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Short Story Contest  
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### Curse of the Owl Necklace

"Owls typically symbolize wisdom and intelligence. However, did you know that in some legends they can also symbolize death or a bad omen? I didn't, and I so wish I had known before it had all started.

It came in the mail, there was no return address, but inside the envelope was a small note that said: *Sorry. Here's something to remember me by. - Keith.*

Keith. I smiled bitterly and grit my teeth. Keith, my dear uncle who had left me, my family, and most importantly my aunt in order to travel the world and fulfill some lifelong dream he had always wanted, which apparently didn't include us.

I crumpled the note up and threw it away, then I reached back into the envelope to find something smooth yet bumpy. I gripped it and pulled it out of the envelope, in my hand lay a necklace. Attached to the black leather cord was a wooden owl. The backside was flat and smooth, but the owl design on the front protruded up to give it a three-dimensional look and was bumpy with the feathers, eyes and beak etched into it.

I hated it the moment I saw it.

I didn't hate it because it was horrible looking or I hated owls, on the contrary I quite loved them. But I hated it because I knew it would be the last thing I ever get from him. Even if Keith did decide to come back after he did whatever it was he wanted to do, nothing would be the same and I don't know how I could ever bring myself to look at him again. This necklace symbolized a countless number of now tainted memories.

I put the necklace on anyways, even though I hated it. I would wear it and I would treasure it like it was worth more than gold. It would serve as a reminder that even the closest people to you can leave despite all the precious and happy memories you share.

The moment I put the necklace on the world seemed to dull. Realization of the new reality before me had seemed to set in. My uncle, one of the people I had trusted most even though we were only related through my aunt who had married him, was gone. And the worst and slightly horrifying part to think about was that he was not gone because he had died, he was gone because he had decided to leave.

My heart felt as though it was being squeezed by some invisible force and my insides twisted into knots as I slowly slid to the floor, my breathing beginning to pick up.

Just two weeks ago, I had first gotten the news that he had left. I didn't want to believe it - I *couldn't* believe it. He was just supposed to be away on a trip for a few months and he was finally supposed to come back some time later this month, he wasn't supposed to leave permanently!

I had immediately rushed to my phone which had been in another room. My hands shook as I tried multiple times to unlock my phone and enter in the phone number of my aunt. She picked up within a span of a few seconds.

Time suddenly seemed to slow, even though not one word had yet been spoken. My tongue felt heavy and a lump was beginning to form in my throat.

I finally managed to say three words, "Is it true?"

It was all I could say, I couldn't think of anything else. Time was going slow but my mind was going too fast and contained too many thoughts to piece together a complete phrase.

"What?" she asked.

"Is it true?" I said a bit louder, thinking in my muddled head that perhaps I had said it too quietly to be heard instead of unclearly.

"What are you talking about?"

"Did. He. Leave?" I couldn't even say his name.

Silence. She finally understood what I was talking about.

"Yes, your uncle left," she finally said after a few moments.

Tears that had just blurred my vision before were now streaming down as the confirmation was made. I felt as though I was being beaten, but there was nothing around me but an empty room.

I couldn't speak, only silently cry into the phone before hanging up without another word. The world spun and I couldn't see anything through the blurriness of the tears. I couldn't move, only lay in place as my heart ripped into a million pieces, each memory that contained my uncle sliced a new hole into it.

Tainted memories. Memories that were once so happy and should have remained happy, now tainted by current events. When a person dies, the loved ones' memories typically become tainted with a bitter happiness, they are still happy for the most part, but the sadness of losing the person in them dampens them a little. But when a person betrays a loved one, the memories become tainted in a way where they have little happiness compared to the pain, anger, and sadness that was now added to them.

I shook my head, clearing my thoughts. It's been almost five years since Keith left. Over the years, I have felt almost nothing but pain, anger, sadness, and the most disturbing of all, nothing. I wore the owl necklace every day, and every day it felt as though the energy was being sucked out of me. I began to believe with all my heart that the necklace was cursed.

It wasn't just the fact that I felt as though I was being drained day in and day out, but it was the fact that I was constantly plagued by bad luck. I tripped almost every day, I'd get the littlest thing wrong on a test even though I know how to do it, I'd almost always mess up on class projects or activities, and finally, my aunt became like a different person.

For the first year, everything with my aunt was fine for the most part, but then one day she changed. She stopped coming by and from what I heard from the older relatives, she apparently seemed to change too. These days I don't even know who she is because I never see her anymore.

With my aunt also changing and somewhat leaving, more tainted memories began to swirl throughout my head. I almost thought my head was going to cave in with the amount of numbing fuzziness the memories brought with them.

A few nights later, I was in bed staring up at the ceiling. It was the fifth anniversary since Keith left.

Suddenly, the owl necklace began to heat up. It got so hot that it began to feel as though it was burning my skin. I tried to take it off but it wouldn't budge, the wooden piece wouldn't even move.

I looked down at it and saw an inky blackness begin to seep out of the little wooden owl. It grew and grew and grew until a large, inky black figure stood next to me. It's two horns nearly touched the ceiling even though it was already hunched over.

I looked into its glowing red eyes and couldn't help but think that I had known that necklace was cursed, but could never stop myself from wearing it. Some part of me always believed that my uncle had given the necklace to me because I deserved to be cursed, but the other part knew that despite everything, there was no way he would curse me.

The figure loomed over me. It lifted its hand and grabbed my arm. It was so cold, colder than ice. It didn't say a single word, but flashes of my memories, the ones only filled with pain and anger flashed in my mind. Then, I was transported to a dark, inky abyss. So dark that not even the glowing red eyes of the demon could be seen.

The dark abyss actually felt quite nice. Peaceful even. I didn't feel scared like a normal person should have been in this type of strange situation. But the abyss seemed familiar in the way it numbed down all my worries.

I began to drift off into a sleeplike trance when I heard a faint voice calling my name. It called again and again, gradually getting closer until I could see a bright glowing orb and a silhouette of a person.

Slightly lifting from the drowsiness I asked, "Who are you?"

I got no reply other than an outstretched hand as the glowing silhouette reached me, I could feel the warmth of it, and I almost wanted to grab its hand, but the drowsiness had come back and it felt as though I was being pulled farther into the abyss by the cold hands of the demon.

Suddenly, in the light of the silhouette, I caught a glimpse of the necklace as it weightlessly began to lift off my head and float away. My eyes began to close as it drifted away.

I hated that necklace. But oh how I loved and cherished it.

Nothing.

No one knows what happened to that girl. The one who would smile so brightly it was as though she were the sun. Some people think she ran away from home, others say she moved to another state to live with some distant relative. However the truth is much more saddening.

The little wooden owl necklace had in fact been cursed. It had been cursed with good and evil, similar to the way an angel might sit on one of your shoulders while a demon sits on the other. However, so many negative emotions were fed into the necklace that finally, after five years of gaining its strength, the demon had been able to pull the girl into the abyss where she would disappear forever. The angel, having very little power, could do nothing for the girl but offer a hand. But it takes great power to overcome the darkness inside of a person, most are not strong enough. However, so long as there is a little light left in a person, there is always hope.”

An old lady closed the book and closed her eyes. She took a breath and opened them again to look at two small children. Then, she began speaking again.

“So whenever you feel as though all is lost, or that darkness just seems too strong, always remember that there cannot be darkness without light. You just have to look for it and want it.”

“What do you think happened to the girl Grandma?” one of the children asked.

The lady thought for a moment then said, “I believe that she eventually awoke from her slumber and found the strength to fight her way out of the abyss. I can’t say why she didn’t return home, but I do know that she’s probably out there, somewhere in the world, living her life happily. The way it should be.”

“Really? That’d be nice. I hope she got her happy ending.” the child said.

“I bet she did,” the old lady replied.

She lifted herself off of the bed and walked out of the door to the bedroom. She closed the door and brought her hand to her neck, pulling out a wooden owl pendant. She held it in her hand and smiled, and when she turned her head to the right, she saw the inky creature stretching out a hand towards her.

She took its hand, greeting it as if it were an old friend of hers.

And then she disappeared.