

## Four People in a Room

### I

Madeline looked at the dying fire and wondered why no one replaced the logs that had long turned to ash. Cold air crept underneath her pajamas sending an uncomfortable chill across her skin. Getting up from her usual spot in front of the fireplace, Madeline made her way to the strange man sitting alone, just outside the light of the fire.

“Can I put more wood in the fire? It’s dying and I’m getting cold.” Madeline asked, squinting to try and see the man’s face through the darkness.

Leaning forward in his chair, a stray ray of moonlight caught a portion of his visage revealing dry cracked lips, turned up into a warm smile. Madeline smiled back revealing several missing teeth, typical of a child her age.

“Of course, my dear,” the man croaked. “Get your grandmother or the nurse to assist you. I would hate to see you burn your little hands by mistake.”

Madeline turned to get more wood for the fire and stopped as a soft cloth was draped gently around her shoulders.

“Take this as well, at least until the fire is strong again,” the man said, securing the scarf around her neck.

“Thanks mister!” Madeline said cheerfully, grabbing two logs and returning to her spot in front of the fireplace. “Nana, can I put them in?”

Madeline’s grandmother nodded, but kept her aged eyes on the man in the chair. Putting one in like she was taught, Madeline couldn’t help but giggle as the once dying fire roared back to life, its light nearly reaching every corner of the spacious cabin they resided in.

“Good as new! She chuckled, turning to face her grandmother’s aid. “Did I do a good job Ms. Krissy?” Only a weak sad smile met Madeline’s enthusiasm.

Humming to herself, Madeline wondered why everyone was so quiet as she wrapped her new scarf tighter around her.

## II

Slow, ragged breaths escaped Sylvia's lips as her eyes flickered between her granddaughter and the man that had broken into her home. Despite the now strong fire, Sylvia still felt a chill ripple across her skin. Having survived two heart attacks, Sylvia knew what death felt like better than most. In her long life, however, this was the first time she met someone that mimicked that feeling. Catching the monster's calm face in the flickering light of the fire, anger blossomed in her stomach. She had lived the better part of her life fighting alone. Growing up the daughter of a drunk and an absent mother, she taught herself how to weave through the difficulties of the world. When she found herself pregnant and abandoned she alone raised her daughter. When she got the call from the hospital telling her of her granddaughter's birth and her daughter's death, she alone took it upon herself to raise the child. Throughout her entire life, Sylvia had been able to handle anything that was thrown at her, but now, at this very moment, She felt as helpless as ever; and that's what made her angry. All but confined to her house because of her health, Sylvia knew she was no match for the man sitting quietly in the corner, waiting for an excuse to kill again, but that's not what was stopping her from trying to escape. At her age Sylvia's life meant close to nothing. She was on her way out already as far as she was concerned and dying trying to escape or fight back didn't scare her as much as it probably should. But Madeline, her life meant everything, and as long as she and that monster were in the same room, she was in danger.

## III

Harriet Krissy stared into the renewed flame, waiting for the nightmare to end. The light from the flames reflected off the tears still present in her eyes. All was quiet except for the crackling of the fire and Madeline's jovial humming.

"Maddy, honey, can you please quiet down a bit."

"Why? Madeline asked, her big brown eyes bright in the firelight.

"Because I think we just need a little quiet for a while, honey."

"But why? "

“Because, Maddy, Ms. Krissy has a headache right now and a little quiet might help.”

“When my head hurts Nana always sings me a song. Do you want me to sing one for you? It always works and I know a lot of different songs I can sing like—”

“Please, Maddy,” Harriet snapped, a twinge of irritation over taking her fear. “Just sit there quietly for a while, please!”

“Let the girl be,” came the man’s raspy voice, his tone cold and inhuman. “She’s only trying to have a bit of fun.”

Harriet quickly turned towards the fireplace so she wouldn’t catch a glimpse of the man’s horrid face, fresh tears rolling down her cheeks as Madeline began to sing her favorite lullaby.

#### IV

The crackling of the fire entwined with the girl’s singing calmed Grason. Remembering the bitter winter nights with just him and his daughter brought a sad smile to his face. What he did, what he was doing, disgraced her memory. What else could he do though? Let the drunk bastard that took her away from him continue walking around, enjoying life while his precious angel had hers cut short. He could never live in a world like that. When it was all said and done however, he didn’t feel any better. In any other house, with any other family, he would have left hours ago to be taken away by the police, but the little girl somehow kept him from leaving. Simply listening to her joyous singing overshadowed the fear in the room, making him want to stay for just a little while longer.

*Prompt: This piece came from an in class writing exercise focused around the concept that everyone in a given room will have their own perspective of what is going and how these perspectives can differ wildly from person to person in the same situation.*