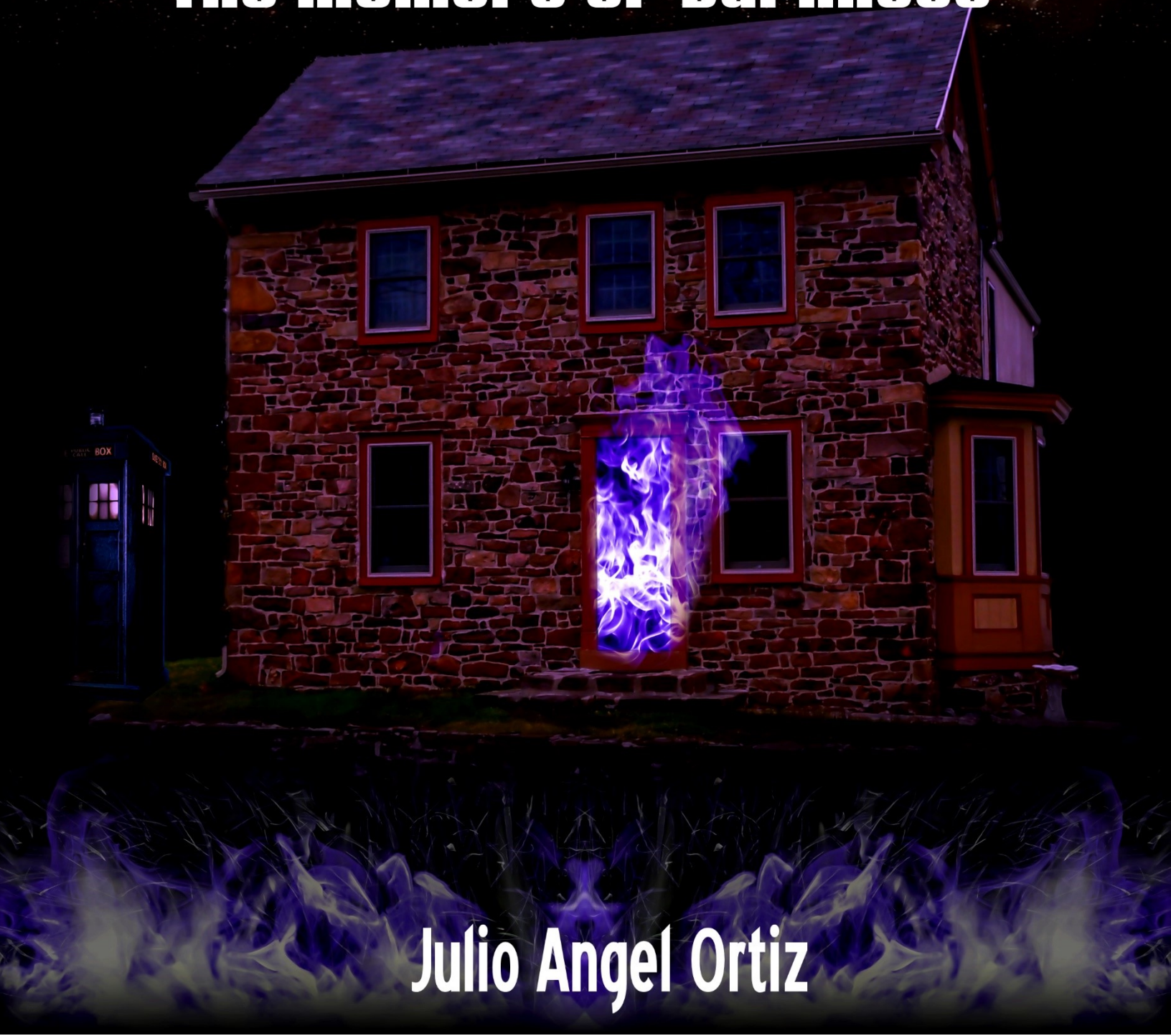


BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

The memory of darkness



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“The Memory of Darkness” Part One

Gretchen's heart threatened to explode from her chest.

She must have been running since the forest clearing; what was that now? One hundred yards? Two hundred? It felt like an eternity. The burning in her chest made a duet with the loud rasps she was unable to contain. Low sobs tickled at the back of her throat; as the sun descended far too quickly on the horizon, Gretchen found herself in the streets of the town.

Almost there, almost there, almost there, she thought, a mantra that she somehow hoped would will her into the safety of her home. Instead, she was out here, running in a frenzy down streets that now seemed too treacherous, shadows betraying and menacing.

Stupid!, she berated herself. Gretchen had promised herself that she would only shoot pictures for an hour or so; but instead, she had gotten wrapped up in the wildlife and the false serenity of the forest. When she realized it was getting dark, Gretchen had taken off, leaving her camera in the forest so as not to have anything to hinder her movements.

And it may not be enough, she thought grimly.

She had lived in Evansburg for years, and yet now each alleyway and street was like an alien labyrinth. Every turn was an agony, a reminder that she was nowhere near home yet.

And the dark was coming. Much too soon.

Around her, Gretchen saw doors being shut and locks being secured. The few people she saw refused to make eye contact with her. Every closed door felt like a gavel of judgment being slammed down for her.

No!, Gretchen wanted to scream. Not that it would do any good; people were scared. No one was willing to take a chance that they would open their homes to the Darkness.

And so she ran.

It at once infuriated and disappointed her, knowing that she was being abandoned in this way. The weight of it pushed down hard on Gretchen's chest, the air threatening to escape her lungs in a wrenching rush. Her heartbeat already pounded against her sternum, the incessant throb making her want to vomit. But as much as her senses and stamina were tested, she knew that she could not stop.

Gretchen was about three blocks away.

She dared a glance back and saw the sun already dipping below the horizon, the clouds darkening. Gretchen was unable to contain a choked sob, and as she turned to look forward she saw a street that she wanted to turn in order to make a shortcut.

That's when her feet gave out under her.

Gretchen cursed loudly as she tumbled a couple of times, knees and hands scraping against the unforgiving pavement. In a continuous motion, Gretchen rolled into a standing position and continued to run, ignoring her burning hands and knees. More choked sobs came, and she turned left to run through a neighbor's yard to cut across to her street, trampling through a newly planted flowerbed in the process.

To hell with them, she said. They're not going to open the door to save me.

Gretchen noticed that the skies had darkened considerably, and the fear drove her legs. A chill permeated the air, and it was all Gretchen could do not to scream. She cleared the yard out onto the street, and saw her own house fifty yards away. Gretchen rocketed away.

"Almost there, almost there, almost there," she repeated, a mantra that she hoped would give her the speed necessary.

Gretchen reached the steps, and ascended two at a time.

Almost there.

Darkness had fallen.

Gretchen fumbled for her keys, and screamed when they fell out of her hands to the wooden porch.

Gretchen leaned down quickly to grab them, but by then it was too late. Darkness closed in all around her, and she could only scream as the burning consumed her...

* * * * *

The Doctor could not remember the last time he had been down in the TARDIS' pool. At first guess, it was possibly a few hundred years, and when he had stumbled upon it again several weeks ago he was surprised to find the water absolutely clean and the area tidy. Although he was excited, it soon turned to mild disappointment, since the Doctor was alone, and swimming alone never made much sense to him in any of his lives. Nevertheless he had kicked off his shoes and sat by the pool, dipping his feet into the warm waters, allowing the cuffs of his pants to get wet. The Doctor ran his hand through his wild mane of brown hair, now peppered with gray, and blew air through his lips. He was lost in thought when it happened, and had barely noticed it even then.

The Doctor looked up, and quickly brought his legs back and over the side of the pool, standing quickly and slipping into his shoes.

"This is no time for a swim, silly Doctor," he said to no one, and rushed through the hallways that lead back to the TARDIS console room. Upon entering, he walked straight to the monitor that was built into the console and punched some keys on the antiquated keyboard. The console responded with a few beeps and a flat tone.

The Doctor pressed his lips into a thin line. "Yes, I know, but why are you losing power?" he muttered, and flipped a switch to his right. He took another glance at the console. "Maybe 'bleeding' is the right word."

The Doctor looked aside, catching a glimpse of the hallway he had just existed, and could see quite a ways down. He saw the lights slowly going out, beginning at the far end working its way towards him. The Doctor looked back down at the monitor, seeing the words displayed on the screen, and leaned closer for verification.

“Error 71?” he said aloud. “But how-”

But before he could finish his thought, the lights went out in the console room, and the Doctor could only scream...

* * * * *

Where there had once been a muse, there was only silence. Katelyn found herself sighing yet again before the blank canvas.

She absentmindedly stroked back an errant piece of her dark red hair, pulling it behind her ear and then scratching her forehead in frustration. Katelyn stood and walked into the kitchen, grabbing a glass and filling it with water from the faucet. She drank the cool water and then stared out the window, not for the first time drifting off into fragmented memories and dreams.

Bill.

Something wrapped around her heart, crushing in slow waves and threatening to leave Katelyn breathless and, worse still, on the floor sobbing and useless. Katelyn dropped the glass into the sink, a clear *thunk* shattering the stillness. She moved back into the living room, and back to the small niche she had carved out for herself to paint. Katelyn sat down for several minutes more but knew it was useless. No art was going to come today, or certainly not in this session. Katelyn sighed again in frustration, and stood and went upstairs. After changing her shirt and pulling her hair back into a ponytail, Katelyn left her home, leaving behind what she hoped was only temporary frustration.

* * * * *

The trail was exactly as Katelyn preferred it; *empty*.

During her three-mile jog, Katelyn had seen only one other person. Glancing at her watch, she noted that it was one in the afternoon, and there was still plenty of daylight left. Usually she would have seen a lot more people by now during her customary jogs, but today she didn't feel like being around people. Still, she could not help but feel some slight apprehension at the thought that no one was coming outside anymore.

Has it really come to this?

Katelyn still wondered how it was possible that no one in town wanted to talk about it, much less get help. Had they really become so beaten down that they had given up hope? Had the town contained such a dark secret that it was now manifesting itself and consuming them all?

Katelyn found herself once again receding into the tide of memories and dreams that had assailed her since Bill died in the car accident four months ago. A part of Katelyn, one which came to her in the middle of the night as she would lay in bed, staring out into the impenetrable darkness, would be thankful that Bill had died and not lived long enough to witness what was happening to the town, or for her to be wracked with fear if he were not home from work before sundown. This conflicted with the deep, abiding desire to have him

there with her, to hold her and whisper into her ear that everything would be fine and that she should not fear the dark. A cynical scoff escaped Katelyn's lips. She wondered if this was another side effect of the dark, the guilt-drenched self-admission that Katelyn may be fine with Bill being dead. Was this something she had gone over in therapy? And when was the last time she went to see Doctor Merlock?

Katelyn shook her head, trying to cast off the images and doubts, and in doing so something caught her eye. Katelyn did a double-take, and confirmed what she had seen: a pair of feet sticking out from under some bushes off of the trail. She gasped, stopping dead and turning reflexively towards the bushes. As she approached and rounded the area, Katelyn tensed. What if this was a ploy? What if this was a rapist in wait? She reached into her pocket, for her keychain which contained a small spray can of mace. When she finished rounding the bushes, she gasped again, her hand instinctively letting go of the keychain and flying up to her mouth.

Besides the bushes was a body, blackened, as if set on fire. Katelyn rushed up to the body, kneeling down beside it and pausing, thinking of what to do next. Her hand slid down to one of the wrists, searching for a pulse. Her fingertips brushed against the rugged, crisp exterior of the arm, and Katelyn fought the urge to vomit.

And then a charcoal hand grabbed her wrist.

Katelyn screamed, yanking her arm back with such force that, when the hand let go with ease, she swung back hard and fell. She was still screaming when she scurried away along the ground and stopped when she glanced up and saw the body was not coming after her, but rather was now convulsing.

He's still alive.

The thought stopped Katelyn cold. *He?* How was she sure? Katelyn gave the burnt figure another look. She couldn't be so sure; instinct told her that the body was masculine, in the build of the shoulders and torso. She moved close again, the figure still convulsing but now much slower.

"What can I do?" Katelyn heard herself mutter, and then decided on the only course of action. She took out her cell phone and called for help.

* * * * *

Katelyn, not for the first time, wondered what she was doing here.

She was in the hospital lobby, legs crossed as she sat in her petite chair. The white of the walls was offensive; it had been that way since Bill died. Katelyn recalled the long wait in the room, *in this very room*, and the eventual slow walk by the doctor over to her to inform Katelyn of the inevitable. In being here she was almost reliving the death of her husband, and for the life of her Katelyn could not understand what compelled her to come in the ambulance and stay at the hospital, awaiting word on the survival of a person she didn't even know, much less was likely to survive given their condition. It did not make sense, but then again very little else did when it concerned the darkness.

The Darkness.

That must have been what happened to the poor soul, Katelyn realized. It was similar to what had happened to everyone else caught out in the dark, after sundown, in these past few horrid months. In short order the doctor emerged from the room, asked Katelyn the polite questions: *Were you related to the patient? Were you a friend? I'm sorry to say, they*

didn't make it. Katelyn numbly nodded and shook her head when appropriate, and barely heard the follow-up statements, regarding that the person must have been caught after dark, and that she should head home soon. Katelyn nodded and left, relieved to be away from the hospital, and feeling guilty that it was at the cost of a life.

She stepped out of the hospital and down the street when she saw a parked delivery truck. The man, in a brown shirt and pants, was off-loading some items out of the back of the truck. Katelyn noticed that he was a handsome man, around her age if not a little younger. He was fit, and Katelyn's eyes wandered down his arms and back until she caught herself and screwed her eyes shut for a moment.

Her therapist had warned about the guilt she would feel for finding another man attractive after Bill's death, and had informed her that it was normal to look at another man, that it was not a reflection of her love for Bill or a smear on his memory. Katelyn had nodded and agreed at the time, but here in the moment it was shredding her heart and leaving her head swimming. She opened her eyes and found the delivery man looking at her.

"Are you okay?" he asked, genuine concern in his eyes.

Katelyn felt the blood escape in a rush from her face. To her horror she realized that she had stopped walking when she closed her eyes, and had done so right beside the man's truck.

God, he must think I'm some kind of weirdo, she thought.

"No, no," Katelyn said quickly, shaking her head and waving him off. "I'm fine, just a momentary headache."

The delivery man chuckled. "One hell of a headache, eh?" he said.

Katelyn smiled and laughed, despite herself. "You could say that."

The man turned back to his truck, removing a box and placing it on the handcart. "What's weird is that folks around here seem a bit jumpy. You're not the only from I've seen."

"Really?" was all Katelyn could muster.

"Yeah, I don't get it either. Seems like a nice enough, quiet town." He closed the back of his truck and moved the cart over to the building. He looked back, favoring her with smile that she found unnervingly cute. "Hey, uh, I know this is pretty forward of me—"

"No," Katelyn said, much quicker than she had meant to.

The delivery man looked at her like a bomb had gone off. "Uh, well, I meant to say," he said, trailing off, clearly embarrassed.

"No, no," Katelyn said quickly. "Look, uh, it's just that my husband passed away recently, and I'm not over that yet."

The delivery man nodded quickly. "I'm very sorry to hear that. I didn't know." Looking back at the building, the man said, "Well, you have yourself a good day."

Katelyn muttered "You too," but it came out as an inaudible mess, and she hurried away, before she could embarrass herself further and shed tears in front of the man.

* * * * *

Officer Stimpson looked out into the darkness. "Damn," was all he could say.

"I'm sorry," Esperanza said, a sympathetic hand on his shoulder.

Stimpson nodded and turned towards her. It was not her fault, he kept telling himself, and knew that getting mad at her would not solve his immediate dilemma; namely, that he was late, it was now dark outside, and that there was no way he was leaving until dawn. The

problem was that he was only supposed to come to fill out a report on the burnt body, which probably was another victim of the dark by Stimpson's guess, and that should not have taken too long. Long enough to get back to the station, finish up some paperwork, and get home to his wife.

But arriving at the hospital and finding that Esperanza was working complicated matters. After seeing each other again and having a brief conversation, they made their way to a secluded area of the hospital that Esperanza knew and lost themselves in each other, for much longer than either anticipated.

And now he was stuck at the hospital overnight.

"How am I going to explain this to Helen?" he wondered aloud.

"You could tell her that you're finally leaving her," Esperanza said, the mirth obvious in her voice.

Stimpson looked back at Esperanza with one eye cocked and none too amused. "Funny, Esperanza," he said.

Esperanza shrugged. "You're the one who keeps screwing me," she said, and leaned in and gave him a quick kiss on the lips. "Well, I need to get back. If you're still around later..." She let the words hang between them.

"Oh, you can bet," he said, flashing the maverick smile that helped him with so many ladies, before and after Helen.

After Esperanza left, Stimpson took out his cell phone and made a few phone calls. One was to his chief, Brock, who sounded unconvinced by Stimpson's line of reasoning but let the matter go. Stimpson then phoned his wife, who was even less convinced and hung up the phone with a slam, the last thing Stimpson catching was the sound of their baby crying. With a sigh and a shake of the head, Stimpson returned his cell phone to his pocket. He began to move down the hallway.

"Well, I'm here, so I might as well see the body," he muttered to himself.

* * * * *

In the dream, the Big Hand reached out to her, slowly threatening to suffocate.

Katelyn was in a room, the angles skewed and the shadows inky, diffused. There was a window far across from her, and outside she saw a moon that was a sickly yellow color, like cigarette hands. Katelyn found herself hunched against the wall, knees held tight to her chest. A fear was in the air, and Katelyn's throat was tight. Her eyes shifted quickly, her gaze darting around the room. In one moment, it appeared that the hand was in the corner, shadow fingers making a slow crawl towards her. In another moment, it was reaching down from the ceiling, a shadow god seeking to crush. Katelyn looked back out the window, and saw the hand crushing the moon. Panic seeped in; were the moon to go out, she would be left in darkness, and with that Katelyn screamed.

Katelyn woke up, sitting up in bed, her shirt damp. She took slow breaths in bed, waiting for the reality of the moment to sink in. Afterward, she swung her legs over the side of the bed, and walked over to the window. She stared up, trying to see the moon, or stars, or other signs of life.

Instead, there was only darkness.

* * * * *

Stimpson's memory drifted to the first time his father told him that his mother was leaving.

There had been the usual arguing and yelling, but Stimpson, even at age nine, had learned to simply go to his room and wait for the storm to blow over, as it inevitably did. There were accusations and words that Stimpson did not know, but it mattered little to him. He pulled out the latest issue of *Weird Comics* and proceeded to read. Several minutes later the screaming subsided, and for several more minutes there was only silence. Stimpson, after finishing his issue, left his room and meandered down the hall to his parents' room.

Daring to peak in, he saw his mother with a suitcase on the bed, and packing clothes in it. His father was by their window. His dad turned his attention towards him, and walked over to him, in the most eerie, calm manner. He knelt down beside his son, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"Son," he began, "your mom's leaving us."

"Go to hell, Jimmy," his mother spat, directed at his father.

"It's true, you lying whore! You're leaving, ain't ya'?"

His mom slammed the suitcase shut. "And you're the reason, Jimmy!"

"I thought it was that other fella', what's his name? Robert or something?"

"At least he doesn't have a bottle in his hand more than he has a job."

"Mom," Stimpson said, the numbness wearing off, "mom, you're not really leaving, right?"

His mother spared him a sad, distant glance, and then turned back to her suitcase. "I'm sorry, baby boy." She picked up the suitcase and moved out of the room.

Stimpson followed on her heels. "Mom, no! Mom, no!"

His mother turned to him, again with those sad eyes. "You'll be fine here with your father. A boy needs his father."

Stimpson threw his arms around his mother. "No, mommy! Don't go! Please, no!"

But she simply hugged him, and looked at him again with the haunted eyes.

"See? She don't care about you," he remembered his father saying, from the bedroom doorway.

His mother gave his father a withering look, and looked back at Stimpson. "Now, you know that's not true." She sighed, and Stimpson saw tears hidden behind the wall of her calm. "Be good, baby boy." And she got up and walked out of his life.

And after all of these years, after the last time that he saw his mother, it was those same haunted eyes that came back to him. It was those same eyes that came to him at night, staring out into the unfathomable darkness, as well as now, as he had stood over the burnt body in the hospital morgue. It was in the moments following beginning his report, and his examination of the body, when its hand inexplicably shot up towards his throat, calloused fingers gripping his throat, and the light-headedness that filled him as darkness threatened to overtake him. And in that darkness, he saw the eyes of his mother, and at the end he could not tell if they were of pity or disappointment...

TO BE CONTINUED

“The Memory of Darkness” Part Two

The Story So Far.....

A deadly darkness engulfs Evansburg each night, burning anyone caught outside. Gretchen runs for home but is consumed before she can escape.

Katelyn, a grieving widow, discovers a charred yet living man. He dies in the hospital, where Officer Stimpson later investigates—only to be strangled by the corpse.

Meanwhile, the Doctor’s ship, the TARDIS, is invaded by the darkness. Disoriented, he appears outside Katelyn’s window, desperately pounding on the glass before it shatters—letting the darkness in.

And then, all is black.

Katelyn felt the weight of bags under her eyes that she thought was reserved for women much older than herself.

Sleep had been awful, between the dreams and the disconcerting quiet moments of staring up at the ceiling. Katelyn had recently purchased a night light and kept it by her bed. As silly as she had felt, Katelyn found that she slept better with it on, as it was better than being drowned in darkness. Sometimes she would turn over in bed and find herself gazing outside, into the sea of black that rose up to her window, and in some moments she believed that she could find someone staring in at her. The moment was always brief, and in less than a blink they were gone, but she could swear there were pale faces there, with sad or hollow eyes. Once she ran up to the window, but nothing was there. She pressed her forehead against it, half-afraid that the darkness would somehow reach in and grab her, and in the next moment feeling tempted to open her window and see if the darkness would flood in like the ocean and drown her. Katelyn's hands slid down to the bottom of the window, her fingers unlatching it, and then she held still. Her hands were shaking, and wondered if it would hurt, if the darkness would take her quickly. She thought of Bill, and wondered if she would see him again. Her hands tensed on the window.

In a swift motion, Katelyn stepped away.

She moved back to her bed, collapsing in a sobbing heap. Outside, the darkness continued to stare in at her.

At the first light of dawn, dispelling the dark like dandelion puffs, Jennifer was rushing to pack everything that she could.

She had decided that she would not tell her mother or her boyfriend. They would probably try to stop her, or convince her otherwise. She was not even going to call out of work today. She only had one overriding thought: try to escape the dark.

Jennifer did not understand why everyone seemed to be afraid enough to not try to escape, or get help, or talk about the dark. But she had had enough, and she was going to escape. Take what she could, and just drive.

Just drive.

When Katelyn awoke, her first thoughts drifted back to the burnt body she had found in the park.

As she got out of bed and began to get ready for her day- brush her teeth, shower, and cook breakfast- her thoughts returned to that of the body, and felt that there was something that she overlooked, something *vital*, and it was gnawing at her for some inexplicable reason. By the time breakfast was ready, she had dismissed the entire notion and began to plan out her day. When she had dipped her bacon in the eggs, Katelyn was pondering the body again, and by the time her toast had soaked up the last bit of yolk she had resolved to stop by the hospital and talk to the doctor. Surely, someone had performed an autopsy by now, or gained new information. Maybe they would provide some bit of insight that would click and she would realize what it was that had been nagging at her. Maybe then, she could sleep a little bit easier again.

"Stimpson's dead," Chief Braddock said, for the second time. Katelyn still could not believe it.

She had walked down to the hospital and inquired about the body that had been brought in. To her surprise, she had been directed to Chief Braddock, who was not only on site but also quite disturbed about something. Katelyn had known Braddock for years; her father and the Chief had served together in Vietnam. She had approached him about the body, only to be informed of the officer's death.

"And that's not all," he said. "The body is gone."

That made Katelyn recoil. "The body?"

"Yes."

"The burnt one? The one I found in the park." Katelyn's tone was incredulous.

Braddock held back his annoyance. "Yes, that one. I don't know what kind of sicko would kill an officer and steal a corpse, but apparently 'crazy' came to this town in spades." The Chief released a heavy sigh.

“Uh,” Katelyn mustered, still in shock, “do you have any leads?”

The Chief scoffed bitterly. “No, and the hell of it is that none of the video cameras caught anyone leaving the building. I mean, who would? It was night. But I've had my men sweep the building and there is no sign of the perp or the body.”

“So, what are you going to do?” Katelyn asked.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, with the murder and the body?”

The Chief shook his head. “What can we do? We'll have to investigate.”

“Why don't you get help?”

The Chief let out a sardonic laugh. “What, you mean from outside of town?”

Katelyn's face instantly felt flush. She recognized the tone in his voice. It was the same tone her father would use on her when he was being condescending. Katelyn was not in the mood. Standing her ground, she responded, “Yes, I mean from outside of town. The FBI or something. Someone with the resources to help us!”

The Chief shook his head. “You mean help us with the dark, right?”

“Yes!”

“Katelyn, you know that's impossible.”

“Why does it have to be impossible? Our phones work! Our computers work! How hard is it to let the rest of the world know what's happening here?”

The Chief's patience was wearing out quickly. “Because you know what happens! You know what happens when we've tried to get help!”

“That doesn't mean that we just give up!” Katelyn's hands were balled into fists, and she was shaking. “We just can't... can't...” Katelyn felt the energy leave her, draining away with her nervous energy. “We just can't waste away here,” she said at last.

The Chief placed a sympathetic hand on her shoulder. “Nobody wants that, Katelyn. And believe me, you're not the only one frustrated, or who has expressed what you're feeling. But the problem is, we can't. Maybe eventually, but not right now.” He allowed a beat to pass between them, and at last he said, “Go on. I've got some paperwork to finish here. If you come across anything that could help us, please let us know.”

Katelyn nodded numbly, and turned to quickly leave. Before she knew it she was out of the lobby and half-way home.

Katelyn's mind was a haze of confusion and anger as she walked home.

The Chief's dismissal of her idea to get help bothered her, and while she kept telling herself it was nothing personal- she had known the man most of her life, after all - Katelyn could not get past the idea of how defeated he seemed. Of how they *all* seemed.

Looking around, she felt as though she was seeing the town through new eyes. A casual glance would reveal nothing; people going on and living their lives with little to no visible worries. Look deeper, past the facade and the ill-attempts at calm, and Katelyn could see the worry. She could see how on edge the people around her were, the darkness haunting them even now, in the brightest hours of the day. No one was living for the moment or taking comfort in the light; they were all enslaved to the darkness, waiting until they needed to scurry home and hide under their beds. *How had their spirits been so quickly broken?* Katelyn wondered.

It was in looking around that she caught sight of Jennifer Paulson.

Katelyn was not very close to Jennifer, but it had been a while since she had seen her, and waved at Jennifer. Jennifer squinted and slowed down the vehicle as she looked over. Katelyn rushed over to the side of the car.

"Hi, Jen," she said, and immediately tried to suppress the urge to recoil in surprise. Her friend looked haggard, with deep, sagging darkness under her eyes and hair hastily pulled back in a pony tail, errant strands jutting out from the band.

"Hey, Katelyn," Jen said. Her voice was low and distracted.

"Hey, I happened to see you driving by, and I didn't know if maybe you could give me a lift home."

"No," Jen said, voice shaky but flat.

Katelyn was taken aback by this. "Uh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to--"

"I'm getting out of here," Jen said, her voice now threatening to crack under immense pressure. "I have to get out of this town."

Katelyn leaned forward. "Jen, what are you talking about?"

"Before it gets dark!" Jen cried out, and Katelyn flushed with embarrassment, reflexively looking around to see if anyone was listening.

"Jen, listen," Katelyn said, putting steel in her voice, "you can't go. You know that you can't!"

"I don't care! I just need to get out of here, before it gets dark." Jen began to sob, her hands curled into pathetic fists against her mouth.

"Jen, look, I know this hasn't been easy, and I wish we could understand just what the hell is going on, but... but it's too dangerous."

"I don't care."

"Now, you know you don't believe that. Look, why don't you come back to my house and I can fix you up some tea, and we'll talk about this, okay?"

Jen's head began to shake, slowly at first and then with purpose. "No, no, no. I'm sorry, I have to go."

"Jen, wait!"

The car's motor revved loudly, and the tired squealed in useless defiance. Jen's car was off and gone around a corner before Katelyn knew it. Katelyn's mouth was left hanging open for a few moments, before she composed herself. And not for the first time, Katelyn wondered when this madness would end.

The water felt good across Jennifer's back.

She sat in the motel shower, allowing the cool water to trace waterfalls down her back and rivulets down her shoulders and chest. Her back ached, and her she was more tired than she could remember. But there was something soothing in the water and in the isolation that was richer than anything she had tasted in years.

Jennifer had lost track of exactly how long she had driven – five or six hours she had imagined. She was far from her home town, and she had not bothered to stop for food or a bathroom break. The more distance she could put between herself and the accursed town, the more at peace she would be. As it turned night, a panic set in, conditioned from the last few months of living at Evansburg. But as she drove, and nothing happened to her, or the

cars and people around her, the more at ease she became. When Jennifer had decided to finally stop for the night, she marveled at the stars; it had been so long since she had seen them, and she never considered how much she would miss them. After paying for the night, she had entered her room and jumped into the shower, wishing the water could turn the recent nightmare into filth that would easily wash away.

When she finished her shower, Jennifer dressed in her sleepwear and, after catching a little bit of the late news, fell asleep.

A noise in the dark scared Jennifer awake.

She awoke and lay frozen, terrified to look at where the noise had come from. The tension loosened when she saw the vague light reflecting from the outside lamps onto her closed window blinds. Stretching out, she peered over the side of the bed, and sat up and looked around. She crawled forward on the bed and finally found what had made the noise: the television remote, which Jennifer had remembered being too tired to place on the table, but rather just flicked aside on the bed when she rolled over to sleep. Despite her mood, she chuckled at herself, and picked up the controller and laid it on the table. Jennifer collapsed back on the bed, glancing at the blinds. Her thoughts were a kaleidoscope, of her boyfriend, her parents, and the town she had left behind. Jennifer felt a strange pang of regret in remembering her boyfriend, and in how she had left him without warning, but she was left with little choice; it's not as though he would have gone with her. Brad was always playing it safe, urging caution, and that grated on her nerves like few things could. In a way it was why they were good for each other, she mused; he tempered her drive and hotheadedness.

Most times. But not today.

Jennifer blinked a few times before noticing the blinds looked odd. It took another moment to realize what was strange: it was getting dark outside, and quickly.

Jennifer slowly sat up again. She tried to wrap her head around what was happening. It was *already* dark outside, so something was dimming the lamp light. But she soon realized this would be impossible; the light was disappearing, as if swiped from left to right. The shadows in the room began to grow fuller, drunk with the absence of light. The slow swipe sauntered across the blinds with a deliberate purpose. The darkness was so deep, so determined...

So organic, Jennifer thought, every ounce of her filling with horror.

Her reaction was to pull the blankets over herself, the trapped atmosphere quickly growing warm and stale with her rapid breathing. Tears found their way down her face, involuntary and unwelcome.

"Please," she whispered, "no."

And then she felt her legs and hands sink into the bed, a heaviness filling the air and her body as she was dragged down, like into quicksand. Jennifer went to scream, but it was too late; the darkness enveloped her, and all she could feel was the burning of every part of her, cutting down to her soul.

And then there was nothing at all.

Katelyn sat on her couch, staring out the window into the rich darkness, wondering not for the first time if she had gone mad.

How could a town be contained by burning darkness, night after night, for these past months? What kind of spell was cast over Evansburg that no one else was capable of noticing and that psychologically broke the inhabitants? Katelyn finished the glass of wine in her hand, and contemplated filling another glass, but decided to hold off for the moment.

The darkness soon became dotted with spectral figures, aimlessly strolling. Katelyn stood, walking up to the window to get a better view, her curiosity piqued yet tempered with fear. This was a new development, and considering the months of pure darkness, Katelyn almost welcomed the change. She found it difficult to make out the faces, but she was certain that they were people, or at the very least in the shape of people. They did not appear to be looking in any specific direction or walking with a purpose. They simply were, and there was something in this that Katelyn found profoundly disturbing.

A moment later, she saw Jennifer, and jumped back.

Jennifer- or a ghostly doppelganger of her- was the closest to her window, about twenty feet away, and was walking by. She then stopped, and looked directly at Katelyn, which caused her heart to freeze. Jennifer's countenance was somber, and she was staring right at Katelyn, but the moment soon passed and Jennifer turned away and moved on. Katelyn craned her neck, struggling to keep an eye on Jennifer as she moved on. Once she could no longer see her, Katelyn turned to face forward again, and saw another apparition, much closer this time. It was of an older man, with a hard face, crags etched into his skin and dour, disapproving eyes. Katelyn involuntarily stepped back, her hands trembling, as the old man's eyes burned through her. She felt sick, and before she knew it she had collapsed to the floor and wretched. The convulsions were so strong that she dug her nails into the wood floor, every moment a blow to the stomach. Almost as quickly it was over, and Katelyn spat and rolled away, a wave of dizziness overcoming her. She fought the urge to look up at the window, the fear of the old man being there overwhelming. After a few moments, she looked up and saw nothing but darkness, and after gathering her strength, she stood. Katelyn took slow, uneasy steps to the window, and saw that the old man was gone. In his place, she saw a peculiar looking man walking through the darkness.

The man had a wild mane of dark hair, and his clothing was old, as if from the Victorian era, complete with a waistcoat, vest and what looked like silk cravat. Katelyn watched the man with rapt curiosity, her sickness momentarily forgotten, wondering if these were indeed ghosts wondering through the darkness. And then she noticed something even stranger.

The man was walking straight towards her.

Katelyn doubted that this was the case until he was almost upon her. She stepped back, and the figure extended his hand, flattening his palm against the glass. Katelyn then saw him raise his hand, curl it into a fist, and begin pounding on the glass, screaming something that Katelyn could not understand. The window shook underneath the violent pounding.

"No!" Katelyn cried out, horrified at the thought of the specter- and the dark- entering her home. "Stop that! Stop!"

But the apparition ignored her, and continued to pound against the glass and loudly rambling on about something, but Katelyn could not understand him. She stepped back

toward the couch, and considered running, until she realized there was nowhere to run if the darkness entered.

“Please, stop that! Stop!”

A hairline crack appeared on the window.

“Stop!” Katelyn's voice was a shrill scream.

Another pounding, and the glass became a spider's web, long lanky strands swimming out.

Katelyn grabbed her head, pulling at her hair and screaming.

Soon, the window shattered. Katelyn could only stare, speechless, as darkness flooded the room like a malignant sea...

TO BE CONTINUED

“The Memory of Darkness” Part Three

The Story So Far.....

The darkness is spreading.

The TARDIS is invaded by a darkness which consumes the Doctor.

A small town is held hostage by pure darkness that arrives in the evening, choking out the stars and streets, burning anything it touches. Any attempts to flee are futile, as the darkness appears to follow. A local woman, Katelyn, soon finds herself trapped in her home at night, with a spectral wild-haired figure banging on the window, smashing it, and allowing the darkness in...

Katelyn stumbled back, her throat not daring to unleash a scream as the darkness flooded the room.

She cowered, reflexively pulling back as the darkness poured in and painted the room, covering suffocating the walls and floor. Her joints stiffened as it rushed over her, and Katelyn waited for the inevitable burning to consume her. Eyes shut, fingernails clawing into her hunched knees, she uttered a small prayer.

And then nothing.

After a few seconds passed, Katelyn dared open her eyes. Paradoxically, although everything around her was dark, she could see. Katelyn's brain stuttered at the thought and had difficulty wrapping around the concept, until she realized that it was analogous to eyes adjusting when awakening in the middle of the night. Katelyn could make out vague outlines of the contours of her room and furniture, and over by the window where the strange man resided.

The strange man, she reminded herself.

In the impossible adjustment of her eyes, Katelyn could see him standing at the window, staring in at her, wild hair defiant. Her mind raced: was moonlight penetrating the

darkness? Katelyn failed to see any source of light, but she was still able to discern the man. He raised a hand and beckoned Katelyn, and turned away from the window.

“What?” Katelyn asked, and felt a twinge of embarrassment at doing so. *Who am I talking to? What am I doing alive?* A spike impaled her heart as a thought occurred to her: *What if I'm already dead?*

Breathing slowly but firmly, Katelyn looked down, and considered her predicament. She was still on solid ground, or whatever passed for it. Her lungs welcomed breath. Resolve hardening, Katelyn stood, her legs finally releasing the tension with an achy reluctance. Still feeling uncertain about the ground beneath her, Katelyn took slow, tentative steps towards the window. She found the glass had completely vanished, as if it had melted by the darkness. Peeking through, she looked around and saw nothing but eternal night. Looking back ahead, Katelyn saw the figure of the strange man moving further away, and she quickly hopped through the window to follow. Katelyn landed awkwardly, and almost tripped over as she tried to regain her footing. After stabilizing herself, Katelyn headed off after the man.

Katelyn followed briskly, and found her mind settling down, the rapid-fire intensity of the last several minutes giving way to a more focused demeanor to which Katelyn was accustomed. It began with the strange man; Katelyn noticed that he did, in fact, have a spectral glow about him; a subtle, pale radiance that made it easier to track him, despite her ocular adjustment. Another observation she made was that, although she should be walking down Levenshoe Street on this side of her house, the layout of the darkness did not conform to her home town.

“It's like I've fallen through the rabbit hole,” Katelyn whispered to herself.

And that's when she saw more spectral beings in the dark.

They were not close-by, and neither were they making any motion towards her. Katelyn saw the ghostly figures moving about listlessly through the dark. Katelyn saw that one was a woman in a long dress that reminded her of one her mother favored on Sundays, and another was a boy with a bat and ball on his hands, kneeling on the ground. Katelyn's eyes kept returning to the strange man, who continued to walk unwaveringly ahead through the dark. Katelyn looked to the side again, and that's when she saw *him* again.

The Old Man.

Katelyn jumped back as the ancient-looking spectral figure glared at her, teeth bared and hatred pouring off of him waves. Katelyn yelped and jumped back. The Old Man failed to motion towards her, and Katelyn hazarded a glance back at the strange man she was following. Katelyn found that he had turned back towards her and in doing so his presence was vaguely brighter. She saw him waving at her, beckoning her with urgency. Katelyn broke off in a run, looking back only to ascertain whether the Old Man was chasing her, or as irrational fear overtook her, whether he was directly behind her like a horror movie villain. To her relief, he had not budged from his spot, but continued to openly display his contempt for her.

Katelyn's relief was short-lived, as right after she heard a piercing scream from a thousand voices surrounding her in the darkness. She snapped back around again, and instead of the Old Man, found a horde of spectral monstrosities in a crowd not too far behind, and all facing towards her.

They were from out of a nightmare. Some had the heads of decomposed horses, flesh barely masking bones and dripping maggots, connected to round, mottled bodies and hundreds of tiny arachnid legs. Others were tentacled blob monstrosities, transparent with

roiling innards and lobster claw-like appendages. There were more, but Katelyn turned back towards the strange man, who was now frantically motioning for her to follow, and who then took off at a run. Katelyn followed, feeling the monstrous screams behind her clinging to her and violating her flesh. For a terrifying moment, Katelyn lost track of the man, and thought that he may have vanished completely. As Katelyn gained speed, she soon saw him again, up ahead, having stopped.

Stopped? Katelyn almost screamed. *What the hell are you doing?* The screams grew loud, and her lungs burned.

And then she saw it.

The man had stopped in front of a tall, oblong shape, and was fiddling with something. To her surprise, Katelyn found that she could make out that the object was a shade of blue, and that it was a box of some sort. Her mind raced with questions, but found that she could only think of the nightmares chasing her.

The man turned back to her, and pointed towards the box, and entered it.

Katelyn almost laughed from frustration and anger. Had the man really just entered that box, and did he really expect it to save them?

The nightmarish cries were almost upon her. Katelyn decided to give the man the benefit of the doubt.

Not risking a glance back, Katelyn rushed headlong for the box. She felt icy cold tentacles brushing up against her back, and she felt sick from the fear and her exertion.

She was almost there.

If this doesn't work, hopefully it'll be a quick death, she thought, and leapt into the darkness of the box.

Everything was cold.

Light streamed in through staccato waves. Everything was gray light and bitter, bitter cold.

Katelyn eyes focused, and she realized that it was underwater.

Part of her panicked, but it subsided almost as quickly. Katelyn gave into the tranquility around her; she was floating in water and despite breathing slowly, she found herself not filling with awful, frigid death. It was a beautiful sensation, and Katelyn embraced the icy womb. Part of her considered the effects that such extreme cold could have; Katelyn was certain it would lead to death, but it felt so peaceful, so beautiful. If so, then what could be more beautiful than death? Katelyn allowed herself to sink deeper, her mind growing foggy with cold embrace. She looked up again, and something caught her eye.

Above the surface, there was a figure standing at the edge of the water. It was a man, and Katelyn was certain that she recognized him. Effortlessly, she pivoted in the weightlessness of the water, and began to swim lazily towards the surface. As she drew closer, the man's face came into focus.

Bill.

Her mouth shot open, and for the first time, Katelyn felt the choke of the icy water in her throat. "Bill!" she cried.

He looked down at her, eyes sad, mouth a grim line.

Katelyn kicked her legs to reach the surface, but came upon the ice ceiling. Her fists pounded on the transparent wall, crying his name. The man Katelyn loved turned and walked away.

Katelyn uttered one final scream.

Katelyn was still screaming, even when she realized that the strange man with the wild brown hair was holding her.

"It's all right! It's all right!" he said, voice raised in concern.

Katelyn was breathing hard, looking around and feeling vertigo gripping her at the edge of her senses. She was in a large room, with a cathedral ceiling and blackened walls. To her side she found a dais, on which a strange-looking console with various buttons and gears which appeared to have been gathered from a curio shop. Katelyn's body was shivering, and her attention snapped back to the man.

"Wh...who are you?" she said.

The man smiled. "I'm the Doctor. I'm glad to finally have made your acquaintance."

Katelyn's eyes narrowed. "Katelyn," she said dazedly, and then, "Finally?" She coughed. "What do you mean? Have we met?"

The Doctor smiled. "In a manner of speaking, yes." He stood, sweeping his arms down his sides. "Although, I didn't quite look like this."

Katelyn shook her head. "What are you talking about?"

He shook his head, still smiling. "That burnt body you found?"

Katelyn nodded.

"That was me."

TO BE CONCLUDED

“The Memory of Darkness” Part Four

The Story So Far.....

Katelyn is pulled into the darkness but inexplicably survives. She follows a spectral figure—the Doctor—through a twisted, nightmarish landscape filled with lost souls and horrifying creatures. Chased by monstrous entities, she barely escapes into the Doctor’s mysterious blue box, the TARDIS.

Inside, she learns the truth: the burned body she found was the Doctor, healing from the darkness that attacked his ship. Worse, he reveals that Katelyn herself unknowingly triggered a psychic connection to him, tying her to the events unfolding.

As the darkness tightens its grip, Katelyn realizes she may be the key to stopping it—but first, she must face a truth buried deep in her past.

“That’s impossible!” Katelyn cried, staring wide-eyed at the man who called himself the Doctor.

The Doctor chuckled lightly, looking down, lost in thought. Katelyn noticed the lack of humor in his laugh and the crow’s feet around his eyes. His presence betrayed his age, and those eyes radiated a weariness Katelyn found unsettling.

“I get that a lot, actually,” he said, looking back at her.

Katelyn looked around at the console room. “Okay, well... I still don’t understand.” She looked at the console. “None of this makes any sense.”

The Doctor nodded, and stood, helping Katelyn up right after. He walked over to the console and began tapping a few keys. Katelyn saw his hands work the rustic controls like a virtuoso pianist, and something about his demeanor put her at ease.

“No, I would imagine not.” He took in a sharp breath. “This place you’re in is my home, called the TARDIS. It *travels*... well, the details are not important right now. However, let’s just say that, during my travels, something... invaded it.”

Katelyn caught something in the tone of his voice. "It... violated this place?"

The Doctor gave her a side-long glance. "Yes, you could say that. This... *darkness...* swept over everything and badly burned my body, to say nothing of the damage it caused the TARDIS. The ship started to lose temporal cohesion-

"What?" Katelyn blurted.

After another intake of breath, the Doctor proceeded with a tone Katelyn imagined that he reserved for children, or uncomprehending fools such as herself. "It lost the ability to maintain cohesion, to hold itself together. We just barely materialized in your home town, though during the process I was shunted from the TARDIS. I had gone into a healing trance, and not a moment too soon, as I was close to... well, that's not important, either."

Katelyn snapped her fingers and pointed at the Doctor. "The double heartbeat! That's what was wrong with you when I found you!"

The Doctor stiffened. "Well, I wouldn't say that was something 'wrong' with me, my dear lady."

"Wait... 'healing trance'? And..." Katelyn's hand flew to her mouth, and with eyes wide, she took a few steps back.

Concern etched itself into the Doctor's eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Officer Ferguson! He... he was watching you... and we found him, dead, and you were missing!"

The Doctor put both hands up defensively. "No, no, no, no! Listen... I... I was disoriented, and I woke up, and there was this man there- Officer Ferguson, you said, hmm? Yes, and well, I did not attack him! I awoke from my trance, and I didn't mean to startle him. It was all very traumatic, you see, and... and he had a heart attack! I swear to you, that's what happened. I was too disoriented to help, and I sensed the TARDIS near-by, so I left. It was here that I had to go in order to complete my healing. Please, you have to believe me... I would never have hurt him."

Something in the earnest nature made it easy to believe him, but Katelyn was still unsure. She stuttered a few times before finally spitting out, "Why did you appear at my window?"

"Because of this," he said, pointing at a screen on his console.

Katelyn took tentative steps towards the Doctor, and looked at the console screen. On it was the phrase "Error 71."

Katelyn looked at the Doctor. "What does that mean?"

"It's a warning, of a telepathic attack on the TARDIS."

Katelyn shrugged. "So, what does that have to do with me?"

"It has everything to do with you," the Doctor said. "You caused it."

In a moment, the world changed.

Katelyn found herself no longer in the strange, cavernous console room. In the blink of an eye, she was in a nondescript living room, with pale cream curtains and brown furniture. It took a moment for Katelyn to realize where she was.

"Look familiar?" the Doctor asked.

Katelyn jumped, and turned around to find the Doctor standing behind her.

"What the hell is going on?" she screamed.

“What?” His visage was of pure innocence.

“This... this place!” Katelyn's heart was pounding. The room felt like it was getting uncomfortably hot. She tugged at her shirt.

“You know this place, then?” the Doctor asked again, calm.

“Yes. This... this looks like where I grew up.”

The Doctor nodded, looking around. “Interesting curtains.”

“Why are you doing this to me?” she asked.

“I'm not doing this. *You* are.”

Katelyn laughed. “What kind of trick are you playing on me?”

The Doctor's demeanor grew serious. “I can assure you, I'm not playing any kind of game. You attacked my TARDIS, and you brought us here.”

“But you're acting like I have some kind of - I don't know - super-powers! I don't have anything like that!”

“On the contrary, Katelyn, you are remarkably gifted. You have a good amount of PSI-abilities, though raw. That's how you were drawn to me in the first place, and why you helped me to the hospital. Your latent telepathic abilities hooked into mine, like a lodestone. That's how I was able to appear to you at your window.”

“But... but you shattered my window!”

“That was just a manifestation of me breaking through your psychic defenses. You've done all the hard work, such as bringing us here.”

Katelyn looked around, incredulously. “You mean, I brought us here, back through time?”

“Oh, no no. We're not back in time. You've drawn us into your mind. You created this simulacrum of your childhood home.”

Katelyn moved towards the Doctor, terror in her eyes as she gripped his coat. “We have to leave, *now*. Please, help me. We have to go!”

The Doctor shook his head. “No. There's a reason why we're here, and we have to discover why. Somehow, the darkness is tied in with this house.”

The Doctor extricated himself from Katelyn and moved about the room. He looked at the various picture frames on the walls and tables, each filled with blank pictures that were ripped. The Doctor stepped over to a closet and opened the door. It was empty save for a stuffed dog, which was ripped in two. The Doctor closed the closet door and stepped over to another door.

“That leads to the basement,” Katelyn said.

“Of course, then, this is where the monster lives,” the Doctor said cheerily, and opened the door.

As he did, the door was thrown open as flames billowed out from the basement. The Doctor was thrown back, landing by Katelyn's feet. She crouched in a scream, then twisted to place her arms around the Doctor to help him stand.

From the basement emerged a figure.

The Old Man, Katelyn recognized.

“Father,” she said in a hoarse whisper, her mental blocks falling.

The Old Man was covered in flames, his skin roiling with liquid fire. He roared at her, his voice causing the entire house to shake and the picture frames to shatter. Katelyn was crying as she dug her head into the Doctor's shoulders.

"You must be incredibly thirsty," the Doctor said calmly, as the Old Man sent flames shooting out from his hand, covering the Doctor and Katelyn, and consuming the entire house, and then the entire world.

Then everything became dark.

"I think I understand," Katelyn heard the Doctor say.

She opened her eyes, and for a moment, wondered if she had. Everything was dark around them, as if they stood alone in a void. Her eyes adjusted, and impossibly, she saw the Doctor standing next to her.

"Don't be surprised," he told her. "We're still in your mind. Why shouldn't we be able to see?"

Katelyn nodded, at a loss for words.

"He abused you, didn't he? He abused you, and you suppressed memories of him, didn't you?"

Katelyn nodded weakly. "He did so many horrible things to me... He liked to smoke, you know? And... and he would burn my feet with cigarettes before I'd go to school, because he knew no one could see them, and they'd hurt like hell all day, with every step. 'So you'll have something to remind you of me all day,' he'd tell me." Katelyn looked down. "So when I was old enough, I burnt the house down with that bastard in it. Made it look like he fell asleep in bed with a lit cigarette."

"And that was it, then?" the Doctor said.

"I had reoccurring nightmares with him for a long time afterward, until I met my husband, Bill. Then they went away for a while. But Bill died in a skiing accident last year, and then a few months ago..." Katelyn's voice trailed off.

"The darkness came, didn't it? And with it, burning anyone who was caught in it."

Katelyn nodded. "Oh, God," she said, giving way to tears. "It's all my fault! The darkness, the deaths..."

The Doctor grabbed Katelyn by the shoulders. "But don't you see? It's *not* your fault. What I sensed from your father was much more than a memory, much more powerful than guilt."

Katelyn looked at him in confusion. "What?"

"I sensed a presence when we confronted your father. Katelyn, *that's him*. You have telepathic powers, right? I believe that you inherited those abilities from your father. And that, when he died, he transferred his consciousness and hid in yours for all of these years. *He's* the one that has been causing the burning darkness, not you."

"But... if that's true..."

The Doctor's face was grim. "If he was able to invade my TARDIS, then that means he is growing incredibly strong. And I don't want to imagine what he could be capable of if left unchecked." The Doctor looked around, then back at Katelyn. "Katelyn, listen to me. You need to concentrate. Take us back to the TARDIS. We need to go there in order to work out a solution. Can you do that?"

Katelyn nodded, and closed her eyes. Within moments, they were back in the TARDIS console room.

The Doctor clapped his hands together. "Very well, let's-"

The TARDIS rocked, and the Doctor tripped forward, narrowly avoiding hitting his head on the console. Katelyn looked back, and saw her father in the room with them, engulfed in flames and hate.

"You can never be rid of me," he said firmly, voice stern and cold, as the TARDIS shook more violently.

Katelyn barely made it over to the Doctor, gripping onto the console next to him. She saw her father unleash flames through the console room, burning through the walls and consuming the vast interior.

"Doctor!" she cried out.

The Doctor was frantically working the controls. "He's grown too powerful! He's beginning to destroy the TARDIS from within, collapsing its dimensions!"

"What can we do?"

The Doctor's face hardened. "I can't separate him from you, but..." He looked over at Katelyn, eyes dimming slightly.

"What?" she cried.

"I can... I can de-age you, here within the TARDIS. Take you back along your timeline, before he infected your consciousness. It may be our only chance."

Katelyn met her father's, and saw the same look she remembered from youth: utter disgust and apathy. Katelyn's heart stiffened with steely resolve.

"Do it."

"Katelyn, listen to me. You won't remember any of this. Your life, your friends, you husband... all of that will be taken away from you!"

"That bastard already took enough away from me, and from everyone else." She paused. "I can't live with myself, even if it is his fault." Katelyn leaned in. "Do it."

The Doctor met her gaze, and then proceeded to type in the appropriate commands. Finally, his finger hovered over the EXECUTE button. "I wish-"

And the Doctor's world was ablaze.

Katelyn saw the Doctor light up, and fly across the room. Looking back, she saw her father, with a hand outstretched, pouring flames over the Doctor.

"No!" she screamed.

Her father smiled. "Don't worry, I'm not going to burn him up too fast. I want him to slow roast." He then looked at her. "And then I'm going to take my time with you."

Katelyn felt the bile rise in her throat, and the world twisted around her. She looked back at the Doctor, where flames danced around him in a teasing cycle of pain.

"Katelyn!" he cried out, and then she knew what she had to do.

Katelyn stepped over to the console, and looked down at the console. She looked back at her father.

"See you in Hell," she said, and then slammed down her finger on the EXECUTE button.

Katelyn was engulfed with a strange sensation. The TARDIS room began to spin, and she heard her father scream. She saw the Doctor no longer in flames, and reaching out to her. The world turned sideways, and she heard herself say, "Thank you." Everything was shrinking. *Like Alice*, Katelyn thought, before wondering what that meant. And she saw a gentle face, a man, staring down at her, with what she recognized as love in his eyes, and a vague memory of a distant time and place washed over her briefly, where this man's voice simply said, "I love you." And Katelyn wanted to respond, but found that she could not speak, but the words danced across her mind.

*I love you too, Bill. You were the best thing to never happen to me.
And then she remembered nothing at all.*

Every night, an unnatural darkness blankets Evansburg, burning anyone caught outside. The town lives in fear, unable to escape its grip. When Katelyn discovers a charred but living man, she is drawn into a terrifying mystery—one tied to her own buried past.

As the enigmatic Doctor arrives, hunted by the same relentless force, Katelyn must face horrifying truths about the darkness and herself. With time running out, she and the Doctor race to stop an ancient evil before it consumes everything. But to defeat the darkness, Katelyn must confront the most terrifying enemy of all—her own memories.

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