

## The Echo of the Theatre Bell

*I still hear the ringing of their screams.*

Through the dusty window of the old theatre, the evil grins of the ukuleles greet me. The moonlight leaves an intense glint in their eyes. The building's looming bulk is everything but comforting. Its gaze watches me as my worn Converse step closer to the entrance. The old mahogany doors look as if they are tired of trapping all the secrets, ready to burst. Old newspapers drag on the footpath. Crows caw in the distance, fluttering away with stale chips and pieces of rubbish. I feel the cold, biting air as it reaches my lips.

*I got this, I'm okay.*

But the words sound more like a forced assurance, like something to hold onto as I lose balance on the beam. I grasp the door handle, it feels cool against my skin. Dust clammers to my dirty hands, reaching for the life that it hasn't felt in years. Shivers water down my body as thick, suffocating air welcomes me. For a second I feel like I'm being watched. I can feel *its* scrutiny. As though a face from the past is searching for familiarity. Creepy, porcelain masks follow me as I make my way to the auditorium. My footprints aren't the only ones to stir the dust. Imprints race across the dusty floor, making their way through the maroon brocade seats that are tattered and dented with age. I turn and see the stage, old velvet curtains droop down to the floor, covering the abandoned abyss behind it. Falling from the stage roof are old cables, wires and fallen lights. I feel as if I've been placed in the aftermath of a mess that happened ages ago.

A mess that was caused,

By me.

"I know it was you."

Five words that send me into shock. No one could know it was me, no one was *left* to know. I twist slowly, awaiting the accusation. Maybe it was just my thoughts, too full and heavy to stay silent. Rows of seats extend into the darkness. There's no one there.

Because now, it's behind me.

And *it's* horrifying. With skin like dull moonlight that sticks tightly to their bones. Long, limp, black hair runs down their back and covers their face. They look small and shriveled compared to the hollow emptiness of the theatre.

“You.”

A blood curdling scream releases into the empty space. They have no tongue or throat, just a black hole. It's as if someone ripped it all out. Sharp, knife-like teeth erupt from their grey grums. Everything freezes, frozen in time by the asylum-white pupils of the thing, but the scream still bleeds through the silence. I'm starting to think it's not them who's screaming, but me.