

The Man Through the Window

By Ashlee Winters

I leave the shed I call home for the last time when my watch reads 9:20 pm. I open the door and the breeze hits me along with the hum of crickets. My feet hit the pavement and I begin my last walk around the empty block. The streetlamps flash my shadow every step until my watch beeps, 9:30 pm and I'm close to my shed.

My steps turn peppy and finally the familial gaze follows me. The eyes watch from the houses' window on the second floor. I smile.

"Today marks a year. To have your eyes follow me is an honor," I say. "Happy Anniversary, Silvia. I'm getting bored, should we leave?"

I take my final step out of her view and walk along the side of my shed to the back of the house. I gather at the glass door. I reach in my pocket and pull out gloves. I put them on and reach for the door handle.

The hardwood floors let out a creak that echoes when I enter. There are no signs of life evident in the home. No scratches. No stains. I go straight for the stairs.

The stale air engulfs me on the second floor as I walk to her door. I fix my posture and smooth out my jacket. The cold handle begs for the warmth of my hand when I turn it, it's locked.

I forgot the key.

"Who's there?" Silvia asks from the other side of the door.

“Shit,” I say.

“You were waiting for me to fall asleep, weren’t you?” Silvia asks.

I stay silent. I run a hand through my hair and bat at my head, Idiot. I turn to walk away.

“Answer me you pig,” She says.

I turn on my heels and body slam the door. The frame breaks and the door shakes on its hinges as it bounces off the wall.

Silvia gasps and jumps to the corner of her bed. She becomes impossibly small hidden in the room's shadow as she pushes herself into a protective ball.

I take a deep breath and relax in the door frame. The small light from the window illuminates a reflection in the middle of the room on the floor. I know she only sees my silhouette.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it. Please don’t hurt me,” Silvia says.

“Why would I hurt you?” I ask. “Are you ok?”

“Aren’t you the one that kidnapped me?” she asks.

“Kidnapped?” I ask. “I was walking by the house and I thought someone might have broken in. This house has been emptied for years. How long have you been here?”

“You’re the man that walks by every night?”

Her arms wrapped around her legs loosen and I take gentle steps inside. The moon light hits my face and I kneel in front of the hollow girl.

“That’s not important. We need to leave if you were kidnapped,” I say.

She flinches when I grab her hand, and I wait until she relaxes to pull her up.

“I’m going to call the police. Do you remember what he looked like?” I ask.

“He was always hunched over and wore a mask, he never spoke,” She says.

“Ok. Follow me, quickly.”

I grab Silvia’s boney wrist and pull her towards the door. I grin and quicken my steps.

“No. If I leave, he’ll hurt me. I tried before; it never works.” Silvia says and pulls her arm back. My grin turns to a scowl and I face her.

“Do you want to be stuck here, clinging to me who walks past the window every night?” I ask.

“I’m scared, and I don’t have anywhere to go. The only person I had left he killed.” Silvia says. She starts to cry.

“Killed? And you think staying is safer? I’m not leaving you here.” I say.

I pull her out the door and into the dark hallway. I’m down two stairs when she escapes my grip.

“No, I can’t leave,” she says. She darts to the door and I skip the steps I went down to catch her. She’s about to close the door when my hand pushes it to the wall. She struggles to try and close it.

“I can’t, he’ll hurt me,” Silvia says.

I put my hand on hers and she sobs. I trace her arm up to her face and fidget on my feet. Silvia turns her head away and I grab it and make her look at me.

“You can’t stay here,” I say. “If you leave now, everything will disappear, this man will disappear. You won’t be scared anymore. Let me help you. Trust me. I promise you’ll be safe.”

I draw a breath and gulp. Her tears are streaming down my arm and it lights a flame below my belt. I wipe the liquid away and it accumulates on my thumb.

“Okay,” she says.

I smile wider than I did when I arrived and grab her hand. I pull her through the house and out the door. The breeze hits and Silvia smiles.

“Thank you,” she says.

She puffs out air and takes a deep breath. Her body no longer shakes, and she starts to run from the house as fast as her malnourished body would let her, my hand in hers.

Happy anniversary, Silvia.

END