

White flash... 9,10,11... crash!

The storm outside was gradually drawing closer. I lay back in my recliner and sipped my tea. The smell of mint combined with the warmth of the fireplace nearby was soothing. After this past week at work, I was looking forward to relaxing. I had no real plans other than to remain bundled in my large blanket and sweatpants, eat leftovers, and catch up on my recorded shows and novels. After putting in so much overtime in the office, my phone was turned off and left upstairs for the weekend. I was ready to do nothing but relax.

Another flash of light. ...7,8...crash!

This storm was oddly out of season, but not unheard of. Every few years it seems like the town is going to be flooded by a freak storm. Meteorologists are always caught off-guard by the sudden storm on the radar and news outlets urge everyone to evacuate just in case, but no real damage ever occurs from these sudden storms. At most a few trees get blown over and knock out the power, maybe a little flooding in the lower areas of town, but nothing that isn't resolved and forgotten within a few days.

I had lived here through several storms without incident and wasn't planning on evacuating for this one. I sat there, sipping my tea, enjoying the solitude and relative silence of the house. It was around this time that the sound of the rain began to reach me. The sound grew so gradually that I have no idea when it really started, but by the time I had finished my tea and the final chapter of my novel, the sound, filtered through two floors of family history passed down along with the house, the sound had developed into a dull roar of water droplets on my house's metal roof. It was constant, yet soothing.

I drained the last few drops from my mug and removed the blanket so I could move over to

the kitchen and wash the mug. Looking at the clock, it was only mid-afternoon so I decided not to clean the mug yet since I didn't have to rush back to the office for more overtime. I placed the mug on the counter and decided to count the time between the lightning and thunder again.

Maybe the storm would be a quick one. The floorboards creaked as I walked over to the window. The family house's view was nothing amazing, but the back side of the house had a veranda that gave a far view of the woods. From the ground floor, however, you could barely see past the end of the yard. The heavy rain obscured the view even more except for the brief flashes of lightning.

4,5,6,7...

The timing between the lighting and thunder was getting closer and closer. Hopefully this would move past without too much trouble, but it didn't seem to be moving any faster than before. It looks like the rain will be going all night. I had been so busy at work that I hadn't gotten any emergency fuel or lights from the basement before the rain started. I wasn't too worried since I had plenty of leftover takeout from this past week in the fridge. I could wait until morning, then use the natural light from the windows if the power went out. That way I could have all day to relax and only get the emergency equipment out if I really needed it. I went back to my recliner and bundled back into the thick blanket.

I decided to take a break from reading and turned on the TV instead. The DVR had a backlog of true crime documentaries that I had been dying to get too all week. Normally I can binge watch several hours of crime shows at once, especially when over caffeinated from several mugs of tea or coffee. But for some reason, I fell asleep without even realizing it before the first documentary had finished interrogating the

victim's lover. They almost always seem to jump right to the spouse.

Flash... 3,4,5... crash!

The thunder had startled me awake, and I was both a little groggy and confused that I had fallen asleep so unexpectedly. The long days at work must have worn me out more than I originally thought. The TV was displaying nothing but static and was currently the main source of light for the house, so I knew I wouldn't be able to watch anything for a while. The storm must have knocked something out in town. At least the power was still on for now. The rain was still coming down as a dull roar on the roof; blending with the static from the television.

Looking at the clock on the wall I realized it was suddenly 8pm! I decided to make some chamomile tea and go to bed after. I couldn't enjoy the weekend off if I kept falling asleep and sleeping in my bed was much better on my back than the recliner. My phone should have enough battery to use the light to read a little more until I doze off again. I stumbled back into the kitchen, still half asleep and began boiling some water.

Glancing outside, I saw that it was pitch black from the storm in the night. That made since; I had been out for several hours at this point. I shivered a little and drew the curtains shut as the kettle began to boil. Crash! I didn't see the lightning, but the thunderclap sounded as if it was right above the house. A few minutes later I returned to the living room, steaming mug in hand.

As I was sipping the tea and savoring its warmth and flavor, I slowly walked around the first floor of the house I grew up in; looking at old photos and knickknacks from previous generations as well as my own trinkets and accolades from my time in school and in recognition of my years at

the office. When I returned to the TV, it was still displaying static.

As I sipped my tea, there was another clap of thunder and the TV suddenly cut out, plunging the whole room into darkness. Cursing a little, I stumbled my way around the room trying to find the light switch. By the time I got to it, I had stubbed my toe and tripped on several small items I couldn't see on the floor. I didn't think I had left anything on the floor before I fell asleep, but the darkness was extremely disorientating. I had probably knocked something over without realizing it when I first woke up.

Click... Click, click, click. Great.

It wasn't just the TV but the entire power supply was out; probably for most of the town by this point. The rain kept coming down. I could no longer see the white flashes from the lightning but could hear the claps of thunder, much louder than before. I fumbled my way out and down the hall, trying to find the basement door. It was strangely dark.

Despite living here for almost my entire life, the storm seemed to turn the place into somewhere I was unfamiliar with. I wasn't originally going to try and find a lamp downstairs, but the darkness was oppressive and I had almost dropped my favorite mug trying to find a light switch. I didn't want to trip on something I couldn't see and fall. With my luck so far tonight, I would end up stepping on the broken shards and near-boiling tea.

Crash!

After what seemed like 30 minutes, I had finally found the basement door. There weren't any more knickknacks knocked onto the floor, but I couldn't seem to find anything in the dark. Everything felt like it was in the wrong place. I unlocked and opened the door and began to

walk down the stairs, the creaking of the wooden steps being the only noise other than the low roar of the rain and the occasional thunderclap.

Creak, creak, creak...

Were there always so many steps to get to the bottom? When I finally got to the bottom of the stairs the roar of the rain had faded away into nothing. Hopefully the fact that I couldn't hear the rain down here meant it was passing by. I began to head in the direction of my emergency lights, annoyed at myself for not getting them out before the storm and for leaving my cell phone upstairs. I figured the cell service would be out, but at least those have a built-in flashlight. That would have made finding the lamps and fuel much quicker and easier. It was then I noticed that something was in the basement.

I don't remember what it looked like or what kind of sounds it made. In fact, I don't even remember running away. As soon as I encountered it, my body was filled with something I had never experienced before: in an instant I was dripping in a cold sweat, and shaking as my body filled with a unexpected terror. Just a second ago I was hoping the basement hadn't flooded, but now there was only one thing my brain and body could comprehend, and it was that I needed to run away as fast as possible. In that moment nothing else mattered. If I didn't move, I knew I was going to die.

When I reached the top of the stairway, I slammed it shut and leaned against it, panting heavily. The roar of the rain was back, but I could tell that it was gradually fading from what it was before I went downstairs. Or maybe it was just my rapid heartbeat blocking out the sound. It was still pitch black in the house, but now I was able to look around and see, maybe my eyes had finally adjusted; maybe my fear had made my pupils dilate more than they were before. I didn't care, I was just glad to be able to see. Until I

looked around. It was the same house I had seen my whole life, but it was... different.

I could see that part of the reason it was so dark was that the windows were boarded up. A layer of dust coated the walls and floor, and that was all that was there. None of the furniture or pictures remained. Shelves were empty, the TV and recliner were no longer in the living room, visible through a half-open door at the end of the hall.

I locked the basement door and took a small, cautious step forward and immediately winced. I looked down and cursed again. In my rush I had apparently dropped my mug and stepped on one of the pieces; just like I knew would happen. It wasn't a deep cut and was barely bleeding, but it hurt now that my adrenaline was fading. What had I been so scared of before? I must be extra jumpy from my lack of sleep this week. The basement was mostly just storage, nothing could get in there. I was just about to turn back around to get the lamps again when I felt it: the fear was coming back. I couldn't remember what the thing in the basement was, just that I had to get away.

I could feel that this thing was right behind the door, and that it wanted me. I immediately broke into a sprint to the kitchen window since it was the closest way out of there. I didn't care where I ended up as long as I was away from here. The pain in my foot was inconsequential now and I ignored it as I ran. I didn't even notice the small trail of blood following wherever I went. There were no other emotions than fear. I had to escape.

It was no good, the kitchen window was boarded up too tightly to squeeze through. Changing plans, I hurried towards the front door at the opposite end of the house, making sure to cut through the living room to avoid the basement, but that was also boarded up. I

fumbled with the lock, trying to get it open and pry off the boards on the outside. The rain seemed excruciating loud, but I could almost taste safety on the other side of the door.

CRASH!

The basement door broke open with a crack much louder than any of the thunder I'd heard so far. Giving up on the door, I immediately ran up the stairs to my left to the second floor. Knowing whatever it was would only be a few moments behind me I wished I had another door to shut to slow it down, if only for a second. As I ran, I could hear the rain on the roof crescendo. I looked around the second floor. This floor may have been a little brighter than the ground floor, but it was in no better condition. It was as if this house full of memories had been evacuated and abandoned for decades.

All the windows were boarded up, and other than a layer of dust the only thing in any of the main rooms was a large dark stain on the floor of what was my bedroom. It was quickly obvious that I would not find a way out here so I bolted, limping slightly from the pain in my foot. If I could get to the veranda in the back of the house, I might be able to shimmy down the side of the building to safety; assuming I didn't slip in the rain. It had a glass door after all so I could use my body to break it open. What was a few more scrapes at this point?

As I ran, I could feel it getting closer. By this point it was on the second floor with me as I hurried to the door. The closer it got, the more horrified I became. The sound of the rain was almost deafening now, but compared to the entity inside with me, it felt like my salvation. Luckily when I grabbed the veranda door handle, it flew open and I tumbled outside onto the balcony.

Outside was pouring rain. The dops fell hard and stung. This constant firing of miniature

bullets was painful, but I barely noticed. I needed to find a way out of the house. Out of the neighborhood. Out of the entire town. I was looking around for a drain pipe or a ledge to shimmy across when I noticed it: the view. The trees normally extend through to the hill line below and to the end of my sightline.

They were gone.

The trees weren't cut down, or replaced by new building, they were just gone. At the end of my backyard the world seemed to just vanish. I couldn't tell if it was simply too dark to see that far or if my house had been teleported to some other dimension that was pitch black and full of nothing but swirling storm clouds, thunder, and rain. I suppose in the end it didn't really matter.

As I was looking for a way to run away, I could feel it: the same feeling I had in the basement. This terror resonated with me to my core. This was something that felt baked into my very being, something at a baser level than any human logic. Pure, unfiltered fear. I knew that whatever the thing was it was now right behind me on the other side of this last door. I stopped and looked up at the rain. At this moment the rain suddenly let up. I could see the stars through the eye of the storm and as the sound of the raindrops stopped, only to be replaced by the crashing of the veranda door being knocked open.