

# Death Bell

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My breath hitched. The hospital bell tolled death. Most people would be terrified. My stomach swelled and had a tickle flutter through it. A vibration of excitement pinged through every cell. I smiled to myself.

“Loretta? Please don’t leave me,” Bradly’s quiet voice murmured through the room.

I smelled the antiseptic. The clean crisp sheets brushed coolly against my hot skin. Everything hurt. I searched my brain, trying to remember what had happened.

“Loretta, if you can hear me... I need you to wake up,” Bradly’s voice cracked.

I could feel his body slump over mine. I tried to move, but that death bell chimed again. A welcome distraction. It sounded musical. It beckoned for me to follow it. I gave up trying to move and lost my focus on his voice. Instead, I turned my attention to follow that chime. A twinkling patter of metal.

Bradly’s sobs filled the cold room. I looked back and watched him as the hospital staff shuffled in. Machines hummed and beeped. A doctor ran in while he shouted orders. I looked down. My silhouette was transparent and luminescent. I could see my body as it laid still in the hospital bed with the sheets that were too crisp and itchy, but my soul was detached. The musical sound chimed again. Bradly was pushed from the room. They shoved a tube down my throat.

I watched in wonderment as a pair of paddles and a stroke of electricity shocked through my side and chest. It connected with my soul; my body still attached by a small thread to my floating form. I remember watching movies and reading books about dire situations, but was my own life really ending? I looked over my shoulder as the chime sounded again. I followed the noise obediently out the door. I almost pushed it open, but my hand slid through as if submerged in a bucket of water. That was cool.

The chiming was coming more frequently. It sounded urgent. I looked around for Bradly. He kneeling on the ground, his head in his hands. Sobs were making his body shudder. An animalistic cry reverberated through the neon lit hallway. I shook my transparent head sadly. I began to float away. The chiming continued. I couldn’t ignore it. The sound was just so inviting.

Another shriek radiated down the hallway. It was so loud it drowned out the chiming of the death bell for a second. I slowly floated to a stop in curiosity, but before I could turn, a pain burst across my scalp. Something had taken hold of my hair and was pulling me backwards.

“You’re not leaving me,” Bradly’s voice screamed at me. I looked at his now transparent form in horror. His eyes were rabid. His face was red and splotchy with anger. He wrapped an arm securely around my waist and spun us back towards the way I had come. His body lay slumped. Still in front of my open doorway. A gurney was beside him and an army of nurses paired with the same doctor that had been in my room attempted to revive him.

I wanted to get away. I squirmed. I couldn’t escape his iron grasp. The chime issued again, and we both paused. I whimpered, wanting to follow it.

“Oh no darling, even in death, remember? You vowed,” Bradley said. He snickered under his breath and grabbed my chin. His boney fingers jabbed into the soft skin of my cheeks. He juttet it forward to stare at his body. His body jolted as a nurse administered CPR.

“We have a code blue here! Looks like it was a heart attack. Don’t stop CPR till the defibrillator is charged,” the doctor screamed. His body was tensed, his brown hair rustled. Lines covered every inch of his face, not from age but from clear exhaustion and stress.

“I love you Lore, don’t you see? I didn’t mean it,” Bradley said.

I whimpered and attempted to pull away while finding my voice. “I don’t love you. Don’t lie, you’re the one who hit me with the hammer. No more. No more. No more,” I mumbled. His fingers squeezed painfully against my chin.

“You ungrateful little twit,” Bradley said.

I kicked out and twisted. His soul was still connected to his limp body, like mine had been. The defibrillator gave me enough momentum from shocking his limp body that I could escape. The world spun. Death was supposed to be peaceful. I felt nothing close to peace. Every painful whack and punch from the previous night bombarded me. The memories crashed into me like rogue waves. I fell to my transparent knees and half my body sank through the floor.

“You will never escape me Lore, you’re weak even in death. Your life is my life,” Bradley said before he gasped. He reached towards me again and I screamed. His sinister chuckle echoed down the halls. No live person could hear him, though. Not that anyone would believe me anyway. They never did.

“Again,” the doctor shouted. “He’s my brother. I can’t lose him,” he said. His fists were clinched. His teeth bared as his eyes flashed with pain. He whipped his head back to the machine while he tapped his foot, waiting for it to recharge. I had never met Bradley’s family. He kept me hidden like a nasty skeleton in the closet.

Bradley reached for me again and I curled into myself.

“No, no, no, no...” I whimpered. My transparent form shook. “Please, just let me die... I can’t do this anymore. I don’t want to fight. Just let it be over.”

“You won’t die till I say you die. Now come back to me. We can figure this out. You know you were wrong,” Bradley gasped out. His form was shaking. His soul was not ready to be on this side of life yet. The death bell wasn’t ringing for him. “I love you Lore, this won’t happen again, I swear. We can go to dinner at that expensive restaurant you wanted to try,” he said.

I looked at him and his calm, transparent demeanor. I could almost believe him, even despite his shaking body. His face was no longer pinched in anger. There was no sinister action too his mannerisms. If anything, he just looked uncomfortable. Bradley held out his hand for me. “Look at everything I have done for you... for us. I just want us to be safe and happy. We can get through anything together, remember?”

I stared at his hand and my foot began moving towards him. “You promise?”

“I promise, my love. It’s you and me. I love you so much. I died just to find you. See what I do for you?” Bradly asked. The machine buzzed again, and he jerked. I reached my hand towards him, but before our fingers could touch, his transparent form was sucked backwards. His screaming echoed through the hallway. Filled with complete outrage and anger. “I will find you. You ungrateful brat,” he said..

I watched as his body shot up and his brother fell back on his butt. He roared with anger. My soul shivered at the sound.

“Bradly, Its me, Damien. You're safe, you're alive,” Damien exclaimed as several nurses looked on. Most had wide eyes varying in color. Some were half squatted on the laminate floor. Others had jerked back and were covering their mouths with splayed hands.

“You can’t escape me Loretta! I will find you. You are mine. You hear me? Mine,” he shouted through the hall. He glared back at my room where my still body laid. As if I would come walking out.

“Who are you talking to Bradly? Loretta is dead!” Damien said while attempting to shake Bradly.

Bradly shoved him away. His gaze darted up and down the hallway as if searching for me. My skin crawled as my heart clinched in fear.

The death bell tolled again. I cocked my head to the side.

*“My child, you are safe. He will never find you where you’re going, now come. It’s time,”* a soft voice echoed behind the metallic twang of the bell. I sighed in relief. Death is supposed to be peaceful, maybe now it would be. I just needed that voice to guide me.