

Stranger at Sundown

I jolted upward. Sweat glistened on my bare skin and damp, blonde hair fell over my face. The dream that I had just awoken from had seemed so real. I remember seeing a dark shadow in front of my eyes. The masculine silhouette of the figure had me come to the conclusion that there was a man standing before me. His black eyes threw daggers at me, and his hard gaze refused to move anywhere else. It gave me this feeling in my chest that I had never experienced before. As I came back to reality, I looked around and realized that I was alone in the room. There was no one in there, and I was completely alone. I tried to calm myself, but a feeling continued to grow in my chest. My heart thumped unbearably hard against my chest. It was beating so hard I was afraid that it would wake up anyone else who remained in the house.

The night was dark and no one was awake other than the coyotes howling off in the distance. The moon shone brightly through the window casting a shadow on the opposite wall which made the night just that much creepier. I swung my legs over to the edge of the bed and slipped on my fluffy pink boot slippers to warm my feet. Winter had come too fast, and it was taking over. Cold air blew through every crack in the house making a whistling sound that almost matched the coyotes not too far away. My small feet landed on the hard wooden floor, and I pushed myself up onto my feet. The floor creaked loudly with every step that I silently took. I took my steps trying not to wake anyone, not even the mouse scurrying around in the wall.

My intention remained unclear, but the feelings in my chest remained. The dream was too real. Something like that does not just happen for a reason. Fear began to take over my

body even more and soon my legs were shaking along with the rest of my body. I knew that something was wrong, but I still couldn't figure out what that was. Sweat began to sparkle on my skin again. Dark marks appeared on my night shirt from the dampness of my flesh but this was the least of my worries. The image stuck in my mind, and that was all I could focus on.

I passed by my little brother's room and peeked in. A little lump was on his bed where his body slept peacefully. It moved up and down to the rhythm of the small breaths coming out of his mouth. I walked in and stood by his bed. The moonlight shone on him making his features recognizable; his eyes moved beneath his lids indicating that he was dreaming as well. Maybe he was having a good dream or maybe he was having a nightmare. I brushed his light blonde hair out of his eyes, and just for a moment he began to stir. I waited for his eyes to open, but they remained shut. I took one more look at him before leaving his room.

The hall was darker than it had been before. The moon that was shining so brightly before was now covered by a giant dark cloud that made the world completely black. I reached my hands out to avoid running into anything. My heart was beating rapidly once again as if there was someone inside me drumming away at my chest. The coyotes were now silent and their absence had been taken over by a trickle off the roof. Droop, droop, droop. Heavy raindrops splattered above me making a shiver run down my spine. They weren't the nice enjoyable raindrops but the kind of rain that made you want to cover your ears and find shelter underneath a blanket. I could no longer hear my heart beating in my chest, but the fear just continued to grow. I should not have been scared but I could feel someone watching me. At times I thought that I heard someone breathing behind me, but it always turned out to be my own heavy breathing.

I walked over to the window to try to distract myself. Raindrops spattered against the window and made a sparkly coating over the clear surface in front of me. The cold atmosphere had caused the raindrops on the window to freeze which made the window impossible to open. I then walked over to the door and attempted to turn the lock. The problem was that the lock already seemed to be turned. I froze in place unable to move a muscle. I remembered locking the door last night, and I knew for a fact that I was the last one to go to bed. The thought welcomed terror to take over my body, so I threw it to the back of my head. I quickly threw the unlocked door open before I had the chance to second guess myself. The horrid breeze that blew across my face was so cold that I felt the sweat on my face freeze and the tears on my eyelashes go solid. I threw the door shut because I could no longer stand the winter air on my fragile skin. I was cold before, but now I was so cold that all of the bones in my body were now brittle. The lock on the door still was unlocked, so I placed my stiff colorless fingers on it and turned it left. It made a soft clicking noise verifying that it truly was locked this time.

Afraid that I had awoken my mother with all of the noise, I stealthily opened her door. Once again, there was no movement and no noise other than the soft sound of the breath coming out of her mouth. I walked in and found the space next to her empty. This space on the bed was never occupied and because of that we had no one to keep us safe and no one to protect us. Losing my train of thought, I tiptoed back to the door and took one more look at her. There was a difference in her face but I could not figure it out and never will. I grasped the handle and shut the door with a soft click.

The hall was a little lighter than it was before, and the rain no longer beat against the tin roof. I carried myself back down the hall until I reached my room, but even then I could not go

to my bed. I kept on walking until I reached the last door in the house: the basement. This is a place that no one dared to go. I had been down there once and since then I had made myself a promise that I would not go down again. Black paint was chipping on the outside of the door and there were spots where splinters of wood had disappeared. Thousands of thoughts raced through my head. Should I go down there? Why can't I go back to my room? Why do I have this feeling of fear in my chest? These questions remained unanswered. I took another step toward the door, and my heart began to beat faster. My breath quickly accelerated and my legs quivered. I slowly placed my hand on the door knob and it shook as it came in contact with the gold-metallic surface. Turning the knob ever so slightly, it made a small squeak with little resistance. Even this small interaction was enough to make me want to turn back around but something kept urging me forward. The door seemed to have opened by itself, but I knew it was the terror messing with my mind. An ocean of black surrounded the staircase cascading downward in front of me. I should not be scared. There is no reason to be scared and no reason that these thoughts should be floating around in my head. I took my first move and landed on the first step. It made a soft croak as if a frog was hiding underneath it. I then took my next step, and it seemed to make an even louder noise. The smell tore into my nostrils making it almost impossible to breathe. It was so horrid that it brought tears to my eyes and made me choke on the stench. I went to take my next step but the tears in my eyes made it impossible to see and I ended up missing the step. I stumbled and then found myself on my side rolling down the steep stairs until I felt my arm make contact with the cold cement. A solid thump disrupted the silent atmosphere, and that was the last thing I heard before everything went black.

I was back in the dream and a body was standing motionless before me. His features

were not as clear this time, but I could see his shape from the dark silhouette. Bulky shoulders jutted from head to toe, and long hair grew out from the sides of this head. We remained motionless staring at each other for what seemed like hours. I was afraid that if I moved something bad would happen. He moved his hand up to the air and waved a little. Not knowing what to do I took a step back. This seemed to anger him, and he moved a few steps closer to me. The good fifty feet that we had between us now was down to about forty. I could hear him breathing this time because I was doing my best to hold all of my air. If I made a noise, it might trigger him to come at me. The man once again raised his hand, but this time it was the other hand. He just waved at me very slowly. At this moment my body went cold with fear, and I couldn't even take a step back. He became very angry with this and took another twenty steps toward me. I could barely make out his features at this point other than the fact that he had on a ripped up sweatshirt and torn up jeans. He had no shoes on revealing his horrifying feet. Torn skin rimmed the sides of the foot, dark bruises shaped the top of it, and yellow nails jutted out from the front. Before I could lift my head I saw the feet coming toward me. They were coming at me fast and there was nothing I could do to stop them. He was an arms length reach away when once again everything went black.

I opened my eyes to the same room that I had been in before. I looked around expecting a man to be running at me, but I remembered that it was just a dream. Forgetting about the man in the dream, I moved my hands across the concrete in circle-like motions to get a feeling of what was around me. The ground surrounding me was wet due to the heavy rain that had just occurred. Water surrounded me making my clothes a heaping wet mess on my body. I heard a dripping noise from behind me. Water droplets were dripping on the flooded basement

floor and causing even more of a catastrophe. I went to raise to my feet, but as soon as I attempted to lift myself everything became a blur and black dots spotted the room. A throbbing pain began to pulse on the side of my head. I reached my hand up to my head and felt a huge lump on my forehead with a wetness over it. I looked at my hand to find a shiny coating over my hand. I had assumed it was blood, but I couldn't be sure.

A light clicked on behind me causing me to jump a little. I jolted my head to the right trying to forget about the pain that was in my head from hitting it on the concrete. A little light hung in the corner flickering on and off and on and off. Everything seemed to become quiet. The water no longer dripped on the basement floor and there was just the little flicker of the light and nothing else. Ignoring my dizziness, I rose. I walked around discovering that there was no one in the room. Feeling silly that I went through all of this just because of a feeling, I began to trudge to the stairs. Water swooshed around my legs pulling my fuzzy slippers from my feet. I reached the stairs when I heard slow steps approaching from behind me. They were so slow and so stealthy that I couldn't even force myself to turn around. My hand gripped the edge of the wall harder and harder as the steps came closer and closer. Once the steps became so close I could barely stand it, they stopped. I could hear the heavy breathing of what could have been a grizzly bear. I could feel the hot breath of the person on my neck. The hairs on the back of my neck rose making my whole body grow goosebumps. Nothing seemed to be happening. I stood there motionless, and the body behind me did the same. I had two options: run from him or face him. Knowing that I could not run away fast enough, I began to turn around. He was just as he was in my dream. He was everything that I hoped that I would never have to see. Fear grew in my body as I looked him up and down. There was a crooked smile that appeared on his face.

He did not move and he did not say anything other than five words that made me wish I wasn't alive. The words had more power than anything he could have done or anything else he could have said.

His smile slowly disappeared," I've been waiting for you..."