

There's Always A Price!

Despite what the weatherman had claimed earlier that week, it was still raining outside. The cruel wind had stripped the trees bare and teased them relentlessly, mocking them because all they could do was stand still and suffer through the deadly storm. The squirrels and birds had disappeared, probably resting inside their homes. There weren't even any little ants crawling in the narrow cracks of the sidewalks. Not that I blamed them. What sane creature would have wanted to be outside in that weather, especially when they had the option of running away.

I was sitting on my lavender-sheeted bed, following the trail of a single raindrop down the circular window above my headboard. Since it was early spring, Mother Nature insisted on giving each of us a free bath everyday. Why couldn't Mother Nature have only made it rain once in two weeks instead of every day? Whenever I went outside, it seemed like everywhere I stepped, my foot would sink into the soft, muddy ground, which had light tufts of yellow grass peaking out. The raindrop completed its journey down my windowsill and I started to trace another raindrop.

It was going to be such a boring day. Mom and Dad were both at work and I was at home alone in a quiet, seemingly deserted apartment, but it was no big deal. I was going to be eleven years old in a month anyway and my mom always said that I was very mature for my age. Sadly, there was nothing to do. Our power had been out for almost three days. In fact, everyone in my building was dealing with electricity issues, but it seemed like most of my neighbors took this unluckiness as an opportunity to visit their relatives, probably residing in some far off suburb of Chicago.

Workers from the power company had been working to resolve this issue, but so far, no luck. And for some reason, the back up generator wasn't working when we most needed it. Typical. Without electricity in our modern age, the world comes to a complete stand still as we know it. I couldn't listen to music, watch TV, or play videogames. I tried to turn the TV on earlier,

but all I was rewarded with was an empty, black screen of doom, reminding me of everything that day was lacking. I didn't get the chance to check out any new books at the library either. Mom and Dad were too busy to drive me there in the past week. It would have helped if I had a sibling to play with too, but I was still an only child back then. What a waste of my spring break. I didn't even know what time it was because we only had digital clocks in our house. On the plus side, I had learned something valuable. There's a reason why old people are more comfortable using old fashioned, tick-tock clocks. At least those didn't break down on you like digital clocks do when the power went out.

As I sat on my bed listening to the beat at which the rain pattered to the ground and the old tree tapping relentlessly at my window, I realized that amidst all the thundering noise outside, there was a distinct sound that stood out. It sounded like someone was knocking on our front door. I stood up in my lemon yellow t-shirt. Thin, yellow stripes ran down along the sides of my brown capri shorts to match. I tiptoed over to the peephole at the top of our front door and peeked through to see who it was. A young man's face expanded over its glass lense. From what I could see, he was a bald headed man, probably in his late twenties with a white shirt and navy blue baseball cap. He continued knocking in a "double hits" pattern. Knock, knock. Knock, knock. Knock, knock. I didn't open the door. My parents had always told me to never open the door to a stranger. He could turn out to be some sort of lunatic for all I knew.

I stood there two feet behind the door in silence, waiting for him to leave but he persisted on knocking some more. This time, he tried a different combination. Knock, knock, tap, knock. Knock, knock, knockity, knock. I made no movements, gave no answer. More knocking appeared. Wow, this guy was starting to get irritating. Who was this idiot? Didn't he understand that nobody was home? What if he was one of those burglars that broke into people's homes and robbed them

when they thought nobody was home? Thank God that my parents had left that morning, double locking our front door.

Then, a deep, scratchy voice came from behind the door and said, "Little girl, I know you're in there. I saw your parents leave and I know that you're home alone. It's okay. You can let me in. I won't hurt you." There was no way I was opening that door. Suddenly, another voice called out to me. I recognized this one. It belonged to Mr. Spooner, our landlord. As far as I knew, Mr. Spooner was a really nice man, almost like a grandpa. He said to me, "Amber, it's okay to let him in. He won't hurt you. He's my nephew. He's one of the electricians working to fix up the generator." "Yeah, Amber," bellowed the first voice after a moment. "I want to check the electrical circuits in your storage closet."

I trusted Mr. Spooner. He was always doing favors for my parents, fixing up our clogged pipes or broken mirrors, etc. He wouldn't have lied to me, right? I took two steps towards the front door and flipped over the two locks. Then, I twisted the doorknob and opened the door to find only one man standing outside, the supposed lunatic. Even though Mr. Spooner was nowhere in sight, I let him in, assuming that Mr. Spooner ran off to attend to some other matter.

The annoying lunatic quickly stepped inside and aside from his white shirt, he was wearing faded, sky blue jeans and muddy, white sneakers streaked with a navy blue stripe on the side. He simply looked down at me with a strange look. I showed him over to where our storage closet was. He went in and there were some noises as if he were opening up something made out of metal. I left him to do his work and went to my room, promising myself to return in a few minutes to check on him.

I entered my room and went to the middle, staring straight ahead at my bed. Out of nowhere, I heard the door shut behind me. I turned around and the lunatic was inside my room. I squealed, "What are you doing?" in a high pitched tone. He gave no reply, simply staring down at

me with an unusual look I hadn't seen on any guy before. I started to run to my closet. It had a lock on its door. Maybe I could have locked myself in there and waited for some help to come. But after taking three quick steps in the direction of my closet, two rough hands grabbed my waist and the ground suddenly disappeared from below my feet. I felt myself being tossed onto my bed, my head slamming against the wooden headboard. A sharp pain shot through my head and drowned me into darkness.

Trapped. Alone. Scared. I couldn't figure out this numbing sensation quickly spreading throughout my body. I looked around and all I could see was darkness pushing itself down upon me. This wasn't the ordinary kind of darkness. It was extremely black. Black like coal in a naughty kid's Christmas stocking. Black like the fur on Sabrina's cat, Salem. Black like an endless black hole. There was no little ray of moonlight sneaking in through the horizontal spaces between the blinds. Where was I? How did I get here?

Was I experiencing some sort of fifth dimension claustrophobia or something? This doesn't make sense. Some invisible force was draining me of all my energy. I couldn't move. At all. I felt something pressuring down on me, hopelessly pinning me to my bed, except there was nothing solid above me, only darkness. I tried to lift my right arm, pulling and pulling, trying to work my way against gravity, but my arm didn't budge from its lifeless position beside my body. I gave my legs a chance, but still, no movement. I felt like a giant lump of clay that required a sculptor to be molded into something new. I didn't even have any light blankets covering me, so what was stopping me?

My next instinct was to cry for help. I screamed and screamed and screamed, but was only able to do so inside my head. When I tried to open my mouth, I continued to feel that numbing force taking over me. It took all of the little strength left in my now feeble body to pry apart my lips about a centimeter wide. As I tried to force sound out of the slight opening, nothing came out.

It's like my voice decided to hide when I needed it the most. I tried to take a deep breath, fill my lungs up with lots of air, and release it full force out into the darkness around me. I felt like I was suffocating from the inside. My lungs felt heavy as if I had inhaled lots of smoke and never got a chance to exhale it out. I couldn't breathe, but I was still alive to an extent nonetheless.

When I tried to peer into the blackness around me, I remember my head throbbing in muddled confusion and growing hotter by the second. I kept fading in and out of this darkness. This sort of felt like I was looking at a bunch of flashbacks, except no memories were involved, only flashes of darkness. Every few seconds, I'd end up where I started, finding myself in what I suppose was some unknown fifth dimension. The only sense remaining in my body was sound. For some reason, my ears didn't entirely lose their function compared to the rest of my dead body. As I kept phasing in and out of this nightmare, I could hear the T.V. on in my living room. Since I live in an apartment, the living room is right next to my bedroom, but even so, the sounds coming from the T.V. were too clear and too loud to be realistic. It felt very real however, as if the T.V. was right beside me, shouting at me to wake up like my alarm clock does in the morning with the grand exception of no snooze button.

I had no choice but to hear what the news reporter was saying. I could hear every syllable coming from his mouth perfectly. Although, I don't remember what the story was about right now. I think it involved a colossal nuclear invasion of the United States or maybe something about a six-way serial killer on the loose. No matter what I tried, my body refused to comply with my brain as the flashbacks continued exploding quite vividly in the back of my mind.

Dear God, I thought to myself, am I dying? If so, I never imagined myself slowly withering away in my bed like an eighty year old man in a coma. Why am I hearing shrill cries and explosions from the T.V? How's that even possible with the power outage? Or maybe I fell asleep, the power came back on while I was sleeping, and is now trying to invade this nightmare of a

dream. Although, I'm a hundred percent sure the power was out when I last checked. In fact, I've never been so sure of anything in my entire life.

Why can't I call for help? Why can't the few neighbors I had left in my building hear me? I really, really need help. The invisible weight was becoming heavier and heavier as the torturously slow seconds ticked by. Why aren't they coming to help me? Why?

I woke up in my full-sized bed some time after I had that horrible nightmare, feeling broken and bruised. I could move my arms and legs, but everything hurt so much, especially between my legs. I felt a strong burning sensation like that of a really sore throat only down there. When I looked down to see what was wrong, I found crusted blood smeared on my inner thighs and some more damp, bloody smudges on my ankles. Underneath me, my lavender bed sheet had absorbed a pool of blood, now seeping into the mattress. Most of my clothes were still on except my shorts and what counted the most, my panties. I had thick knots in my hair as if it had been recently pulled at. A long, thin, red scratch ran down from my left cheek to the side of my neck.

Tears fell down from my eyes as I held my throbbing head in between my hands. I couldn't quite understand at first what had happened to me. I tried hard to remember but I only remembered bits and pieces. The last thing I fully remembered was one of the electricians working to fix the back up generator in my building ask me whether he could step inside for a moment.

My nightmare suddenly became clearer to me. Why had I been so stupid? Why did I let that horrible man inside my home in the first place? Was I that desperate for the power to come back on, so that I had something to do? Mr. Spooner had vouched for him, but I knew something hadn't been right about him. I should have called the police the moment I had the chance after he slipped into the storage closet, but I didn't. Why hadn't I?! Why? I sat shivering in the middle of my bed, still sitting on top of that pool of blood bleeding into my mattress. More hot tears burned across the scratch on my left cheek and plopped down onto my bed sheet. They fell right into the

pool of blood, unable to change anything about it. I kept crying and crying, hoping, praying that somehow my tears could wash away the huge stain and magically erase what just happened, but they couldn't. No matter how many tears fell into the flat vat of dried blood, nothing about the dark maroon color changed. Absolutely nothing.

I wasn't exactly sure how this changed me back then, but I knew that I had been hurt. I knew I had been humiliated and turned into something else, perhaps someone's toy. I had heard about cases like these on the news. That was all the news ever seemed to report, whether it was on TV, online, or in a magazine. I never imagined becoming one of those cases, being labeled as a file number in the local police department. Why did this have to happen to me? It was all my fault. I thought, how would my mom and dad react? Would they yell at me instead for being so foolish? The power had come back on. The TV blared the theme song from one of my favorite cartoons, Teen Titans. I wish I had been a teen titan that miserable day, instead of an ordinary ten-year-old little girl. Maybe then, I could have defended myself better somehow. I guess there really is a price to everything in this cold, cruel world we call home.