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Assignment #3

Interview with a Nightmare

I moved here from another group home around two months ago. They all called me Connor. I can’t blame them, it was taped onto my suitcase, and I wasn’t really one for talking. Being fourteen, I was among the older of the kids there. Jane and Alex were both a couple years older, being sixteen and seventeen respectively. There were sixteen of us in total.

I didn’t say a word until two weeks ago. The sun was going down and it was getting cold; it was almost time for one of the mothers to come and put us all to bed. I was looking out at the city from the balcony. Jane, Alex, and Jamie along with some of the others were all there. None of us wanted to be inside, half of the cot reeked of urine. No really talked though. Occasionally Jane might make a quick remark about one of the mothers. A couple of us would chuckle and that would be the end of it. Then Jamie tugged gently on Jane’s arm.

“What's that smoke? Jamie said. There was a slight shiver in his voice, we didn’t have layers to wear. His little finger pointed towards a sewer grate on the stone cobbled street below.

“Huh?” Jane said, talking through the roll she had stolen from the cafeteria. Crumbs crumbled out of her lips and onto dirt scarred balcony floor. Her mind wasn’t entirely with him. “Oh thats th-

“That’s the smoker.” I said. I still don’t know why. I don’t think I even knew what that was supposed to mean. The balcony was stunned, I think Jane choked on her roll. Shit.

“Y-ya know?” I stuttered. I rubbed my arm like I was cold. I was wearing a blanket. “That monster that lives in the sewers.”

“No shit?” said Alex. He had a crooked grin on his face. So I told them. I think I read an article about alligators in the New York City sewers, so that's what it was. I told them a story. Of a gator who would throw people around. It was stupid. But the little ones believed every word of it. I think Alex knew it was bullshit. But part of him, like me, wanted to see how far I would go. I started telling stories every night before bed. The smoker’s neck became long, with sharp rib-like bones along its spine. Where eyes should be were holes that pillowed smoke. It’s mouth a wide smile, hundreds of shap bloodstained teeth. It talked in a long deep voice that rattled one's bones.

“And it’s right out here?” Alex said one night that same crooked smile plastered on his face. That caught me up a little. Usually Alex and Jane would just sit back and listen.

“Of course!” I said.

“Well.” Alex said, “How about at midnight tonight, I sneak you out and we go find it.”

“W-what?!” I said. Why would he say that. Alex knew I was lying. He had to know.

“We can catch it on this!” He extended his hand and brought out a small video camera. Jamie looked at me with begging eyes. Maybe it was a trick? Maybe it was for them?

“Sure absolutely!”

Alex came and got me from my bed. It felt like every eye in the room was on us as we left. Without a word, he led me down the halls. His flighlights beam cast away the shadows as we made our way to the first floor. He propped open a window and gestured for me to exit. As soon as I clumsily tumbled my way through the window of the group home and out into the street I felt the cold fog bite at my skin. It had rained recently, the damp cobble streets luminated in lunar light, looking like a slurry of black stones and a field of stars. I heard Alex, followed by Jane tumbling awkwardly out of the small window of the group center out into the street. Alex slipped on the rocks and as his tall skinny body buckled underneath him he let out a loud resounding cry.

“FUCK!” Alex yelled. I had never heard him be so vulgar. Jane covered her mouth but couldn't retain the giggle. It was stupid, but I don’t think I had seen Jane smile like that before. I didn’t even realize I was smiling myself.

“Fuck off you two,” said Alex. He couldn’t hide his smile, his scarred face had twisted into something that resembled genuine joy. I guess I hadn’t really looked at him that well, I didn’t notice them before. The scars I mean, they were very old and faded but still visible. The moonlight filled in the shadows in his face that the lights of the day missed. He walked over to the manhole that poured out plumes of smoke. Not white like steam, but black, something that would fill your lungs with air. But before he could open it himself Alex looked up at me in a state of shock. The hole was already open.

“Hello” said a deep voice that rattled my bones from within the hole. I feel like I had heard it a thousand times before. In the back of my head. In the darkness of a dream. Whatever it was, it had always been there.

“Hello,” said Alex. He wasn’t scared. I was shaking. When he spoke I caught a glimpse of something squirming its way out of his mouth. It was smoke.

“We brought you the new one,” said Jane, the smoke coming from her eyes. “Just like you asked.”