

I know this sounds terrible; believe me, I do. I would give my life in a heartbeat if that meant righting the atrocities I've committed in the name of "justice." Yet my death won't change a thing, it'll only end my suffering. I have no right to ask for forgiveness, I know that. The sins of my idiotic teenage self can never be undone, and for that, I'm sorry. I'm sorry to the family of my victims. I'm sorry to their friends. I'm so, so sorry. But what I'm most sorry for is the fact that I do not regret taking any of their lives. You can take this as a confession, but in any legal sense it won't matter, because by tomorrow I'll be dead. Those monsters will make sure of it, and so will I.

After reading this, you might think I'm some sick, pathetic bastard who gets his rocks off by killing kids. If you think that, you couldn't be more wrong. The first child I was forced to kill kept me awake for weeks; I was drowning in regret and anguish for what I'd just done. I felt like a monster, and to most people I would be. But most people don't understand why I had to do what I did.

I tried so hard to change the fate of these children who were destined to grow into rapists, pedophiles, and murderers, but no matter what I tried nothing would change. My gift of selective clairvoyance was impressive, but it cost my sanity. When I first began developing this ability, I figured I'd just try to ignore the distressing visions, but that was an ignorant thought. Of course ignoring clear signs of evil would blow up in my face; why wouldn't it? I just wish the person who committed such a heinous act wasn't my best friend.

Jake and I had been friends for years. He was there for me when my mother took her own life and my father forgot I was even there. He was there for me when I wanted to take my own life because of my own mental turmoil. He was always so kind and fun to be around; I just couldn't bring myself to cause him the same pain I felt when my mother had died. So essentially, Jake saved my life. We were only twelve at the time, but I figured right then and there that we'd be best friends for life.

Ironically enough, just a year later is when I started developing my ability. It started out as little coincidences. I get a flash of my neighbor falling off a small ladder in the morning, then on my way to school I see her on the ground next to a ladder cursing to herself. I didn't think much of it. Then in school I get a flash of my classmate crying, holding a ripped piece of paper. At lunch I witness that same classmate giving a note with hearts scribbled all along the edges to a boy in our grade and he laughs at her and rips the paper in half. I shake my head, chalking it up to dejavu. But as the weeks go by, these "coincidences" become less circumstantial, and more unbelievable. I see my neighbor's eight year old grandson take a hammer and murder a small animal, and that comes true. I see some teenagers from the high school beat up a freshman because he stole one of their vapes. I see a man push a woman off a building nearby, and then a week later it's labeled a suicide. These visions weren't just becoming more vivid, they were becoming more violent.

It then began to dawn on me that I could've prevented a lot of these if only I'd somehow intervened before. There's no way I could prove I knew the culprit of the crimes; who's gonna believe a thirteen year old boy that saw a vision of a man murdering a woman who was declared a suicide victim? Even worse, my dad might find out and yell at me because I spoke about something I shouldn't have again. It still hurts to think about that time back then, even all these years later. I knew even at eight that he'd never be on my side, even if I have obvious evidence of...nevermind.

Anyway, I eventually came to the conclusion that if I were to stop them before they even happened, the world would become a lot safer. Plus, I might actually find a sense of fulfillment. Childish as it may be, that's what I genuinely believed at the time.

Remember when I mentioned my best friend Jake? Well, like I said before, he was the best friend I ever had. However, as close as we were, he still didn't know everything about me. And apparently I didn't know everything about him, either, because I never would have expected Jake to turn out to be such a despicable human being.

Fast forward to the beginning of 11th grade. Jake and I were sixteen, and by this point I'd had a good grasp on how to work my ability. You see, I'd found a way to hone it onto a specific subject so my mind didn't get bombarded by all this chaos surrounding me. The benefit to it was that I would get a very clear vision into any point in the future I'd want of my subject. The con was that I could only use it once every few hours if I was to focus that hard on a particular person.

It was a Monday morning just like any other day. Jake and I were sitting next to each other, joking around before the bell rang. I forget what the exact conversation was that led us to talking about the previous night, but if I had to guess I'd say Jake brought it up because he wanted to brag.

"So what were you up to last night, Evan? Sucking dick or eating cock?" Jake said loudly to ensure someone who might have been listening thought I was gay.

"Shut the fuck up, asshole. We all know you'd spread your cheeks for Mr. Rubin if that meant passing for once." I said louder than he did. "Matter of fact, wasn't that you last night giving that old guy head for a few bucks, or was that someone who looked and sounded exactly like you?"

Jake laughed. "You fucking wish. I was actually doing something much better last night."

"Oh yeah?" I laughed. "And what would that be?"

Jake lowered his voice and leaned closer to me. "I fucked Rachel last night. She let me do disgusting things to her."

I froze. I don't know why, but something felt off when he said that. At the time I had an idea of what it might be, but I didn't want to jump to any conclusions. Jake was my best

friend who helped me through terrible times. There's no way he did anything horrible like what I imagined. No, if he did something illegal like that he wouldn't be bragging about it. He talked about how hot Rachel was all the time to me. I joked with him that she was too good for him because she was a very sweet girl, so there's no way she'd go for someone as hideous as him. Even though I was joking around, it still surprised me when Jake told me they had sex. I knew teenagers did that, of course. I wasn't a prude or anything. It's just...I knew Rachel. She and I were somewhat close, actually. It surprised me that they had sex because I could've sworn Rachel was gay. In fact, I thought I remembered her telling me in passing about a girl she had a crush on! I've never been one to judge, so I didn't make a big deal about it in case she didn't want it getting out. That's also why I never told Jake that Rachel and I were friends, because I knew he'd beg me to set him up with her.

However, I knew that it's very possible she was bisexual, so I didn't think much of it. I didn't think anything of her being absent that day, either. I imagined plenty of girls don't come in the day after they have sex. It would probably be tiring, I assumed. But then that day turned into two, then three, and I began to worry. A few days went by, and Jake continued to talk to me as if he never told me about Rachel. It was as if he'd completely forgotten about her existence. So at lunch I asked him about her.

"How is she?" I asked.

Jake looked taken aback. "Who?"

I rolled my eyes. "Rachel! How is she? You two had sex on Sunday and she hasn't been in all week! Aren't you worried for her? What if she's sick?"

Jake froze. He looked nervous. My heart started beating fast. I didn't know why, but I felt uneasy. "...Jake?" Jake stood up abruptly and grabbed my hand. He yanked me out of

the cafeteria and into the nearest vacant restroom. “What the fuck, man!?” I said loudly as he shut the door to the bathroom and locked it. “Why are you locking the—”

“Shut the fuck up Evan!” Jake whisper-shouted, putting his hand over my mouth. He was shaking. Why was he shaking?

I smacked his hand off my mouth. “Dude what the hell’s gotten into you?” I questioned angrily. “Why are you acting so weird?”

Jake took a step back and put his ear to the door. After a few seconds he leaned in close to me and whispered, “Don’t tell anyone I had sex with her, okay?”

I backed up slightly and looked at him with furrowed brows. “Why?”

Jake groaned and rubbed his hands to his head. He stared at the floor and mumbled something I could barely make out. The only words I heard were “accuse”, “police”, and “in trouble”.

“Jake I can’t fucking hear you. What?”

Jake glared at me. He stepped closer, putting his hand on my shoulder and staring down into my eyes. It only then occurred to me how much bigger he was than me. I could only imagine how Rachel might’ve felt. “She fucking accused me of rape. The police are probably gonna get involved. I could be in big trouble if word gets out that we had sex, okay? So just please don’t say anything.”

Everything felt off. It was as if the world itself was tilted off its axis, and I was the only one who noticed. I stepped back again, ripping my shoulder from his grasp. I swallowed. “You...you didn’t actually rape her...did you?” I asked shakily.

Jake froze, and for a second, I could have sworn I saw the devil in his eyes. “No! No, of course not! That bitch is fucking crazy! She begged me to have sex with her, and when I did, she didn’t come into school the next day and I got an angry text from her stupid bitch friend calling me a fucking rapist! You gotta believe me man, I’m the victim here! These bitches are crazy!” Jake stammered all that out before breaking into a sob and falling to his knees. “Back me up, man, please! If anyone asks you, tell them I was with you on Sunday! Say we were playing video games at your place or something! Your dad wasn’t home, right?”

Jake continued to plead and cry after I mentally checked out. No, it couldn’t be. Jake would never. But lying to the police? Why do all that if it was consensual? Shouldn’t there be some way to prove it? And besides, I was sure there had to be some misunderstanding! Rachel wasn’t the type to accuse people of something like that! Then, it dawned on me. Everything Jake said was more or less the same things my old babysitter had said about me all those years ago when I tried telling the adults what happened. My heart felt like it was going to explode out of my chest. I began hyperventilating and fell backwards.

Jake crawled towards me, tears and snot running down his face. “D-don’t get me wrong, okay? She wanted it! She did! She said she did! I didn’t rape her, I swear! Evan you’re my best friend, you have to believe me! I’m not a fucking rapist!”

I couldn’t say anything. I couldn’t even breathe. There was no way. I couldn’t believe it. My vision blurred and I realized I was crying too. Jake grabbed my arm when I tried to stand up, so I mumbled “get the fuck off me” as I stumbled up. Everything was spinning. My chest hurt. I still couldn’t breathe. By the time I stumbled my way to the door, I was gasping for breath, trying to calm myself down enough to unlock the bathroom door. As my trembling hand began to unlock it, I felt Jake’s body fall into mine.

Jake, still crying, begged me, “please Evan...PLEASE JUST TELL THEM I WAS WITH YOU, OKAY? I DIDN’T DO IT I SWEAR!”

I mustered up all the strength I could in order to push him off me. “I can’t just lie to the police! If you didn’t rape her then tell them you didn’t! Lying will only get both of us in trouble!”

Jake was still crying in the bathroom as I ran out. I immediately called Rachel while running to my locker. There wasn’t anyone in the halls, so I knew I’d be fine. The phone rang for a while before she picked up.

“Hello?” She sounded tired.

“Rachel?” I asked gently. “What happened?” She didn’t say anything, so I said “I’m not here to yell at you or accuse you of lying. I just want to know what happened so I can help you the best I can.”

It was silent on the other end for a few seconds until I began to hear her muffled crying. She opened up to me about what happened, and my whole world fell apart. I thanked her when she was finished and hung up. I was so angry. I was furious. I wanted to kill Jake with my bare hands. Most of all though, I was angry at myself. I was too stupid and blind to see through the rose tinted glasses I had for Jake. I should have known he was a monster the second he talked so graphically about Rachel. I made excuses for him every time. I thought it was all a joke. I should have known. It hurt so bad that I felt like I was going crazy. If only I’d noticed what kind of person he was sooner and looked into his future. I would’ve seen what he’d do to Rachel and I could have stopped it!

I started crying again. I felt so helpless, just like that little boy I was eight years prior. A small, pitiful being. I stood up and grabbed my things from my locker. The sadness turned to rage as it always does. I couldn’t let Jake continue living. He didn’t deserve it. I

was so angry. It took all the strength I had not to go kill him with my bare hands right that moment. But I knew I couldn't. I knew I would be too weak, or chicken out, or get caught. I decided to just let the justice system do its job, and I would do as much as I could to see him get locked up.

However, just like eight years prior, justice never seems to work out in the end. Jake got off essentially scott-free. He was one of the best athletes in the school, and with his dad being friends with the judge, it should've been no surprise that justice wouldn't prevail. When the news broke that he just got a slap on the wrist for ruining Rachel's life, I did everything in my power to comfort her. However, she avoided me along with most of her friends. I couldn't blame her of course. All I could do was hope for her to heal. However, healing is much easier said than done, because Jake took every chance he could to stay in both her life, and mine. I had a feeling he resented me for 'turning on him' and vouching for Rachel's credibility. However I never did find out what his true intentions were at the time, because not too long after the trial he died.

Anticlimactic as it may sound, I was not the reason he died. Ironically enough, just a few weeks after the charges were dropped, Jake got into a fatal car crash. Apparently he was the one at fault for the crash as shown by the other driver's dash cam, so nothing came of that either. At first I didn't know how to feel. I think I just felt numb. But after a few days of feeling empty, I saw Rachel. For the first time since the whole incident, she was happy. Somewhat, anyway. I asked her how she felt about all this.

She paused to think, then explained, "Well, to be honest I'm kinda in shock. It all feels so surreal. I just...can't believe it. I want to be angry, sad, hurt, or something negative...but I just feel relieved. I don't know if that makes me a bad person or whatever, but I'm just happy he's gone now and he won't be able to hurt anyone in the future."

“Huh...yeah, I guess you’re right,” I said thoughtfully. She left to go to class after that, but I stayed standing in the hallway. Her words, ‘he won’t be able to hurt anyone in the future’ were still ringing in my ears. At that moment, I decided how I could make a change. I could stop things like that from ever happening. I had a special ability, so it must have been given to me for a reason! By some divine miracle, or maybe God himself, who’s to say? At that moment I was filled with passion. I had a goal, and I knew how to achieve it. My mind was set: I was going to be a vigilante.

As heroic and noble as that sounded at the time, I now sit here writing this wishing my childish fantasy of ‘saving the world’ didn’t hit me so hard...but it did. I was a damaged teen, blinded by a warped sense of justice and trauma. I was naïve. It didn’t take long for me to find my first victim. It was a little boy who couldn’t have been older than seven. Honestly I didn’t even intend to look into his future, it was an accident if I remember correctly. But at that point I hadn’t used my power for a month or so, so when I accidentally saw into his future, it was when he was twenty-five years old. I vividly saw him grab a woman in a dark alleyway and beat her with a hammer. I gasped, jumping back to the present. The little boy was by himself, playing with rocks in the corner of an empty playground. I looked around and didn’t see anyone. I figured his mother must’ve been off doing something.

At first I really didn’t want to kill him. I slowly walked over to him and bent down next to him. “Hey buddy, where’s your mom?” He shrugged. “You shouldn’t be here without anyone.”

He looked up at me. “Well my mom’s a bitch so I came here without her.”

I was shocked. “Why would you call your mother a name like that!? You can’t call her something like that!”

The little boy shrugged again. "She yells at me and then my dad yells at her. He tells me she's a bitch whenever she leaves, and he says it's ok to call her that whenever she's not around."

It all made sense. Of course this little boy would grow up to hurt women! How could he not? In fact, I went as far as to think that he was destined to. I thought back to the vision I saw. That woman looked very young in the vision. This little boy would grow up to brutally murder a teenage girl for simply walking past him. In my head, I decided that I was going to save that girl. So I pushed down all my rational thoughts begging me to just turn around and forget about what I saw. I tried as best I could to not pay attention to my heart rate increasing and my palms beginning to sweat as I looked around once more and made sure there was nobody around. This playground was surrounded by woods, and at this time of day nobody ever walked around here. Before I chickened out, I grabbed the little boy and ran into the woods, picking up a large rock as I ran. His screams were eventually drowned out by the banging in my ears as I heard my own heart beat faster and faster. The second we got into the woods I used the rock I had in my hand and bashed it over his head. I did it a few more times until he was completely still. I checked his pulse. He was dead.

I don't remember much after that. I know I felt sick to my stomach, I know I developed insomnia, and I know I cried so much I began to feel numb. Another thing I know is that I didn't stop there. I continued to kill kids I saw who were destined to commit horrible atrocities as adults or as teens. I wish I could say I grew accustomed to it, but that's not the case. Every single child that cried out to me as I murdered them hurt my very soul. I began to question if it was worth it. I wanted to stop all this and throw up my hands, saying "what they do as adults is none of my business," but I just couldn't. I was in far too deep at this point.

This continued for years. I was never caught because I was good at covering my tracks. When I turned eighteen I decided to stop. There was no big reason for this; I never had

a police scare, and I still saw kids who would turn out to be monsters in the future, but I just couldn't keep it up anymore. I always knew what I was doing was wrong, but it really started to dawn on me just how sick it was as I actually began developing my frontal lobe. It was just so horrible, all of it. And for a few years the only thing that haunted me was regrets of the past. I felt burdened by the guilt of everything I had done, but I just couldn't bring myself to fully regret everything. After all, I ended up saving so many innocent people by getting rid of those children who would turn into monsters.

So at eighteen I moved away from my home town and found a job at a gas station a few towns over. A new start. A clean state. I vowed to never use my ability again. I got a small apartment with the money I'd saved up from working as a teenager, and I began to integrate myself into a social setting. You see, I've always been an introvert, but after Jake died I secluded myself even more. I didn't even talk to Rachel much anymore. I just figured it would be best to stay distant from everyone, after all I was doing heinous things in the shadows. But at eighteen with my hopeful fresh start, I could try to actually turn everything around.

As I settled in, I began seeing this group of people who looked to be around my age come into the store every so often. They would always talk about things that piqued my interest, such as the latest horror movie that had just come out, or some new video game, and sometimes even anime that I liked. I always watched them behind the counter, longing to be a part of their clique. Every Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday the group would come in and loudly joke and banter about trivial things. I would just smile and watch them. They were always so nice to me whenever they'd check out, too. After a few weeks I built up the courage to try and join in on their conversation.

"—and that's why I think it was absolutely necessary for her to grab the small knife instead of the axe. That was the whole point of the movie! You need to make sacrifices to survive!" The girl with freckles and blonde braids said to her group of friends.

“Molly, I think you’re misinterpreting the meaning of the movie. It’s not about her survival, it’s about the aftermath of a very traumatic event and how she overcame it by coping with the horrible things she did to survive!” A tall guy with brown hair and glasses said with a smirk.

“Holy shit you guys are dumbasses. The whole thing was a meta critique of the horror genre! I can’t believe you guys are so stupid that you didn’t even realize!” A girl with short red hair laughed as she threw her hands in the air.

“Are you guys talking about that new movie ‘Cabin in the dark’? I just saw it last night.” I chimed in quietly.

They all turned to me and I felt myself turn red. “Hey, what’s your name? You’re in here all the time, right?” A muscular guy with blond hair asked with a smile.

“Yeah, I’m Evan. I just moved here a month ago.” I smiled.

“Nice to meet you! My name’s Dave,” said the tall guy with glasses. The red head introduced herself as Anna, the blond guy said his name was Ross, and the girl with braids was named Molly. We all got acquainted pretty quickly, and eventually they all shared their numbers with me.

I began actually hanging out with them soon after. My life finally started to feel good. I was having so much fun with them, I even began sleeping at night. Years went by, and I began to forget the horrible things I did as a teenager. It became like second nature to ignore distressing visions, and I never looked into my friend’s futures.

Now I’m twenty-one. A few things have changed, such as my place of employment, my apartment complex, and the fact that I now own an adorable cat. My friends are the same, and I wouldn’t have it any other way. They’ve tried asking me many times about

where I used to live and if I have any family anymore, etc, but I purposely try to stay as vague as possible. It's hard enough being from a town that has so much crime associated with it, especially when I'm the one who was involved with most of those crimes (even if no one else knows of my involvement). But still, everyone here is very nice and understanding. I was happy to call it my home. I just wish it could have stayed that way.

Just over a month ago, I was probably the happiest I've ever been. I was interning at a local news station, my friends and I hung out frequently, and it was the first time in four years that I didn't have to spend Christmas by myself. Ross, who I've grown the closest with, invited me over to his place for Christmas since he was apparently tired of seeing me lonely during the holidays. His family was so incredibly warm; I've never experienced joy like that in my entire life.

Then on December 26th I came back home. I paid my neighbor for cat-sitting and picked up Mandy from her apartment. She was so happy to see me and was purring non stop, so when we entered my apartment and she immediately started hissing, I knew something was off.

I shivered as I closed the door and locked it behind me. I put Mandy down, but she ran behind my legs and continued hissing. I crouched down. "What's gotten into you, girl?" I rubbed behind her ears which somewhat calmed her down, but she was still way too on edge for me to feel any piece of mind. A thought dawned on me that there could be another person in the apartment. It wasn't too unusual that it was freezing in there, as it's always been drafty ever since I moved in. Yet there were things I still just couldn't rationalize no matter how hard I tried. There was furniture knocked over, and paper and pencils all spread over my kitchen table. I turned on the lights the second I came in, but the areas in my home I usually could see clearly seemed to have been shrouded in an unnatural darkness. I felt more uneasy the longer I stood there, and I had the feeling that I shouldn't turn my back to the dark corner that led to my bedroom.

I was frozen in fear for a while. The rational thought was there was a person in my house, which was just as scary as the thought of a demon in there. Though for some reason, I knew in my gut that thought was wrong. I slowly set down my backpack and reached for my phone to call the police. However, the second I got it to click on it immediately shut down.

“Fuck!” I whisper-shouted.

I charged it in the car. I know I did. It was at 100%, I’m certain. How could the battery have died in the span of a minute? It didn’t make any sense! I’ve heard in the past that the cold can drain a phone battery, but never to this extent! I was at a loss. At that point, I began to wonder if it was some sort of elaborate prank, although how anyone could’ve pulled it off was beyond me.

I glanced back down to Mandy, who was now hissing again. She was staring somewhere beyond the kitchen. She was staring at the black spot in the hallway that led to my bedroom. I felt a chill crawl up my spine. Then I heard a voice; I know I did. It had to be.

“Gregory Miller,” the barely audible voice whispered. I could hardly make it out, but I’m certain that’s what I heard. Gregory Miller? What could that possibly mean? I didn’t know anyone with that name. Even if this was just my mind playing tricks on me, wouldn’t I hear a name that meant something to me?

Before I had a chance to think, I heard my floorboard creak a small distance away. My heart started beating faster as the creaking began to pick up some speed and rapidly approach me. Without so much as a second thought, I scooped up Mandy, grabbed my backpack and ran out of my apartment. I then ran down the outside stairs as fast as I could, certain I could still hear the creaking getting closer behind me. I didn’t dare look back as I jumped over the last few steps and sprinted to the parking lot.

After fleeing my apartment, I went to hide in my car and charge my phone. Once it was charged enough to turn on, I was going to call Ross. He was super into the occult and ghost shit, so if anyone had answers it would be him. At that point I still couldn't bring myself to fully believe in ghosts, but knowing that I had a supernatural ability of my own, it really wasn't that far off to believe ghosts or even demons could exist. How could I of all people be a skeptic, after all?

I clambered into my car, locked the doors, and blasted the heat. My phone had to charge for a few minutes before I was able to use it, and once I did I called Ross. It only rang for a few seconds before he picked up.

"Yo! Evan, did you make it home alright?"

"Uh, yeah, but I gotta talk to you about something," I said.

Ross's laid back attitude immediately switched to concern. "Woah, woah, are you alright? What happened?"

"This is gonna sound crazy, but please hear me out," I pleaded. "I think there's something really wrong with my apartment," I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, cringing at what I was about to say. "I think...I think my apartment is haunted."

Ross breathed deeply on the other line. "...Okay, okay. Calm down. Think rationally before jumping to conclusions. First, tell me why you think you're haunted. What happened?"

"To be honest, I don't have any strong evidence. It's just...I came home just now and my place was completely trashed. Mandy immediately started hissing, and when I turned the lights on there was this dark spot in the hallway that usually isn't there. Like, I swear to god I've never felt like this in my own home before. You know me, I don't scare

easily. This was different. It felt...evil. I don't know how to explain it, but it just felt insidious."

"Okay, so where are you now?" Ross questioned.

"I'm back in my car. My phone was dead when I came in even though it was full battery just a few minutes ago, so I came in here to charge my phone." Ross was silent for a few seconds. "Uh, are you still there? Did the connection cut, or—"

"No no I'm still here. Just...thinking." He paused again. "Is Mandy with you?"

"Yeah, I wouldn't leave her there. The poor girl would've had a stress-induced heart attack," I laughed.

"Good. If she wasn't I would've come there to beat you myself."

I chuckled. "Damn, you'd kick my ass for that little?"

"Evan, I'm serious. I know you were joking about the heart attack thing, but if you left her in there, who knows what could've happened?"

I paused. "Ross, what do you know?" I felt cold again. "What do you mean by that?"

"I don't wanna jump to conclusions, but this is freaking me out. You said your phone died the second you went inside? That it was at full battery when you left your car?"

"Yeah...?"

"Stay there. Don't get out of your car. If you hear anything, anything at all that's suspicious, DO NOT LISTEN. I'm coming over right now."

Then he hung up. I was stunned. Sure, Ross is somewhat superstitious, but he's the first person to point out when things can get explained away by common sense. I've never heard him that worried, either. I began scratching my arms. I could feel myself reverting back into my old coping mechanisms, but I just couldn't stop. I hate to admit it, but I was terrified. I haven't been this scared since...

Nevermind, I don't wanna talk about that.

Anyway, I was freaking out, but my Mandy, (bless her heart, that sweet cat), noticed and jumped on my lap. She purred and rubbed her head on my hand, instantly calming me down. I remembered my old therapist's words on how to ground yourself, and started using techniques that I haven't even thought about since I was fifteen. Breathe in for ten seconds, hold for ten, then slowly breathe out. Do that four times. It really works, believe it or not. After calming myself down enough to where I could at least think straight, I began to wonder again about that name: Gregory Miller. I had no recollection what-so-ever about the name, and I was certain there was no celebrity with that name that I knew of. So, in order to figure out what any of this could possibly mean, I googled it.

Once it loaded, I froze, unsure of how to think, or even feel. The only thing that popped up on Google was an article that was made five years ago about a missing child case. I didn't want to believe it, but my body grew even colder when I clicked on the article and it named my town as the last place Gregory was seen. He was seven years old. I scrolled a little farther down and had to suppress the urge to vomit when I saw his picture. Gregory was the first boy I killed. I still remember it clear as day. I tried so hard to forget, but when you're the monster of your own story, it's hard to repress "traumatic" memories. I wasn't the victim, Gregory was. All that guilt, all that shame, it all came flooding back. I thought I was past this. I tried so hard to convince myself that what I was doing was good, that I was riding the world of monsters before they could even

form, but don't my actions make me a monster as well? I don't feel sorry for killing them. I don't. I...I can't. Because if I did, then that would mean I *am* a monster. That would mean that I *knew* what I was doing was wrong, which makes everything so much worse.

I only realized I was crying when I saw a water droplet fall onto my phone screen. Mandy meowed, trying her best to make me feel better. I smiled for a moment, happy that I had at least one being who would always love me. Then I started thinking again. That voice...was it a ghost, or did someone who knew I killed that boy break into my home? I felt another chill run up my spine. No, if it was a person I would've felt it. But that begged the question: If it wasn't a person, what was it? Was it Gregory's vengeful spirit? Was I finally going to answer for everything I've done? Maybe the devil himself has come up from hell to personally punish me! All these thoughts were so overwhelming that I didn't even realize Ross was standing right outside my car. He knocked on my window, causing me to shriek.

"Jesus, calm down, man! It's just me!" Ross said through the window.

I calmed myself as much as I could, then rolled down my window. "H-hey Ross...sorry, I was just—"

"It's ok, you don't have to apologize! You're going through a lot right now, I understand. Can I come in?"

I nodded, and was about to unlock my car door when I froze. No. This wasn't right. Ross...how did he get here so fast? I felt myself begin to tremble as I slowly looked back up to him, my window still wide open. He was smiling. His smile, which was once so warm, felt so...cold. It was unnatural. His eyes were bulging a little too much, and his mouth was just a little too wide. No. No this wasn't right. Then I looked into his eyes.

They were so dark, like endless tunnels of vast nothingness. I could've sworn he used to have bright blue eyes.

My trembling must have been getting worse, because he tilted his head to the side and asked me, "What's wrong, Evan?"

His voice...what was wrong with it? On the surface it sounded exactly like the guy I've known for years, but at the same time...it felt off. Uncanny, even. It almost sounded like it was being forced out, as if he was just getting over a bad case of strep throat and wanted to sound normal again.

I glanced back and realized there was no car in sight. My heart dropped to my stomach. I slowly turned my head back to Ross, and his face was just a few inches away from mine; eyes bulging, his smile even wider than before. I couldn't help but jump and let out a small, feeble yelp.

"What's wrong, friend?" Was his voice always this raspy?

"Uh, hey...R-Ross...can you just, like, back up a little please?"

My voice was so shaky, I could barely tell what I was even saying. But it seemed "Ross" understood, because he immediately frowned. He stood tall; taller than I knew him to be. His face twitched ever so slightly; I almost didn't notice. His eyes seemed to bulge even wider out of his sockets as his face shifted from joy to seething rage. His jaw unhinged as if he were a snake ready to devour its prey. His eyes rolled back, and he began vibrating. I might've pissed my pants, but I was so terrified, I don't even remember if I did. All I know is that out of reflex I shifted to reverse and slammed on the gas. I could tell he tried to grab me as my car launched backwards, but it all happened so fast he wasn't able to. I successfully sped off, rolling up my window as I got

away. Out of pure instinct, I glanced back to my rear-view mirror, only to find that “Ross” was gone.

I kept driving as fast as I could. I didn’t stop until I reached the next town over and pulled into a gas station. I was light on fuel, but I also felt enough time had passed that I was somewhat safe. The danger seemed to stem from my apartment, anyway. I rolled into a spot to fill my tank in the vacant gas station. It was so dark out, and the minimal light surrounding the station was almost laughable if I wasn’t so petrified.

I tried breathing again, but it was so much harder to do now. I knew I had to step outside of my car to fill up the gas tank, but I just couldn’t bring myself to even unlock the car door. Everywhere else was so dark; what if he was still there? Then I remembered that the real Ross was still on his way to my house! I cursed and grabbed my phone to call and warn him about what happened. His phone rang for a while before being disconnected. ‘Shit shit shit shit shit...’ I thought while hurriedly texting him.

I texted him to not come to my apartment because something happened and I fled, and it was too dangerous for him to show up. I also texted him to call me as soon as he could so I could better explain the situation. I waited a good ten minutes for him to respond. Not only did I need to make sure he was safe, but I also really wanted someone to be on the phone with me while I left the safety of my car to fill its tank. However, after a long period of silence, I went to text him again, only to realize the texts were never even delivered. I stared dumbfounded at my phone. There was service, I know there was. I called him again, but the call immediately failed.

I then called Anna. Since she and Ross were dating, she should know his whereabouts and if something was happening with his phone. It rang for a little bit before she picked up.

“Hello—”

“ANNA! Oh God Anna, thank God you picked up!”

“Evan!? What happened?? What’s wrong?”

“There’s a lot going on right now but please just tell me if Ross is with you?”

“Oh, Ross? He left a little while ago. He said something about you, actually. Is he not with you?”

I closed my eyes and began to cry. Anna must’ve heard, because she immediately began questioning me worriedly.

“Wait Evan what happened? Is he okay? Where is he? Oh God please tell me he’s okay—”

“I don’t know if he’s okay,” I said through silent sobs. “I’m so confused...I don’t know what the fuck is going on...”

I heard movement on the other end. It seemed Anna heard a knock and ran to the door. She must’ve forgotten I was on the phone when she placed it down, so I listened carefully. There seemed to be a few people on the other end, all talking quietly, but I couldn’t make out anything. That was until I heard Anna shriek. “NO! NO YOU’RE LYING! NO PLEASE GOD OH GOD I’M GONNA BE SICK—” My heart was pounding. “HE WAS GONNA TO PROPOSE TO ME NEXT WEEK! I SAW HIS NOTES, IT WAS GONNA BE A SURPRISE! NO NO NO NO THIS CAN’T BE HAPPENING!”

I heard the men on the other end a little more clearly once they moved closer to her phone. “Please calm down, miss...we know, we know...” There were more sobs on the other end, but I didn’t need to hear anymore to understand what happened. I hung up,

knowing Anna would need some time to grieve. At the time I was in denial. I knew logically that Ross had died, but it just didn't click in my mind yet. There was no way. Ross was a good man. He was a loving boyfriend, and a caring friend. He lifted the mood everywhere he went...so why? Why did he have to die? It just wasn't fair.

It felt like somebody had punched me through the gut and left their fist inside. I felt the urge to vomit again, but like always nothing came up. A thought occurred to me that I could try and use my ability for the first time in years and see when "it" comes after me again, but when I tried nothing happened. As it turns out, I can only use my ability on live humans. Not only is that thing presumably not human, I also have no idea where it came from. I've also tried many times in the past to predict my own future, but I've never been able to do that either. So what was left? The only people in my life that were still alive. I focused as hard as I could on Anna to see where she'd be tomorrow. All I saw was her staring at a picture of Ross with puffy eyes and I immediately stopped. This is another reason I hated my ability. It felt so invasive. It grossed me out to watch my friend go through such an intimate moment. How could I in good conscience continue? Then I remembered Gregory again. How could I pretend to have a conscience?

I stared at my hands for a while, trying as best I could to work up the courage to step outside and fill up my tank. I pet Mandy once more and put her in her carrier to keep her comforted. I breathed in, breathed out, and unlocked my car door before I could hesitate. The moment I stepped outside, a familiar wave of uneasiness washed over me. I tried as best I could to ignore it as I began to fill up my tank.

I stood there in silence, looking over my shoulder every so often to make sure nobody was around. As cold as it was, the air felt weirdly stiff. It was freezing, yet there was no wind. Apart from the gas tank filling my car, the only other sound I heard was my own blood pounding in my ears. In reality I had not even been standing there for a minute, but in my heightened state of being, that felt like an eternity.

Eventually I filled up three quarters of my tank, and with the creeping sensation of feeling watched, that seemed like more than enough. I finished up, jumped back into my car, locked the doors and started up the heat again. I looked up nearby motels, and found one only a few minutes away. It was in a somewhat shady part of town, but by that point I'd take a crackhead over whatever that thing was any day. At least a crackhead would hold the door open for you.

I drove to the motel in pure silence. The radio static would flicker off and on occasionally, so I tried my best to ignore the thought that it was a demon doing that and not just my car being old. As I pulled into the parking lot, I couldn't help but notice how vacant it was. I parked my car and packed everything as quickly as I could before running inside.

The old man at the counter glanced up upon my arrival. "Getting a room?" He asked gruffly. I nodded, still frantically looking around. He peered at me intensely, frowning. "Listen kid, if you're in some kinda trouble I don't want you staying here and disturbing the guests—"

"No! I'm not in trouble! Please, I just need a room."

The old man grunted, but he let up and got me a room. "That'll be fifty dollars, son." I rummaged through my wallet and handed him the cash. Just in case "it" could somehow trace me, I needed to be careful. I grabbed the key and hurried to my room with all my things.

After inspecting the room for bugs, I let Mandy out and laid on my bed. I was so tired, I just wanted to sleep forever. Just as I finally began to drift off, I heard scratching on the window. I shot up and turned to where the noise came from. It was so dark out that I couldn't even see a foot outside of my window. But with my hairs standing up, and

Mandy now hissing again, I knew “it” must’ve found me. I pushed Mandy back in her carrier and grabbed the rest of my things, ready to bolt if needed.

There was another scratch, but this was longer and louder. I could almost hear the window cracking with how much pressure was being applied. I stared intently, certain I’d be able to discern who or what was making that sound. But then there was nothing.

I stayed holding the cat carrier and my bag with my back to the wall for at least ten minutes. Eventually I decided it was just the wind, and put everything down. I sighed, unsure of what to do.

Ross was dead. He had to be. If not for the phone call, my vision certainly proved it. So what the hell was that thing? It looked and sounded exactly like Ross, until it didn’t. When exactly did it stop looking like him? I wasn’t too sure.

I wanted to cry again, but no tears came out. My world was falling apart for the second time. Was it my fault? Clearly this thing had something to do with Gregory, so if Ross is dead because of this thing, does that mean Ross died because of me?

Eventually I drifted to sleep. When I woke up, I saw a bunch of texts. They were all from my friends, all telling me Ross was dead. I didn’t have it in me anymore to feel anything. I just stared blankly at my messages, thinking about what I should even say. One text was different, though. It was from Anna. ‘It’s your fault.’ That text stung, mostly because it was true. Then another text from her popped up, ‘Meet me at my house. We need to talk.’ I’m assuming she wanted to lay into me? Or maybe just ask why Ross was trying to come meet me so late? I thought about all the possible scenarios she might throw at me, and tried thinking of a good lie for all of them. In the end, I decided to tell her the semi truth. I thought there was someone in my house and Ross was gonna come over to help me investigate. Not false by any means, but purposely leaving out the supernatural details so as to not have her think I’m spiraling again.

I drove to her house after taking a shower and getting all my things together. Pulling in, I saw an eye peer through the window, which I assumed belonged to Anna. I grabbed Mandy's carrier and my phone, but left my bags in my car. I wasn't going to be staying very long if I could help it.

After a single knock, Anna swung the door open to greet me. Just as she was about to let me in, she noticed Mandy's carrier. "What's that?" She asked.

I looked down and realized she meant my cat. "Oh! That's just Mandy. Sorry, I hate leaving her by herself. She's got separation anxiety, so I—"

"Put her back in your car," Anna said coldly.

I stared at her. "What?"

"You heard me. I don't need my house to smell like cats right now."

"Uh...okay..." I turned around to put Mandy back in my car. I knew grief made people act different and all, but that felt weird coming from Anna. She loved animals, or so I thought. Maybe because Ross died from potentially hitting a deer she felt differently now? I wasn't sure. That didn't make sense, but again anything's possible so I shrugged it off and put Mandy in my car.

I went back to Anna and she beckoned me inside. It felt cold in her house, but I tried my best to not show how cold I was out of respect. I felt so guilty about Ross, so anything she had to say I wouldn't argue with. We sat on her couch and she offered me a drink, which I declined as politely as possible.

Anna, to put it bluntly, looked awful. Her hair was disheveled, she had bags under her eyes, and I could tell she just stopped crying. We sat in silence for what felt like ages before she started talking. "I...I just wanted to talk to you to clear things up...maybe talk about the funeral too?"

I nodded. "Of course. Anything you need, I'm here. I'm honestly still in shock...I just can't believe he's actually dead..."

Anna stared at me with an expression I couldn't quite read. Was she angry with me? Did she understand what I was saying? Or was she too grief stricken to even think?

Before long, Anna nodded. "Yeah, me too," she paused. "Evan, please, I need to know. What was he doing? Why did he leave me in the middle of the night to do something with you? What happened?"

She sounded determined, more so than I thought she would. She wasn't angry by any means; I really thought she would be, considering her texts. She was more curious than anything. I leaned back into the couch and sighed. "There was someone in my house, and I asked Ross to come over and help me investigate."

Anna kept staring at me. "Are you sure?"

"Huh?"

"I asked if you were sure. Are you sure it was a 'someone' and not a 'something'?" Anna smirked.

"Oh, did Ross tell you? I'm sorry I thought you didn't know any details 'cuz when you called last night—"

“Oh no, he didn’t say anything,” Anna said with a wave of her hand.

“So how do you—”

“Ah, I don’t know, it just seemed like such a Ross thing to do. Leave me for some ghost shit.” Anna shrugged.

“Right...” I said before pausing. “Hey Anna, I gotta make a call. It’s my dad’s birthday, so I just wanted to call him real quick...” It was the best lie I could come up with on the spot. I cut my dad off three years ago when I first came here. He tried getting in contact with me for an entire year, but eventually gave up. Luckily, me being so distant in the beginning paid off.

Anna nodded, then asked, “Do you need space? You can call in the bathroom. It’s right down the hall,” she pointed behind me.

“Yes, thank you. I’ll be right back.” My plan was to pretend to call my dad and then make an excuse to leave. Maybe an emergency or something. Anything to get me out of there. Plus, I hated leaving Mandy in the car for so long.

I walked through the hallway, looking around to see where the bathroom was. I could vaguely feel Anna’s piercing gaze burning a hole in my back, but I tried to ignore it. The tiny hallway grew darker as I continued on. Every single door was closed until I approached another one on the right. It was slightly open, so without thinking I peered inside to see if it was the bathroom.

At first I couldn’t believe my eyes. I thought it was one of those visual hallucinations you get when you’re exhausted. But the longer I stared, the more real it felt. There, laying perfectly still, was Anna. Her once fiery red hair seemed almost dull amongst the pool of crimson red she laid in. I stared. I couldn’t blink. I couldn’t think. I was completely

paralyzed. My mind was disgustingly blank; I was beyond numb. At first, I wasn't even scared. Then I felt myself slowly turn to face the thing that looked just like Anna. I wasn't in control; I was simply a passenger in my own body.

"Anna" slowly walked towards me, contorting ever so slightly with each painfully long step. Her eyes darkened and began to bulge out of their original sockets. Her smile grew wider and more unnatural with every step. I stood still, unable to force my useless body to move.

By the time "Anna" stood a few feet from me, she was much taller than I remembered her to be. She used to stand a few inches shorter than me, but now she had to have been at least two feet taller than me. It looked like she had always been that tall, but it felt so unnatural. Her jaw unhinged and I heard a slow groan come out. It started quiet, but grew louder and louder until I felt the urge to cover my ears. Then just as I felt myself regain control of my body, her jaw snapped back shut into a tight smile. Her head twisted to the side, and she bent down to where her head was a mere inches away from my face.

"Awww, poor Evan. Are you scared, buddy?" Her voice rasped like nails on a chalkboard. Still, I couldn't respond. I could barely move. The only movement I felt was my chest heaving up and down due to my frantic breaths.

"I—I—I—"

"Shhhhh," the thing tried best it could to sound comforting. It brought its long finger up to my face to stroke it as if it cared about me. My eyes shot to the finger as it wiped a tear away that I didn't even realize I shed. "It's okay honey, we know you're sorry," the voice was now completely different. It sounded nothing like Anna anymore. Hell, it didn't resemble her in the slightest, either. Its hair was jet black, messy, and slightly longer than what Anna's had been. Its eyes, although still black, seemed to be more

sunken in than before. Its long, bony finger still caressed my face. All I could do was stand there and silently cry. If I wasn't so scared, I would've felt humiliated.

Its voice was lower than Anna's by a lot; almost as if it was being distorted by some weird radio frequency. And yet, even with how low the pitch was, there was no mistaking its cadence. This creature was attempting to take the form of my deceased mother. I wanted to be angry, but I couldn't. Not at that moment, anyway. The feeling of grief that I thought I pushed down all those years ago resurfaced. I knew it wasn't her, but it hurt so much to see her face bastardized so horribly on this monster. Each stroke of its disturbingly long finger seemed to be getting more painful by the second.

When I gained the ability to speak again, I began to plead with the thing. "P-please...I'm sorry...I'm so sorry please stop this..."

It laughed like a hyena; the sheer volume caused me to flinch. Then, it grabbed my face roughly with one hand and pulled me closer. "Mommy is sorry for leaving you so soon, Evan."

"No..."

"Mommy is sorry for everything."

"Stop that!"

"Mommy is sorry for—"

"Don't fucking say it!"

It grabbed my throat to silence me and smiled viciously. Its head tilted even farther away than before. If it was human, I surely would've heard a snap by now. Then, with its bulging black eyes and unhinged jaw, it screamed.

“MOMMY IS SORRY SHE DIDN'T BELIEVE YOU WHEN—”

I blacked out, I think. When I came to, I was back in my car, racing down a road I only vaguely recognized. My breathing seemed steady enough, but I didn't dare look at my hands. I could feel the lukewarm sticky substance coating my skin. It wasn't my blood; that I was sure of.

I eventually regained full control as I slowed my breathing and focused on driving. I could tell my driving had been erratic judging by the items inside my car being knocked all around. Luckily Mandy didn't seem too affected as she was safely inside her carrier, which was buckled into the passenger seat. Still, it was terrifying coming to the realization that I could've died not by that monster's hand, but my own. I haven't blacked out like that in years. I knew better than to try and remember *why* I blacked out so as to not make it happen again.

I drove in deafening silence for a good twenty minutes before I saw the next exit, which I turned onto. I found a gas station close by and parked my car. I then went to check the time on my phone, only to discover it was dead. Of course it was. After I plugged it in, I laid my head back and sighed, closing my eyes. I was so drained that I couldn't feel anything even if I wanted to. So, with nothing else to do, I started recollecting my memories of the morning.

The biggest piece of information to remember is that Anna's dead. I wish I had it in me to grieve, but I just couldn't. The next thing I remembered was the encounter I had with the monster. I finally looked down to my hands; they were covered from finger tips to elbows with a deep coating of blood. But that begged the question: whose blood was it?

It definitely wasn't mine, that's for sure. So was it Anna's? Or maybe the monster's? I honestly couldn't tell.

I closed my eyes, trying harder than before to extract whatever hidden memories I just now suppressed. I recalled the monster morphing into some deformed version of my mother, although it was more like a grotesque distortion of her memory than anything else. Then I recalled our conversation. Right. I didn't want to remember, I really didn't want to. But I had to. For everything to make sense. For the possibility that I could end this suffering. For me and for these innocent people I marked by simply befriending.

It knew. That monster, for some reason, knew about what happened. At least somewhat. It had a vague idea of my mom's appearance, even though she'd been dead long before I did anything worthy of this punishment. It knew about things I'd tried so hard to forget. But nothing ever really disappears. No. Memories like that can be repressed, but they always come back eventually. Whether that be in the form of self sabotage, or committing acts that no sane person could even dream of. It's one thing to cope with the reality of childhood trauma, but it's another thing to realize you've become the monster in other children's stories. Sure, they aren't here anymore to experience the long term effects, but does that take away from what I'd done? I'm writing this not to farm sympathy, but because of the ignorant belief that simply recognizing past mistakes will somehow absolve me of all the wrong I've done. Maybe somehow this beast will leave me be, but I know that's not the case. I'll keep running, sure, but eventually I'll break down. I'm bound to. I deserve to.

And then at times like this, where I'm actually trying to look inward, his voice slithers back into my head. *'It's your fault'*, and *'you wanted this, that's why I'm doing this'*, amongst so many other phrases that defined the hell that should've been my childhood. It only happened a few times. Why can't I just get over it?

I started cutting again. I only realized I was bleeding when I felt the blood from my arm drip into my lap. Fuck. I knew this would happen. Here I am, reverting back to my damaged teenage self. What's next? I start murdering children again? I almost wanted to laugh, but the bitter irony of my pathetic existence made it impossible to do so.

I stopped what I was doing and mindlessly cleaned up the mess I made of myself. *'Shit'*, I thought. *'I left my meds at my apartment, didn't I?'* I wanted to scoff at myself. Tell myself I have bigger problems to worry about other than my mental health. But I couldn't bring myself to be that careless. It's one thing to keep myself in danger, but at this point two of my closest friends have been killed. The law will most likely chalk both up to accidents, but I knew better. I always have. I knew my old neighbor didn't kill herself, and I knew that Ross didn't hit a deer. This went deeper, it had to.

I turned my car back on and charged my phone just enough for it to turn on. This monster had to be related to the kids I killed. That was the only explanation. Luckily for me, my small town records were really easy to access online. I went on my phone and found the missing children cases that were never solved. I had a rough estimate of how many kids I killed, but I just had to be sure. After double checking across multiple websites, I wrote down each name and age of my victims. There were a total of five victims:

- Gregory Miller, age 7
- Marci Turnsile, age 8
- Mason Hernz, age 7
- Thomas Miderbower, age 6
- Ainsley Pugh, age 9

I wish I could say it hurt to see all their innocent faces, knowing none of them reached double digits because of me. I wanted to feel bad, but I couldn't. These children were destined to be horrible adults. I had to keep telling myself that. And you know what?

Because they were destined to grow into monsters, I bet that's why that god awful *thing* is making my life a living hell.

That's what I told myself, anyway. The urge to bash my skull through a brick wall gets stronger day by day. If only I wasn't such a pussy I would've done it already. My mom wasn't a pussy.

Anyway, I ultimately decided it wasn't worth the risk to travel back to my apartment for my meds. I was dealing with something much worse than my mind could ever conjure. I had a feeling this thing would go after all my remaining friends, which left just Molly and Dave. I had to find them before that thing did, but since I knew next to nothing about how it operates, I just had to try to get to them as fast as possible. So I called Dave in a hurry and told him to meet me at Molly's house. Then I called Molly and told her I needed to stop by. Both of them agreed without questioning.

I sped to Molly's house so fast that it's a miracle I wasn't pulled over. I left Mandy in the car again, more for my own peace of mind than anything else. When I knocked on Molly's door she immediately answered.

"Hey Evan, come in," she said groggily. Just like "Anna", she looked awful. I immediately felt my heart begin to race, but with no concrete evidence I couldn't do anything yet.

I went inside and she motioned for me to sit on the couch, which I obliged. She sat on a chair across from me and smiled with only her mouth. "You look like shit."

I let out a small chuckle. "I could say the same to you."

Molly's smile faded; she looked empty. I could relate, although I wasn't too sure if her emptiness and mine were the same. "What did you wanna talk about?" She inquired.

I felt a chill crawl up my spine. I glanced over my shoulder, hoping to god that Dave would knock on the door any moment now. If Molly really was what I suspected her to be, then it would be really helpful if Dave could witness it come out. If not for the fact that two people together are stronger than one, then to at least prove to me that I'm not crazy. Every minute I continued breathing, I considered the very possible idea that all of this was in my head.

"What are you looking for?" Molly questioned with squinted eyes.

I turned back to face her, barely able to conceal my discomfort. "I was just checking to see if Dave arrived yet."

"Ah," Molly said. "He should be here soon. He's only a few minutes away."

'Then what the hell is taking him so long?' I thought furiously.

"Hey, are you okay? You seem...tense. More so than usual." There was that smirk again. This couldn't be her. She was acting just like "Anna", and "Ross" before her.

"I'm fine. Just waiting for Dave to get here!" I forced a smile.

"Ah, okay," Molly said thoughtlessly, looking vaguely down the hall. She then suddenly turned back to me. "You still didn't answer my question."

"Huh?"

"What did you want to talk about?" She said harsher than before.

'Is she being serious right now? Does she really not know that I wanna talk about the glaring elephant in the room that takes the form of our two newly deceased friends?' I thought to

myself. I stared at her for a second before getting my bearings. "Isn't it obvious? Do I really have to spell it out to you why I'm here? Besides, I wanted to wait for Dave to get here so we could all talk together."

Molly glared at me with such hatred in her eyes that I'd never seen before. At that point I was sure of my suspicions. This wasn't Molly, rather that *thing* that's been tormenting me and my friends. And now it's gotten to Molly. I felt like crying, but I knew this was my one chance to get an advantage over the thing before it could get Dave. I knew by that point my life was basically over, as the only way to really explain what was happening would mean admitting what I'd done as a teenager, and that was a death sentence on its own. So why not die actually saving someone, rather than the idea of someone?

Molly's parents were avid believers in the second amendment, which meant they had a gun somewhere in the house. I knew from past conversations with her that they had a gun mantlet over their bed, in case someone were to break in they had it at their disposal. All I needed to do was find a way to sneak into their bedroom without drawing suspicion from that thing, and then I could see if a gun posed a threat to it.

"Hey, before Dave gets here, do you think I can use your bathroom?"

It nodded. "Yeah, just go down the hallway past my parent's room and you'll see it on the right."

Bingo. I thanked it and walked down through the hallway and found their bedroom on the left. I quietly sneaked in, saw their bed, and found the gun mantlet above their headboard. I found a double barrel shotgun resting atop the mantlet. It was like a gift from God himself. I snatched in and crept out of their room.

The second I stepped back into the living room, It turned to face me and screamed.
“EVAN WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING!?”

That reaction must imply that guns *do* give this thing damage, I thought. With shaky hands, I slowly raised the gun and pointed it at the thing’s face. “This is for killing all my friends,” I said shakily.

“Evan PLEASE put that thing down...what the f-fuck are you on about!?” The thing tried reasoning with me, but I knew better. It angered me how it had the nerve to pretend to be scared while it was wearing the skin of my dead friend.

“SHUT THE FUCK UP!” I bellowed, causing it to flinch. I took in a deep breath, trying to calm myself. Although I knew this thing couldn’t be Molly, I still had trouble shooting the thing that looked and sounded exactly like her. “Please...just please stop this...I’m sorry for what I did when I was younger, I’m so sorry...so please stop killing all my friends,” I said with tears streaming down my face.

“Evan,” the thing started pleading. “I don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about...please let’s just talk this out, okay?” It even started to cry.

Before I could say another word, we heard a knock on the door. Both the thing and I immediately turned our heads to the door. Without sparing a second, the thing sprinted to the door and let Dave in.

“DAVE! OH DAVE THANK GOD YOU’RE HEAR, EVAN’S GONNA FUCKING KILL ME!” The thing yelled to Dave.

“DAVE GET BACK! I DON’T HAVE TIME TO EXPLAIN, BUT THAT THING ISN’T MOLLY! PLEASE JUST GET BEHIND ME SO IT DOESN’T KILL YOU TOO!”

I was very aware of how this scene looked to Dave. The thing looked and sounded exactly like Molly. And here I was, standing with a shotgun pointed right at “Molly’s” head. Even still, I had to do everything in my power to save my last remaining friend.

“Woah woah woah, everyone just calm down!” Dave yelled.

It was now on its knees, clutching Dave’s shirt and crying into it. Dave put his hand on its back and began to rub it, all while staring at me. “Dave...” I began. “Please listen to me...that’s not Molly.”

Dave looked down at the thing with a blank expression. He looked back to me, and asked “Then why is it crying like her?”

“Because that’s what it does! It takes the form of people you’re close to and tries to trick you! Please you have to believe me, I’m not crazy! That’s how Ross and Anna died! This thing killed them and took their forms because it’s trying to kill me!”

“Alright,” Dave said. “Then kill it.”

“WHAT!?” The thing screeched. “DAVE ARE YOU SERIOUS!?” It tried to run away, but Dave held it in place.

In all honesty, I was taken aback myself. “W-what? Y-you believe me? Don’t you want evidence or something?” I didn’t know why I didn’t just shoot it, but something in me kept me talking, rather than shooting.

Dave stood up straight, and grabbed the thing by the arm and threw it on the ground in front of me. “Go on,” he said coldly. “Kill it.”

My mind told me to aim and fire, but my body wasn't listening. I turned back to look at him, and he was...smiling. That same smile. My heart dropped.

"Dave...please...save me—" Molly tried to plead to "Dave", before he grabbed her by the throat. With strength beyond human comprehension, "Dave" lifted her into the air and snapped her neck. Molly was dead before I fully processed that the monster took Dave's form, rather than hers.

Then it turned back to me, growing even taller, and eyes turning black. Its face elongated, and I could almost hear the bones in its fake body snap and reshape to fit its new form.

I immediately turned the gun on it and pulled the trigger without so much as a second thought. But...nothing happened. I tried again, and again, but nothing came out of the gun. "What!?" I heard myself exclaim as the thing slowly made its way toward me.

It's high pitched laugh echoed through the small house before it grabbed the gun from my hands and tossed it aside. "Haven't you ever heard that you shouldn't keep a loaded gun inside your house?" It mocked in a voice that could barely be considered human.

'Shit! God fucking damn it!' I thought, trembling. This was it. I was going to die. Right here, in my friend's living room while her parents were out to lunch. I started to cry yet again. Every single one of my friends were dead. Every. Single. One. Was it me? Was I the curse? Was this bound to happen because of my actions as a stupid, reckless teenager? Or perhaps this was fate. Maybe my life was predetermined by some other being. Maybe in my past life I was a terrible person, so that's why I had to suffer so much in this one. That's why he did that to me. That's why I was given this curse of an ability. That's why Jake raped Rachel. That's why I killed those future monsters. That's why I cut my dad off. And that's why my friends are all dead.

The monster was now engulfing me. It no longer even tried to resemble a person. It was just an accumulation of all things horrific in this world. When I looked into its black, soulless eyes, I saw what can only be described as hell on earth. It was cold, yet I could feel my skin almost burning off. My heart was racing so fast, I could almost feel it bursting from my chest. Then, it started to slow. I was getting colder, and I began to lose feeling in my knees. At some point they buckled beneath me and the world began to fall into darkness. Then I remembered Mandy. She was still in the car. If I let this thing kill me now, then that sweet, innocent creature would starve to death, trapped in a small carrier, all alone and scared. I couldn't let that happen. I just couldn't.

With all the strength I could muster, I grabbed the chair next to me and pushed it pathetically towards the now formless creature. It regained some semblance of a humanoid figure in order to touch the chair, so I took that chance to crawl between its legs and make a run for my car. Either the creature was slower than I thought, or it let me go willingly. I hoped to god it's not the latter.

The second I got in my car, I drove as fast as I could to the only other place in the world that I knew. My hometown. Part of me wondered if my dad didn't ever want to see me, although I had a gut feeling he'd be more than happy to hear from me. So, after pulling into a gas station a half hour away from my old town, I called him for the first time in four years.

"Hello?" He rasped.

"Hey dad, it's me..."

"Evan?" He sounded as if he was holding back tears. I smiled.

"Yeah, it's me. I was wondering if I could come over? Sorry this is so sudden, I just...I just really need you right now."

"Yeah, of course! Please, come home!" He cried.

"I'll be there in thirty."

It was a lot easier of a conversation than I anticipated, but it still hurt. I wasn't mad at him anymore. Honestly, I'd forgiven him years ago. He was going through his own turmoil, I can't blame him for being an imperfect father after my mom died. I lost a mom, and he lost a wife. But I just couldn't bring myself to call him. I told myself it was because I was still mad at him, but truthfully I couldn't face that town again, and he was part of that. I didn't want to go back. I...I couldn't go back. But now I had to. And you know what? I'm finally content with it.

So yesterday I showed up at my childhood home. My dad came out to greet me, and I knew off instinct that it was indeed him. We hugged for a long time. I really needed this. He let me inside and questioned me about my new life, which I answered as truthfully as I could. Of course I had to omit a few details, but that's to be expected by this point. He asked about my friends, and I told him we had a fight. He didn't need to know. Not yet, anyway. Hell, who's to say he'd even believe me? I wouldn't, if I were him.

He then showed me to my old room, which was in the exact same state in which I left it four years ago. He told me he knew I'd come back eventually, which hurt me more than I'd like to admit. We then ordered pizza, and even watched a movie together. It was nice. I wouldn't ask for a better last day on earth, in all honesty.

Now it's the next day. I've been writing this for hours, without much of an idea of how I want to end this. My dad already left for work, so I'm planning on printing this out for him before I post it here. This is it. People have to know what's been going on. This can't die with me. It just can't. So as I write my final words before ending things on my own terms, I just want everyone who's reading this to understand. Understand why I did

what I did. Understand the circumstances. Most of all, understand that I'm not crazy. With this, Dave Parker, Molly Verniz, Anna Handerson, and Ross Skyland's deaths will be answered, as well as my own. Please, do not let their deaths be in vain. Know that they died because of me, and I will be answering for my sins. I'm sorry. I wish I could have done better.

Oh. Wait. I'm hearing a knock on the door.

"Hey Evan, come get the door! I left my keys inside! Silly me!"

His voice, which was once so raspy, now sounds so clear. He's still knocking on the door, but I can't move. Why can't I move?

I hear a faint hissing. It's Mandy...she's staring at the door.

That's not my dad.