

THE NIGHT VISITORS:

The bedroom was dark when Annie sat up, sucking in a ragged breath. Her white walls were tinged a deep blue, indicating the time was somewhere between midnight and pre-dawn.

They were coming.

"Please, no" she whispered to herself, frantically reaching out in the darkness to pull her ancient sage green quilt up around her body as if the fabric could keep them at bay, as if it's a collective mass of fibers could keep her safe.

Her heart began to pound out a warning against her ribcage, but Annie did not attempt to get out of bed. It didn't matter where she was in the house, they would find her.

Shuffling against the mattress, Annie pushed herself up against her headboard, feeling the mahogany wood dig deep into her spine. She curled her knees up beneath her nightgown, clutching them to her body to make herself as small, as unnoticeable, as was possible.

She had inadvertently chosen to wear her favorite one to bed--an off-white cotton shift, with small red poppies stitched into it.

"Please, God, no" she whispered to herself again.

Her blue eyes shifted frantically from the large, rectangular window, to the bedroom door, both on the opposite wall of her bed.

When she was younger, she had believed that having her bed flat against one wall, rather than in the middle of the room, would make her feel safer. She could tuck herself up against the wall and watch all entry points to the room with ease.

But that was before the first time they carried her straight through the wall.

Annie was six the first time she was abducted.

It was late, and she had rearranged her limbs for what felt like the thousandth time that night. Her father had been relocated to the Air Force Base in Charleston, South Carolina, and it had been hard for her to adjust to the new house, to her new life. She was shifting her blankets around when she first began to feel it.

Frowning, she stopped and stared down at her stomach. There was a faint, almost ticklish sensation around her belly button, as if someone prodded their finger through her flesh, and tugged her forward. She only had to endure this for a few moments before they appeared.

One moment she was alone, the next there were two dark creatures standing at the foot of her bed, peering at her through the shadows. Their eyes were black, the same pitch black of the cow's eyes she had seen on her uncle's farm in Indiana.

But these creatures' eyes were four times as big, and they felt completely void of all feeling. She saw nothing but the reflection of her own terrified face when she looked into them.

Annie opened her mouth to scream for her parents, but no sound came out.

Stay silent, a deep voice said, but she could only hear it in her mind.

The nearest creature slowly lifted a long, thin grey arm to point at her, and Annie could feel her body begin to rise from the bed of its own accord. Wide-eyed, and panting, she stared down as her blanket slipped off her body, as she hovered in the air. The six-year-old felt a brief wave of warmth spread down her legs as urine trickled past her knees, and dripped from the tips of her big toes, onto the mattress.

The tugging sensation in her stomach intensified, and she felt vaguely like a fish, being pulled up on a hook. Her arms trembled as the invisible force pulled her ever upward, through her ceiling, through the cramped, insulation-filled crevices of the attic, and out into the crisp, night air.

Annie watched in abject terror as her house began to grow smaller, and smaller beneath her until it looked like nothing more than a miniature dollhouse, set perfectly on a square patch of artificial grass.

She was theirs, now.

Her memories of that night grew fragmented, and cloudy, overtime. She could recall a labyrinth of hallways, the walls, floors, and ceilings all encased in a harsh, heavy metal. The lights along the tops of the walls were white, and harsh to her eyes.

Annie remembered being taken to a room, where two more of the creatures bent down low to examine her. Their heads were large, far larger than anyone she had seen in her life, and their skin looked waxy.

The subtle grey tones of their flesh reminded her of how her grandmother looked, lying in a casket, the year before.

“Ah” Annie tried to cry out, but something stopped the sound.

It felt like someone was pouring sand down her throat, and she couldn’t move her tongue around the grains to make any words come out. One of the creatures turned its body and produced a large black mask.

The last thing she remembered was staring up at those impossibly black eyes, watching tears fall down her reflected face, as they lowered the mask over her nose and throat.

The next thing she could recall was the sound of her mother screaming, and the feeling of gravel pressed into her cheek. It was dawn, and Annie was curled in a ball on their new driveway. She looked up to see her mother running toward her, arms outstretched, her face wrinkled up with fear.

That image of her mother always came back to her, every time that tug on her stomach began. But her mother could not protect her from that first encounter, nor any thereafter.

Once or twice a year, Annie would wake up the same way she had that first night. The air in her bedroom would turn heavy, and cold, and the invisible hook in her stomach would pull her upright, like a fish being pulled towards a boat anchored somewhere in the dark recesses of her bedroom.

The tug pulled more violently, and Annie shut her eyes, afraid she might be sick all over her quilt. She pressed her back, and head more squarely against the headboard, and for a brief moment, the shape of the wood felt like a hand, cradling the base of her skull.

Peter.

The name drifted into her mind of its own volition, unwelcome.

Her husband never woke up during one of her abductions, when they had been married. Annie was certain that the creatures did something to him to keep him unconscious through the ordeal. Still, it had been a small comfort, to have his body beside her while she waited to be taken.

Peter had never believed her, though. Peter had believed her experiences were merely the vivid dreams of a bored housewife. Even when he had been there, she was alone.

Her door and the large rectangular window remained shut, but the creatures appeared, this time on the right, beside her heavy, wooden nightstand. Annie stared at them, clenching internally to keep from wetting the bed. It didn’t matter how many times she saw those eerie, large faces, she could never remember quite how horrible they were until they reappeared. Softening their features in her memory was the only way she could stay sane.

Annie tasted blood as she cut through her bottom lip with her teeth. With one long arm, the nearest creature made a languid gesture, and Annie began to drift off the bed once more.

Her quilt slid off her knees as she was pulled sideways through the air, straight towards the window. Moonlight splashed against her face as she was pulled through the shut glass, a sensation much like being drenched from a bucket of cold water.

Shuddering, she glanced up at the large silver spacecraft, then down again towards the ground.

Her house, a ranch in robin’s egg blue, grew smaller, and smaller as she floated up through the night.

Annie sucked in a deep breath as her body sifted through the base of the round, disc-like aircraft.

It felt like someone had briefly poked her with a thousand needles.

The unseen force had transported her into a long, narrow hallway. The lights were softer than before, but the walls and floors were the same dark metal of her memories. One of the creatures stood to one side of the hallway, its long, skinny fingers clasped together before its torso, waiting for her.

“Please, please just let me go” Annie begged the being, feeling her face grow moist with tears and snot.

The creature watched her without expression. No amount of tears, no amount of begging, had ever seemed to affect them.

Soon enough, human.

The words leaked into her mind, like a spilled pen. Annie shuddered, hating the way they could communicate with her only in her mind. It felt like they were in her body with her, enveloping her. There was no escape.

The creature pointed to the empty space in front of them, implying she was to follow him. Annie felt her legs, first the right, then the left, lift up and carry her forward. The metal felt like ice on her bare toes.

Every ship she had been on had been laid out in different passages, but she knew where they were going, she knew what was going to happen next.

Her body trembled, and Annie gagged as her stomach threatened to reject its contents. Swallowing hard, she focused all of her energy on her legs, willing every bone, muscle, and sinew to stop following the creature. Her pale forehead sheened with sweat as she forced her legs to stop moving. I will not go, she thought to herself through gritted teeth.

I will not.

With a sharp sob, Annie watched and felt her body move forward regardless. Her legs were still, but that invisible force pushed her onward. Every once in a while, she could feel her toes scrape against the metal as she hovered in place.

She began to cry in earnest as, at last, they came upon the examination room. A long metal table sat squarely in the room, reminding Annie of the ones she would see in a coroner's laboratory on television.

The only other pieces of furniture in the room were a large lamp that hung low from the ceiling, and a metal cabinet along one wall. The top of the cabinet was littered with various silver instruments that glinted in the intense light of the lamp. Annie could not bear to look at them too closely.

Every examination began much the same way. A group of the creatures would come into the room, one by one, and surround her as she lay on the metal sheet.

Without any visible clue that Annie could see, they would reach out to her with both hands, and begin to touch her skin. Their corrugated skin felt cool and leathery. They touched her thoroughly, but completely void of emotion, like how a doctor would examine a new patient.

Their unrelenting focus made her skin break out into goosebumps, and that only made them touch her more.

After what felt like an eternity, the hands went away. Annie hadn't realized she had closed her eyes until they were open again, and she saw that all of the creatures except two had left the small room. Sweat formed and dripped from her armpits as the nearest creature leaned in and used what looked like silver pliers to pinch the top of her eyelids, stretching them up and outward.

Annie tried to scream, but the imaginary sand was back, clogging up her esophagus.

The creature laid the pliers against her forehead, so her eyes remained wide open. The metal felt cool against the moisture on her skin. Annie shifted uncomfortably, waiting for the inevitable need to blink, but it never came.

Whatever they were doing, they wanted her to see it.

No, oh God, no, she screamed in her mind, as the creature on the other side of her pulled a long black tube from the cabinet. The tube was narrow, but long, reminding Annie of a handheld vacuum. The moment she saw the machine, muddled memories flooded back to her. She had seen this machine twice before. What they did with it was so terrible, her mind had not been able to retain the experiences.

The only way she could sleep at night was to repress those memories, deep in her subconscious.

But she recalled now, with horrifying clarity. It didn't matter if she choked to death, Annie opened her mouth, and tried to scream over and over again. The creature with the black tube stood still as its counterpart removed Annie's underwear without ceremony.

Extract the egg, the creature with the underwear commanded.

The words, unspoken, flooded into Annie's mind. They seemed to bounce, and echo off the walls, bombarding her.

Extract the egg.

Extract the egg.

Extract the egg.

Pain coursed up her body as they eased the tube down and between her legs. Annie jolted and writhed on the table, but she could not move her arms or legs enough to fight off the procedure. She could feel the whirring suction of the machine inside of her. She could feel the machine's small but powerful vibrations radiate up through her organs, along every vertebra of her spine, all the way up to the back of her head.

The tube made a wet, gurgling noise, and was carefully removed.

Annie gasped in air, unaware until that moment, that she had been holding her breath. She cried silently to herself as the creatures busied themselves with the device at the cabinet.

Peter, she thought.

His face, pale and lightly freckled, appeared in her mind. She could picture him sitting on the taupe colored couch in the living room they had once shared, his head bent low over his hands.

His expression grew hopeful when Annie had reappeared from the bathroom, small plastic stick in hand.

"Any luck?" he had asked her, his eyes alight.

But one look at her forlorn expression told him everything he had needed to know. No, she was not pregnant. No, he would not be a father.

Every time, it was the same.

He had been kind about it, at first. But as weeks turned into months, and months turned into years, he wouldn't comfort her as long as he used to. He would no longer wipe the tears from her cheeks. He stopped saying, "next time."

Then, one day, he just wasn't there at all. Not long after the divorce was finalized, Annie had heard from a mutual friend that Peter had been seeing a woman for a few months, and that they were going to have a baby.

He had found another woman to have the life they had planned together.

Annie vigorously shook her head, ignoring the way the pliers tugged and pulled at her eyelids. The physical pain was easier to endure than any of the emotional trauma she had been through.

Please, she begged the creatures in her mind.

Please don't keep my egg. I want to be a mother. I need to be a mother.

One of the creatures turned its steady black gaze back to her.

Be silent, it told her.

You will understand soon.

After several more minutes, Annie felt the pulling sensation in her gut, and she was floating again, off the examination table, through the narrow metal doorway, and down yet another dark hall. Her toes continued to scrape against the flooring as she floated, but she could not bring herself to make her legs move.

Everything she looked at was through a veil of tears.

The room they led her to was even smaller than the previous one. Annie blinked and was relieved to see the space, no bigger than a walk-in closet, was void of a medical cabinet.

Instead, there was a strange device that hung from the ceiling. It was wide, and square, with a flat piece of metal at the bottom curving outward. It reminded Annie of the machine her optometrist would use, holding her head in place as he would examine the state of her eyes.

Sure enough, the invisible string pulled her to the device, and rested her chin upon the bottom, locking her head and face into place. One of the creatures stood back, stoically observing.

You are to watch the screen in front of you, it spoke in her mind.

We are recording your emotional responses. Pay attention.

The small wall in front of her flickered to life, and Annie realized the wall was actually a television. She blinked and found herself looking into the eyes of a little boy on the screen. The boy had dark, straight hair, and he was holding a single white daisy between his small, chubby hands. He met Annie's eyes and smiled silently.

"What—" Annie began to say, but the screen flickered and changed again. The following image was of another child, a girl a few years older than the boy. Her eyes were dark and unwavering as she stared at Annie.

She had been smiling when she first appeared on the screen, but the longer Annie looked at her, the more visibly upset the girl became. Her white teeth disappeared behind her lips, and her lips began to tremble.

Gasping, Annie watched as the girl's gaze flickered to something behind Annie, something Annie could not see.

The girl's mouth grew long, and wide with screams as flames suddenly appeared, licking her skin. The girl was burning to death before her eyes. Sobbing silently, Annie tried to close her eyes, she tried to jerk her head away, but she couldn't.

The invisible force, ever cruel, held her steadily in place.

The screen shifted, and a montage of images came and went with sickening frequency. All children, all in various states of death or dying. Annie cried for each of them, she cried for her own nonexistent child, she cried for herself.

"Stop this, please I beg you", she sobbed and blubbered in her mind.

"I can't do this anymore, just let me die. JUST LET ME DIE."

She dry heaved as the thought left her mind because she knew she meant it.

With a soft click, the television shifted to one last image.

Annie recoiled. The creature on the screen was different than the creatures she had seen up to that point, but it was just as grotesque. Its skin was as pale as a human's but weathered like her abductors. The creature's eyes were wide and black, as impenetrable as the ocean is in the middle of the night.

But it had hair.

Soft, slightly wavy brown hair, the color of milk chocolate. Just like Annie's had been when she was a little girl.

The creature blinked and smiled at her.

Annie's flesh broke out into goosebumps, and she dry-heaved again. Every fiber of her body, of her being, was telling her the same intuitive thing... the creature on the screen looked like her because it had been made from her.

DNA from Annie's body, mixed with one of the grey beings that walked amongst her.

"Is this...?" she began to whisper.

She couldn't get the words to come out, she couldn't fully comprehend what she was seeing.

Yes, the creature said in her mind.

We have been experimenting with cross-breeding for two hundred years now. Genetically speaking, you were a viable candidate. Our efforts have proved worthwhile, with you.

Annie wept, absorbing the creature's words inside her head.

It couldn't be, and yet... and yet...

She knew the words to be true. She felt it in the deepest recesses of her gut, in the finest sinews of her heart.

She had a child.

Annie sat, strapped to the device, for what felt like an eternity. She opened her mouth, and closed it again, gasping uncomprehendingly, like a fish out of water. She stared at the screen, at her own child, taking in the shape of its eyes, the contours of its cheekbones.

She could not tell the gender of the child, but it did not matter to her. It had never mattered to her. Still, mixed within all her joy was a complete lack of understanding.

"Why?" she whispered out loud.

"Why me? Why...us?"

The creature beside her tilted his head to one side--a gesture so human-like, it made Annie shiver. We have been studying your species for a long time, the creature said, its unearthly voice echoed all around in her head.

"Our planet is coming to the end of its natural lifecycle. We have been in search of a new home, and your planet--Earth, as we know you humans call it--has the right chemical compounds for our species to survive.

The words, so casually communicated to her, filled her with absolute dread.

"What... What are you saying?" she murmured, eyes wide. "You're going to invade Earth? Take over?"

No, the creature said in her mind. The timbre of the inhuman voice was anything but soothing.

We have no intention of destroying the human race. We will breed with you and create a new species to inhabit your planet. It has already begun.

You are the first.

The creature pointed a long, gray finger at the screen.

Turning quickly in her seat, Annie bent her body in half and vomited on the cool, metal floor of the ship.

The sound of a lawnmower made Annie jolt awake.

She sat up, and blinked against the harshness of the sun, beaming down on her at a sharp angle from the east. Her poppy nightgown was damp from the dewy grass beneath her. Traces of puke clung to the light fabric.

Blinking, Annie realized she was in a large, open field.

All around her neighbors began their chores for the day, clambering into their cars to go to work, or tending to their lawns, and fields. She saw the robin's egg blue of her house half a mile down the road.

Shaking, Annie slowly got to her feet and began to shuffle slowly home. Every part of her body ached, but she ignored it all.

Every time she had been abducted, she thought about the torture she went through the previous night, which triggered a strange mixture of emotions the following morning: fear, hope, and relief.

But this time was different. This time she didn't remember anything. Why was she laying on the field and how did she get there?

Although she didn't understand anything, she had weird flashbacks. A portrait of her child kept popping into in her head. But that must have been a flashback from her dream because the child didn't look human.

(Inspired by stories from people who claim to have been abducted by extraterrestrial beings)