

HOLLOW KNIGHT

# Remorse

Short story

Rubombee

Everything was quiet. The gentle tapping of the rain was the only thing to be heard.

A pale figure was standing still, piercing the darkness, its shell gleaming white in the faint light shed from the scarce lanterns. The delicately-crafted ornaments accentuated the gloominess of the place. The pallid being raised their arm and touched the wall's intricate patterns, their cloak brushing softly on the floor.

This city had always been silent – its stillness only broken by the deadened moans of its former inhabitants. Only a smattering of the bugs of Hallownest were still, somehow, alive.

Suddenly, as if some thought had crossed their mind, the whey-faced creature took a few steps down the corridor – only to stop abruptly.

A far-off, ethereal chant was echoing around them, just barely audible. It seemed to originate from somewhere behind the dimly-lit curtains at the end of the passageway. A shaft of light was shining through the hanging drapes; an invitation, beckoning whoever would dare to draw near.

However eager it was to find out the source of the sublime melody, the ghostly warrior did not show any sign of perturbation. Placidly grasping the hold of the weapon that was kept fastened on their back, they slowly proceeded to advance further into the hallway...

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As they cautiously pushed the fabric aside, they were met with quite a sight to behold.

A spacious, forlorn-looking stage, empty of life; the song, more intense than ever, echoed from even the furthestmost ends of the room, its provenance still unknown. Numerous seats, forever vacant, filled the area facing the rostrum; many had fallen over. Here and there, bouquets of wilted flowers remained, as devoid of life as what surrounded them. The white figure glanced around, apparently unfazed; amid the forgotten blooms, they could descry a thin ray of unworldly light, one of a familiar kind – the kind only they could see. With a swift, nimble leap, they came closer.

Before them now stood a sylphlike, butterfly-winged apparition. Gracefully floating a few inches off the ground, the phantom was singing. Its wavy, gold-colored hair flowed around its shoulders as did the tapered ends of



its long, red turtleneck dress around its legs. The wraith's great pink wings with mosaic-like markings were calmly flapping.

If an unaware, more simple-minded bug had been in the pale one's stead, they would've presumably cowered in fear, or thought they were insane; but not the Knight. They knew of this; the wielding of the Dream Nail had granted them the sight of similar spirits, remnants of the living's wishes and dreams. It was ready to gather the essence of yet another ghost – yet something, something they could not identify clearly, was stopping them from cutting through the spectral form.

Perhaps it was the desire to learn what the phantom had to say, before relieving it of its burden, they thought. Yes, surely; it must be the reason they were holding back.

As they entered its field of vision, the wraith noticed them.

“Welcome to my stage, little one,” it said.

“I am Marissa, a songstress of some renown,” she continued, “though... given the sorry state of this place, you may find it hard to believe...”

“Huge crowds once flocked to hear me sing... then something changed. The audience, once so enrapt, began to leave. I continued to sing, yet my voice fell silent upon their ears.”

Marissa's voice quivered slightly as she went on:

“Perhaps... you'd care to listen to me sing? You'll be the first in an age to hear it...”

Quietly, the pallid creature looked upon the ghost. They felt like, deep inside, something had changed. Despite their reason telling them to release the songstress from her everlasting doom, they could not help but sit beside her.

Marissa sounded relieved as she added:

“Even if only you... it's a wonderful thing to have an audience again.”

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Marissa's singing felt... powerful. The ethereal harmony had wrapped the Knight in a whirlwind of feelings they couldn't escape from any longer. Invisible from the outside, a storm was howbeit raging inside their mind.

They *had* to absorb the songstress. Free her from enduring this perpetual existence. It was the only thing there was to do.

But then, why couldn't they?

What was stopping them from unleashing the Dream Nail, once and for all?

Was this... really the only way? The right thing to do?

They didn't know anymore.



Truly... the more they looked into it, the more they thought about it... the worse it seemed.

They had never questioned anything about themselves, or their doing. They had never doubted the consequences of their actions.

*Why now?*

Where did all these emotions come from? All this... *guilt?* Had it been there all along?

Had they ever been sure about... anything?

Was it only the song's power, influencing their thoughts?

Was it Marissa's unmistakable gladness to finally have someone to sing to?

Was it the feeling that, somehow— they had just been denying it since the beginning?

Was this... *all wrong?*

Once the question had been raised, there was no running from it anymore. They could feel their consciousness fading into a vortex of emotions and blurred memories – which were getting more and more vivid as they were drawn nearer. Faces began briefly flashing before their eyes.

A round face... the blue child... Joni.

*"Isn't it just so peaceful here? Such a perfect place to rest."*

A fluffy, cream-white... the Gravedigger.

*"Do as you will, little wanderer. Cut a path toward your goal."*

All those of the Spirit's Glade...

*"Don't fear, little creature. Here I am truly at peace."*

*"Do you think dark thoughts, little one?"*

*"We're always left with reminders of the errors we've made."*

*"In this place, I once performed a task, but what was it?"*

A typhoon. Spiraling deeper and deeper. Memories blending together. Surfacing.

*"Are you a warrior, little one? A true warrior is one who can stand strong in the midst of a storm."*

*Stand strong, little warrior."*

...Whatever way there was to fix this mess— this was not it.

They had to think clearly.

*To stand strong*

However painful truth could be.

Casualties still came forward to show themselves. Not to harm... but to remind of their existence.

The one who had been hurt... The False Knight, a mere maggot, only wishing to protect its siblings...

*Killed.*

Its ghost, only lasting fragment of their soul?

*Consumed.*

The helplessness of a phantom guardian... Revek, fighting all his might to protect those getting absorbed in the Spirit's Glade, under his watch...

*Annihilated.*

Who else? Who could they have harmed, thinking it was the right thing to do?

One could say... if only they had known— perhaps all this could have been stopped—

But the Infection... the Light, whatever this plague was... was it not tormenting them?

That wasn't a good enough reason. Many had found peace before disappearing.

There was no justification to be found.

They were to blame.

*"Little one... is something wrong?"*

This voice... was different. It was coming... from outside...

"Dear... are you doing fine? It seemed as if... But surely you've awoken now? Oh, my... was it something I said?"

Quietly trembling, the ghostly warrior attempted to make out their surroundings.

Red, gold, pink... Marissa leaning over them— visibly concerned.

Her singing had stopped — for only a deafening silence to remain.

Both of them stood still. One brief instant, meaningful yet insignificant; stretched ever more as if it were to last until the end of time.

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It was beyond a doubt — deep inside, something had changed about the Knight. And somehow— they knew it was for the better.

Carefully, once they had stood up, they held the Dream Nail firmly. Concentrating on its radiant energy. Thinking about the great number of voices it had silenced. Focusing their whole soul on this only thought...



These was a burst of immaterial power. It felt as if dormant souls were trying reaching out. Translucent beings began emerging from the shimmering blade.

They were all here. The many spirits whose essence had been consumed — or, one could say... *stored?* — by the dream-collecting weapon... *they were back.* Puzzled, admittedly; but well and truly here.

The Knight felt... fulfillment. Although all was not done yet. They had yet one last task, to bring them somewhere safe... to give them a new home.