**The World Is a Cruel Place**

Evangeline stared numbly at the sign nailed into the pavement. Her friend, Maxim, was clutching her hand tightly. From her periphery, she could see his mouth moving. Yet, she didn’t hear a single word he rambled into her ear. The noise inside her head was too loud for that – as her thoughts rolled over each other like ocean waves at the beach she once visited with her mother.

*For sale*.

The words haunted her.

As if she were a commodity at a flea market.

As if she weren’t human at all.

‘I’m not for sale,’ she kept murmuring under her breath, over and over again, like a jammed record.

Evangeline was young. Too young. To watch her life end before it ever had a chance to begin.

She hadn’t noticed the old man approach only until he stood right in front of her, resting the weight of his body on his wooden cane.

Evangeline peered up at him.

‘I’m not for sale!’ she shouted in his face.

‘Too late,’ he smiled but to her it looked a lot like an evil sneer, ‘the deal has already been made.’

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