They can’t rest, so they won’t let me rest. They’re everywhere I am, their voices echoing against my skull.

You might think it’s a gift, but in reality, being able to see and hear the dead is nothing but a curse. I can do nothing for them, not one shred of solace I can offer while their voices pound away in my brain.

When I was younger, I thought it was fun. Like a game that only I could play. Watching their ghostly wanderings, chasing the smallest ones through the garden of my childhood home. They have always seemed more real to me that even my own family. But now, the game has become dark and twisted.

One day, I was walking down the street when I heard the most gut-wrenching screams I’d ever borne witness to. Looking around, I quickly located the source: the shadow of an old man standing next to park bench. A mangy stray dog was curled up on the rough planks of wood, shivering in the chilly air. The ghost reached out to it futilely, empty tears streaming down his face as he failed to comfort his lost friend.

I couldn’t take it anymore. There was a place I walked past often that called out to me. It was a hospital. Or rather, an asylum. I would occasionally see patients sitting outside with beautiful nurses, everyone looking peaceful and serene. The perfect place for someone like me.

I stepped through the front door and up to the front desk. A lovely woman with ebony skin and a heart-shaped face smiled from behind stacks of papers.

“Hello,” she greeted me warmly. “How can I help you?”

“I need to check myself in,” I replied. I expected her to ask questions, but she simply guided me to an empty room. As the door closed behind me, I quickly fell asleep, truly alone for the first time inside the mint green walls.

When I finally woke, pulling myself out of a slumber deeper than hell itself, it was time for me to meet the doctor who would hopefully have the answers I needed. A nurse with hair the color of turmeric and a spray of freckles across her nose came to my room and led me to a dark office. I followed closely behind her and watched her feet as they moved, almost seeming to dance across the tile floor.

Inside the office, a woman in a white coat waited on the couch, her eyes shining like jade fire in the dim light. She gestured for me to sit next to her, patting the sofa with her long, graceful fingers. I sat easily, feeling nothing but peace in her presence.

“I understand you admitted yourself to the hospital,” she said, her voice humming like the strings of a lute. “Why?” She tilted her head to the side as she waited for my response.

“I see ghosts,” I said, the words slipping from my lips without thought or hesitation. I dropped my head into my hands. “I just want them to leave me alone so I can rest.”

As gleaming tears began to form in my eyes, the doctor leaned forward and placed her soft hand on mine.

“Don’t worry,” she said with a gentle smile. “I'll keep the ghosts from bothering you.”

Days went by in a haze. Sometimes I walked outside among the weeping willow trees, accompanied by a nurse with rubina lips or gleaming almond eyes. Sometimes I talked quietly with the other patients; the ones who were willing, that is. Some of them are just so, so angry, and they always seem afraid to come near me. I sighed with relief every time their sharp eyes turned away from me.

Some days, I looked out my window and saw them on the other side of the fence. There are so many of them, and they all feel so deeply. I can see their lips move, speaking their lonesome words, but inside those walls, there was only beautiful silence.

Most days, I sleep. I have a lifetime of rest to catch up on.

But now, from somewhere just outside the wispy fog of sleep, I feel someone shaking me, voices talking and shattering the blissful silence.

“Wake up,” a stern voice says.

I barely have the energy to mumble, “I’m just trying to rest.”

“You can’t stay here,” he says angrily.

I blink open my eyes slowly, taking in the shining gold police badge pinned to his shirt.

“But I’m a patient here,” I say, rubbing the sandman's dust from my tired eyes.

The officer shakes his head in pity. “You can’t be a patient here,” he says roughly. “This hospital’s been closed for years.”

The silence explodes, and I twist in the air as I fall.