess that's okay, too. Neither was he."

She nodded, her smile brightening.