

Him.

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He stepped into her room, slowly shutting the door behind him, careful not to wake her as she lay so peacefully. He crept to the end of her bed. The only light given into the darkness came from her small butterfly night light next to the dresser, casting his shadow over her. He moved to the side so the light would illuminate her soft face. The floor creaked as he moved closer. He froze so as not to disturb her slumber. With no sign of stirring, he took another step towards her, softly brushing her hair and cheek with the back of his hand. His dark eyes burned as he stared, his heart beginning to race and the adrenaline surging through his body. His hand began to tremble as he rested it on her hip, gripping ever so tightly to steady his hand, but it was only to cause the trembling to move elsewhere, tightening his pants. A small moan escaped her lips, and although it excited him, he knew he was waking her. He tore himself away from her, disappearing out of sight.

Savana opened her eyes without a fight to escape her sleep. She glanced around her empty room and pulled her stuffed moose close to her as she began to cry.

“Daddy!”

It was just after four a.m. Sam knew the familiar sound and was on his feet and down the hall before she could call for him again. He knew it was the dreams. The same ones she’d been having for weeks now. The night light he and his wife had decided to leave on in there helped very little. Savana only made it two nights without being woken from the horror.

Sam entered her room and turned on the purple shaded bedside lamp. “Hey sweetheart,” he smoothed her hair, letting her know she was safe. “Same dream again?”

“This time he touched me, Daddy,” she fell forward into his chest for the moose was not supplying enough security. “He’s never gotten close enough to do that before.”

Sam’s heart sunk. *It’s getting worse*, he thought to himself as he rubbed her back. “It was only a dream Angel,” he kissed her forehead, trying to sound unworried.

“What does he want from me?”

He winced, knowing his little girl couldn’t escape these night terrors. Sam leaned back, resting himself in an upright position against her headboard, holding her quietly. She couldn’t take much more of these



nights; he could see her defeat. That broke his heart for he had no idea where to even begin to help her sleep through the night and rid her of these dreams.

Just as five a.m. approached, Sam was able to slip his arm out from under his again asleep daughter and return to his room. His restlessness set in, and he knew going back to sleep was not an option. Once back in his bed, Sam found his place next to his wife Kate. Feeling his presence, she rolled over to face him, resting her head on his chest, never even attempting to open her eyes. “How’s Savana?”

Sam kissed her cheek lightly and closed his eyes, “She’s sound asleep. We can talk about the rest in the morning.”

Not even an hour later, Sam rolled over and decided to get up. It was pointless to try and sleep any longer when it obviously wasn’t working. He took the extra time before the rest of the household was awake to make everyone breakfast before school and work. He busied in the kitchen making pancakes, eggs, bacon, sausage, hash browns, and a small special plate of waffles for Savana because she said last Easter Breakfast “the pancakes taste like clouds.” *That made her sad thinking she was taking them out of the sky when they were so beautiful*, Sam thought to himself and laughed as he turned over the flapjacks.

Just after sliding every plate into position at the table, he heard the house beginning to wake; a toilet flush, the running water of the bathroom sink, his wife’s blow dryer echoing down the hall. Soon the house was in full swing, and the table filled with his hungry family.

“Hmm, these pancakes are so fluffy, just like a cloud, Savana,” Tristen, her 14-year-old brother said to her as he mockingly shoved a fork full of the syrupy breakfast cuisine into his mouth.

Savana’s face scrunched as though she might cry. “Tristen, knock it off. Why do you have to act like that and ruin a perfectly good breakfast?” Sam scolded him as he filled his hash browns with ketchup. Tristen shrugged and went back to his food. Sam shook his head before turning to Savana. “Were you able to sleep okay, Sweetie?”

Savana didn’t look up from her waffle. “Yeah, I did,” he could tell she was uncomfortable discussing her shadow watcher.

Sam glanced at Kate, who shared the same concerned look on her face as him. He lightly squeezed her hand, giving her a small reassuring smile, and turned his attention back to the table. “Alright kids, go get ready for school; you’re going to miss the bus.” Tristen shoveled as much in his mouth as he could before following his sister down the hall to their rooms. Once they were out of earshot, Sam grabbed their plates and



moved to the sink. "It's getting worse, Kate."

She came up behind him with the other two plates, "What happened?" she opened the dishwasher.

He sighed, setting the dishes down and turning towards his wife. "He touched her last night," her eyes widened and she looked fearful. He put his hands up to signal for her to not get hysterical. "It's just dreams, Kate. It isn't real. However, I am concerned as to why they are repetitive dreams, and now growing worse."

"We need to do something, Sam," Kate crossed her arms to comfort herself.

Sam set down the washcloth, softly holding the backs of her elbows, bending down to look her in the eyes. "Katherine, Sweetheart, it's going to be figured out, I promise. I will not let something like this distress our daughter any longer. Keep yourself calm and relaxed. It's nothing I can't handle," Sam gave a light smile. "I'll look into what it may be; hopefully we can get a starting point; obviously the night light is doing no good." Kate looked up just as Sam leaned in to kiss his wife, moving his hands from her elbows to her waist.

"Ew. That can stop at any moment," Tristen grabbed two more bacon strips on his way out the door.

"Don't forget to wait for your sister!" Sam yelled after his son. He pulled away from Kate and felt a small relief in the smile that came across her once worried look. As the words left his mouth he heard Savana trample down the hallway after Tristen, backpack bouncing behind her, restraining her from running in a straight line.

Savana quickly caught up to Tristen at the end of the driveway, reaching for his hand to cross the street. It was like her hand sent a shockwave through his body, and he jerked away from her, looking at her in disgust.

"Tristen!" she whined. "Please! I'm too scared to cross the street by myself."

"Oh please, Savana, the street is empty, it's not a highway. Besides, you're scared of everything. You're in the second grade now. Time to toughen up," he started into the empty street without her, holding his head high, full of his superiority.

Savana didn't move from the end of the driveway, watching her brother make his way without her. Halfway into the street he turned around. "Oh, come on, Savana, it's not like the big scary man in your room is out in the middle of the day, in the wide open, with so many people to spot him," he smirked at his cleverness. Terror swept her face and she ran to him,



grabbing his hand, squeezing for him to not let go. Tristen sighed, “You know he can smell fear Savana, the dark man. The more you fear him the stronger he gets.”

“Tristen, stop!” she begged, fighting back the tears. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Tristen smirked lightly, looking down at his scared little sister, “Oh, sweet, sweet Savana. You have no idea what I know,” a small chuckle broke from his smirk before sending a wink in her direction. Letting go of her hand, he moved forward to his friends, leaving Savana frozen, traumatized.

About 20 minutes after the bus had made its way to the schools, Sam stood in the driveway fiddling through his briefcase for his keys.

“Hopkins, how’s it going?” Sam looked up at the voice of his neighbor Clyde, a single guy who moved in just after Savana was born. He was standing at the fence that separated their yards. Sam took a deep breath, knowing he didn’t have time for him before work.

“Hey, Clyde, enjoying your morning?” Sam said nodding his head in his direction. Clyde looked down, completely ignoring Sam’s question.

“Savana doing okay? She seemed a little upset at the bus stop this morning.” Sam crinkled his brow, knowing Clyde question was odd. “I was out watering my flowers this morning and saw her with Tristen, is all. They seemed to be fighting.”

Slightly hesitant, Sam answered, “she’s... she’s doing just fine. Just had a bad dream last night, so she didn’t sleep too well.”

Clyde shook his head. “Those are the worst, especially for a child. After my wife and little girl died, those nightmares became so real to me. I felt like I was actually living it over and over again,” Clyde shook his head once more. Sam could see in his eyes the ghosts of his family he lost after they were run off a bridge once the driver of an eighteen-wheeler had fallen asleep. “Well, it looks like you need to be gettin’ to work, Hopkins, don’t wanna keep ya waitin’,” Clyde gave a quick wave and turned back to his landscaping. Without so much as a goodbye wave, Sam climbed into his truck and left the driveway, trying to shake the uneasy feeling of Clyde’s words that filled his body.

It wasn’t long for him to return to her room. He couldn’t resist something so sweet. He took a seat at the end of her bed, lowering himself ever so slowly so as to not disturb her. His heart raced and his fingers trembled. He needed to touch her, to feel her. He knew it was



wrong but he needed it. He stood after a while, finally letting his urge take over. She lay on her back, holding tight to her moose. He reached across, placing his fingertips on her thigh, quickly retracting them after she started to rustle, only to see her smile and let out a faint giggle. It tickled her. Hesitantly, he placed his fingers back on her thigh, this time with a little more pressure, taking his hand up her side and across her waistline. Her stomach rose with each deep breath she took. His adrenaline surged as he felt the realness of her. He moved forward, taking his hand up her side, passing the princesses that danced around her chest. He allowed his fingers to linger there, like they were the princes the princesses had been longing to dance with. Moving forward he brushed her hair, leaning towards her forehead, he pressed his lips just above her right eyebrow ever so gently.

“Daddy, Mommy, help!” Savana screamed as she sprang up in her bed, tears rolling before she could even take in her empty room.

Seconds later her bedroom door was opened, Kate right on the tails of her husband. Savana’s light was thrown on, and each parent took a side of their daughter’s bed. Savana quickly collapsed into her father while her mother held her hand and smoothed her hair. Savana couldn’t catch her breath to speak. Tristen appeared in the doorway, crossing his arms and leaning against the frame, as he watched. As he surveyed the scene in front him, no emotion came to view. His mother looked at him, trying to signal with her eyes to come help comfort his sister, but he refused. He let out a scoff to insinuate he couldn’t believe her whole facade and turned back for his room.

Kate brought herself back to Savana; her face wore a mask of sheer terror as she held back tears while looking at her husband. “It’s okay, Darling, just another dream. We’re here now. Nothing can happen to you,” Sam comforted as best as he could. Worry permanently found its home on his face. These were not any normal childhood nightmares. Something was seriously wrong, and he needed to fix it.

Savana’s tears finally subsided. Kate and Sam knew they didn’t want to press anymore on their little girl tonight. Her father scooped her up and headed back to their bedroom, Kate and the moose following soon after. He laid her in between the two of them and took his place in the right side of the bed. Wide awake, he didn’t move. Listening to his girls sleep ever so softly he watched the clock tick by: 5:17 a.m., 5:18 a.m., 5:19 a.m... His mind swirled with options and different courses to take. He kept coming back to the same option, the one option he didn’t want to move forward with.



Right before his clock turned 6:30 a.m., he reached over and shut off his alarm before it could sound, tiptoeing out of the room and down to his office. Once there, he awakened his computer and then pulled some old documents out of the back of his filing cabinet. He reached for the file he kept hidden in the back for a reason. *Dr. Laurie Newcomb: Child Psychologist*, read across the off-yellow flap. He opened it up, spreading the papers across his desk to get a better view of things. Quickly, he pulled out Dr. Newcomb's contact information.

Taking a deep breath he dialed her number. He closed his eyes as he lifted the phone to his ear, praying his call would go to voicemail. The line clicked, and he cleared his throat.

"Hi, yes, Dr. Newcomb. This is Samuel Tyler Hopkins," he waited.

"Yes, it has been a long time. Listen, the reason I was calling is..." he stopped to let her speak.

"I am doing well, yes."

"No, I haven't had any mishaps."

"No, it is not acting up again... Listen, Dr. Newcomb, I am not calling about myself. It's about my daughter, Savana," his patience wore thinner with her than he planned. Taking a moment to calm himself, he continued. "No, no, she isn't showing the same signs I was. It's nothing compared to that."

He nodded as Dr. Newcomb rambled on the other end. "I'm not saying it is anything like mine, Doctor, but it's getting worse. Her dreams are getting stronger, and I am worried something is going to happen to her," he rested his elbows on his desk, using his palm to hold up his head.

"Dr. Newcomb." She was pushing his patience again. "I am coming to you because I know you worked with me and have my blood samples and tests all filed, do you not?" There was a small pause. "That's what I thought. I am just hoping that my wife can bring my daughter in, and you can run some tests to see if some of it may be mental illness or something psychological that I may have passed on," he listened. He started to fidget and was soon pacing the office's hardwood floor. "Late this afternoon would be perfect."

"One o'clock it is. Thank you, Doctor," Sam didn't even wait for her to respond before he ended the call. By this point, the kids were up—Savana slowly moving. These nightmares were really weighing down on her. Kate joined Sam in the office. The bags under her eyes spoke for her.

"Morning, Babe," he walked across the room to give her a kiss. She didn't respond or even so much as uncross her arms. Sam ran his hand through her hair and pulled her in close. "Call Savana out of school; I



have an appointment for her with Dr. Newcomb.” Kate looked at him in surprise after hearing her name. “I know, I know. I am surprised I contacted her, too. It does bring up a lot of tough memories, but this is for Savana, Katherine. My main priority is to make her happy. I can’t let these dreams get any worse.” Kate stroked his cheek, leaving her hand to hover.

“But she didn’t ever find what had been going on with you?”

“She wasn’t able to diagnose it. But she knew how to handle it, because everything stopped. You know that, Babe.” Kate still didn’t like the idea. Sam could see it in her face.

“I want you to see what you can find out as far as night terrors go. What causes them, how they work, and what can be done to minimize them, okay?” Sam nodded before Kate kissed his cheek.

He wrapped his arms around her, burying his nose into her hair. “I think I’m going to set up a nanny cam in her room, too.”

“What for?” Kate asked with a panicked look, pulling out of his arms.

“Don’t worry, I just want to make sure she is staying in her bed and not sleepwalking. I also want to make sure Tristen isn’t doing anything to provoke her. You know how he is always picking on her.” Kate nodded, but he could tell she wasn’t comfortable with it.

“Tristen wouldn’t go that far,” Kate defended her son.

“I don’t think so either, but I would feel much better if we were able to rule it out.” Still hesitant, she agreed. “It is more of a tactic to ease our minds. We don’t know much about anything that is going on with her, but I think this will help us go down the right path.”

Kate looked up then back down at her crossed arms. She sighed, walking around Sam to his desk. “I’m going to call her out of school, but since you are doing this nanny cam thing that I am not a fan of, I’ll need you to make me a cup of coffee and a bagel.” Kate smiled with her eyes but her mouth was a flat line.

Sam huffed and shook his head, not even trying to hide his delight. “Yes, your majesty,” he bowed and backed out of the room. With that, she couldn’t fight her lips from curling up in amusement.

Just after lunch, Sam walked his girls out to the driveway. “It’ll be okay, Savana. I’m sorry I can’t come along, but be brave for me alright?” She shook her head, holding her moose close. Sam leaned through the window and kissed her goodbye.

“It’ll be just fine, I promise. This is a step in the right direction,” Kate said as Sam leaned into her window.



“Hopefully this direction ends with a full night’s sleep,” Sam winked, kissing her goodbye as well. She laughed before putting the car in reverse. He waved as they backed out of the driveway and drove down the street.

“No school for Savana today?” Clyde stood on the Hopkins’ side of the fence, leaning against his rake.

“She wasn’t feeling well this morning,” Sam answered, not wanting to entertain him.

“Yeah, I’m sure them nightmares really can tear down a kid’s immune system. After being deployed for the Marines, my nightmares made me feel like I was going batshit crazy,” he shrugged his shoulders and turned to head back to his yard. “Good day, Hopkins.”

Sam didn’t move, but instead squinted in suspicion and watched Clyde walk back to his house. He knew Clyde had always had a liking for Savana, but he was way too into her nightmare issues. Or was Sam just overthinking?

Sam convinced himself to let it be and go back inside. He knew he could be doing something more productive to help the situation. Passing off his paranoid suspicion of his creepy neighbor, he retreated to his office for research.

“She wasn’t any help at all, Samuel,” Kate pulled the pillows off the bed. Tristen and Savana had already been asleep for a little over an hour. “They ran tests and said everything seemed to be just fine—nothing out of the ordinary. We didn’t make any progress.”

“While you were gone I tried researching different symbols and causes for dreams,” he responded, almost dismissing what his wife had just said. “I looked further into night terrors, but all it said was that they are caused by something traumatic happening in a child’s life, like a move, or a death of some sort. None of that has happened to her recently,” Sam slipped out of his jeans and under the covers.

“So, where do we go from here?” Kate set her glasses on the end table before joining her husband. A small sigh escaped his lips, and he looked directly forward, riding the silence.

“I was able to get the cams installed after my research. They are linked to my laptop and are said to record up to 24 hours at a time. It’s a starting point. Hopefully it will help eliminate certain suspicions and show that I’m just being paranoid.” He could tell that Kate hated even thinking those things were considered an option by the way her face scrunched up in worry. Sam gave her a sweet, heartwarming smile to ease her. “Try to get



some sleep, My Love,” he kissed her hair before turning off the bedside lamp.

Not even an hour after laying down, Sam knew sleep was not in his future. His mind ran from one thing to the next, refusing to settle. Accepting defeat, which he seemed to be doing so much of lately, he made his way to his office once again. There, he pulled up the camera feed to watch his daughter sleep so peacefully, laying there like nothing had ever happened. She looked so innocent and sweet. He couldn't fathom why any such nightmare would want to come into such a beautiful girl's mind and ruin her angelic slumber.

For hours, he scanned her room, waiting for a rustle in the curtains, or her door to open exposing Tristen on the other side. He kept his ears open to hear another cry for help, yet nothing came. Silence crept through the house only making his anticipation worse. She stayed asleep, the house stayed quiet, his monitor stayed undisturbed.

He was prepared for tonight. He had prepped himself all day to be ready to take it to the next level with her. But first, the lights needed to be dimmed. He slowly unscrewed the bulb to the wall butterfly until it went out. He didn't need to see where he was going; he had been there enough that he knew this room like the back of his hand. Slowly, he made his way towards her. He didn't waste his time sitting at the end of the bed to watch her. She lay on her side, her nightgown raised a little higher than normal. He waited for his eyes to adjust to the darkness a little more so he could take in the beautiful view in fullness. Soon, he rolled her on her back, careful not to wake this angel that slept oh so softly. He needed to test what she could sleep through before moving forward. Placing both hands on her upper thighs, he slowly added pressure through his fingertips, leaning into her as though to pin her to her bed. She began to rustle like she knew something was happening. He pulled away, waiting for her to settle. He grew impatient; he knew what he wanted, and he couldn't keep himself away any longer. As he took a step forward he saw the hall light shine through the bottom crack of her door. Cursing all things holy and unholy, he slid away, knowing it was too dangerous to try at her again tonight.

Sam shot awake not knowing where he was. Allowing himself to get used to the darkness of the room, he realized he was still in his office. He must have dozed off during his stakeout. He glanced at the digital clock on his desk: 5:42 a.m. Close to three hours, he had been asleep.



There was no noise from down the hall so he assumed Savana had been sleeping okay. Without hesitation he rewound the nanny cam back to where he had fallen asleep. For the first twenty minutes, there was nothing. The screen was unmoved, like the rest of the night, but then the bedroom door opened, and a figure stepped into his daughter's room. It stood in the shadows, and Sam was unable to make out the face. Sam's heart began to race, and his breaths came short and fast. He leaned closer to the monitor, hoping to see it better. The figure moved with its back to the cam. Sam's eyes widened while his brow furrowed in confusion. *Is that?* he thought. *It couldn't be.* He didn't understand. There was no way that could be possible.

His eyes focused in on the screen as he watched his own face turn to the nanny cam and smile, holding his finger to his lips, before slowly unscrewing the light bulb to Savana's butterfly nightlight.

