

250 word Horror flashfiction submissions for NYC Midnight 2019

Growing Up Fast

It was getting easier to listen for mama's alarm, Ellie thought as she pulled on her favorite shirt that ever existed. Yesterday's juice spill had stained the sparkly frog's mouth, but Ellie didn't care. That first day Ellie had almost been late for the bus. The alarm beep beep beeped and mama didn't come get her. But Ellie was mama's Big Girl and she knew the routine.

She tapped her toes in mismatched socks as her Dora toothbrush buzzed at her, then she spit and rinsed and kicked her stool back under the sink where it waited quietly when she was away.

The kitchen smelled worse than yesterday but mama was still sleeping, head on her arms leaning over the table. Ellie held her breath as she peeked on her tiptoes to see the mush of cereal she had poured for her. The multicolored sludge was dissolving slowly, losing any semblance of substance.

Ellie grabbed her purple plastic bowl from the sink and her favorite color-changing spoon and tipped the Lucky Charms box carefully, making a face at the crumbs and marshmallow dust that only filled her bowl partway. There wasn't any milk left either; mama had gotten the last of it.

She eyed the few pills still scattered on the table then stretched on tiptoes to give mama a quick kiss on the cheek. "Sleep good, Mama. I'll be back later." Ellie remembered that her gummy vitamins were almost gone, but maybe mama's Big Girl vitamins would be better anyway.

So Long

I'm kneeling on the old hardwood, scrubbing at it with a fresh sponge. It's been a strenuous few hours of cleaning but I inspect my work and it will suffice. As I rise from my crouch there's the exhale of his breath over my shoulder. I clutch the pail handle and count to three. When I turn toward the dark kitchen, there's no one there.

Within the heavy silence of the house, I'm disquieted. I have always believed that ghosts belong to times long passed. Yellowed pictures from decades ago with translucent figures in long white dresses or attire from the twenties. Black and white photographs of strange blurs or hidden faces. Daguerreotypes of people already dead.

The door slams behind me and I flinch, spilling clouded water onto the tile. I don't turn around. I am alone in the house.

Long ago and distant, that's where they should be. Places in Europe with centuries of war and strife. Disasters and martyrs and mass executions. Five years or twenty. Fifty or more...

But as I'm pouring the water darkened with dust and blood down the drain, I can sense him behind me. His jaw tightly clenched. His hands around my neck again. He shouts in my ear and it rings through the quiet for an instant and is gone.

Ghosts, I've always thought, should be specters of the past. But he's only been dead three hours. I'm trying to keep it together but he's already here. And he's still furious.