

Mon, 15 Sep 2008

7:05 PM

## The Army

The woman looked out the window, the yellow nicotined curtains musty and stiff with age. The sun was setting, the shadows long and stretching their cold fingers towards her. She knew what the shadows wanted, knew their secrets.

Across the street, children played, laughing, not realizing the evil they had in their yard, it smiling inconspicuously from behind a molded ceramic face, painted with rosy red cheeks. She knew why their cheeks were red, blushed from the thrill of the kill. She knew that the morning dew made the tiny splatters of blood disappear from their red hat and blue shirt wiped clean by mother nature's shower.

She stared at the statue. his beady little eyes staring at her, threatening her silently, daring her to come outside, daring her to call for help from the oblivious children. She felt the acidic bile come up from in her throat as she turned from the window, the thread of sunlight disappearing- as she rushed to the bathroom, her fear overtaking her body for the moment.

It was like this every day. She could go outside to pick up the newspaper and see movement in the corner of her eye. She knew they were rushing back to their spots before their owners knew they had been out playing, been out killing.

She knew they killed and she knew they enjoyed it. Her cat had been one of their victims. Naturally, she had thought her cat had just run off or had been taken in by another family. That was before she had watched in terror as the tiny bearded men had tortured the poor orange cat.

She had stood on her porch calling to him, pleading with her only friend to come home, to keep her company.

"Biscuits, Biscuits," she called out, her voice breaking as she did not see the orange blaze of fur anywhere. Usually, he came running at the first sound of her voice. The sun was setting low, the shadows still friendly to her, before fear paralyzed her life. She pulled the blue terry cloth robe around her body as she stepped down the stairs, following the broken sidewalk around the house.

That's when she heard the small meow, the cat seemingly pleading out in pain. She paused, taking a hesitant step forward, seeing the cat under the bush, covered by the branches.

"Come on baby. Come on out Biscuits," she said, her voice full of fear as she watched the cat moving around, trying to escape from the unseen captors. The cat hissed, pulling slightly out of the bushes, looking toward her, his eyes wide with fear. She could see the deep gouges marring the cat's orange fur, red streaks cutting across his eye and nose.

She stopped, staring at the cat as she saw the tiny hands grab it by the hind fur, pulling it back into the overgrowth. As she started to stumble backwards, she heard her cat meow loudly, followed by deep snickers.

At the corner of the house, she stopped, turning to look back at the spot where she had last seen her pet. A thin string of blood oozed out from under the shadows, slowly, creeping across the ground like a snail. She heard the laughing again, louder this time, as she ran into her house, shutting the door and sliding the useless hook into place, her heart racing, her mind asking her if she was awake or still trapped in an all too real nightmare.

She never saw her cat again. The next morning she had braved herself to go out to the spot she had seen him, wondering if she would find blood or fur. She kneeled down, peeking, scared to look but knowing she had to.

The ground was matted down, tiny puffs of the tabby's fur stuck to branches and leaves. It looked as if he had been dragged away out the other side of the bush, the slight blood trail diminishing the further it went. She looked around through tear brimmed eyes, the salty drops stuck on her lashes, refusing to fall.

That is when she saw the little man in the corner of her neighbor's yard, smiling blankly at her from his spot, holding the little shovel on his shoulder. She brushed the tears away quickly, staring at the shovel the gnome held, the orange fur a bright beacon to her, the familiarity of it screaming for recognition. The blank painted eyes stared at her, unblinking, waiting for her breakdown that was coming.

Biscuits had disappeared a little more than a month ago, the rain and weather washing away the macabre evidence on the shovel and gravel. It would not have been too scary if it had just been the one, the one with the shovel. She was certain she could handle the one but when his friends started showing up, with little pick axes, with little lanterns, their bright red and blue clothes, a fake cheerfulness-, she was certain that they were taking over.

When she woke up, glancing out the window, she saw every yard, perfectly manicured and green had a tiny ceramic soldier, some yards even had two or three. She could feel her heart jump, could feel her knees shaking as she turned, letting the curtain drop stiffly. She sat at her kitchen table, the papers and dirty coffee cups crowding her area, leaving only a small space for her to sit, resting her elbows on the sticky surface. She ran a shaky hand through her hair, the tangles pulling and snagging on her fingers.

Out of the corner of her eyes, she saw a movement, causing her to twist her head quickly, trying to see the cause of it. It seemed like the more she looked, the closer she came to seeing the blur but never enough to make it out enough. That is when she heard the soft giggle, like a deep voiced childish twitter.

She froze solid, the warmth running down her thighs slowly. She felt the tears in her throat gagging her. Closing her eyes, she tried to push the sounds away but she could feel them getting closer, could hear their tiny boots shuffling on the floor around her. Swallowing, she built herself up, trying to breathe evenly before she snapped her eyes open.

Nothing moved around her, the giggle gone, hiding behind doors and in the shadows. She stumbled to the door, checking the lock. The silver L was still in the circle, seemingly keeping them out. The sun was filtering in, not nearly as much as what she expected. Where had the day gone, she thought, looking around, the windows darker than she would have liked.

She could feel the shadows creep in, melting around her like sticky dark water, coming to drown her in its cold clutches. She moved to the door, flipping the lock, pulling it open quickly, trying to escape the evilness in her house.

What she saw stopped her in her tracks. The tiny statues, all sizes, all shapes stood in her yard, waiting, their plastic eyes staring, their smiles stiff. She swallows, moving back, her lumpy body bumping into a table.

With each blink, they move closer, as if in a strobe light. She stares, her eyes wide until she can feel the gentle breeze drying them out, making her blink. They inch closer still, waiting, their patience endless.

She looked to the yard, wondering where her neighbors were, where the children were that played outside. Was

everyone gone, oblivious to this impossibility? She feels a scream bubbling, quivering in her mouth. She closes her eyes tight, feeling the army descend upon her quickly, feeling the warmth of the outside escape disappearing-, the sound of the doorknob clicking loudly, echoing forever in her brain.

She opens her eyes, staring at the crowd around her, their eyes staring blankly ahead, unmoving. She feels a slight calm come over her, watching as they don't move, waiting for something unknown, as if someone had pressed pause on a scary movie.

The first time she blinks, she feels the bite on her thigh, sudden and sharp like a bee stinging her. Her eyes pop open, looking down at her leg. A tiny pick axe is buried in her flesh, the blood spilling, staining the ratty robe that covers her. She holds her eyes, staring at the redness spreading quickly.

She doesn't even realize she blinked until the twin sting happens in her other leg, making her jerk and twist, a silent scream coming from her mouth. The gnomes stand there, as if they had been molded with their little tools in that position. She lays her head back, her eyes shining with unshed tears. Staring at the ceiling, her eyes waver, losing focus as she struggles to hold them open.

No sooner were they closed, when a heavy metal shovel comes down against her face hard. The red explosions flood her face, the bones in her nose cracking, sliding apart with a sick crunch. The scream gains sound as she screams, it erupting softly, becoming louder gradually.

She makes the mistake of squeezing her eyes shut, the pain of her busted nose too much to bear. The onslaught of the tools picks at her body, a shovel gouging into her stomach, a pick axe slicing into her arm.

She turns to the side, the vomit spilling from her mouth. She moves her mangled arm to her stomach, feeling the slippery life spurting from her. Her hand is on her face, holding her nose, the vomit sticking to her face. Her eyes open, the attack pausing, tools sticking out of her body like voodoo doll needles.

She starts crawling, the puddle of blood, a dark lake around her. She stares, her body jerking as she crawls toward the kitchen. The army is dragged with her, their tools stuck into her body. The others stand there, nudged aside as she moves away.

Her hand slips, falling out from under her quickly. Her body loses whatever gain it had as she slams face first into her own blood, the smear from her hand an angry streak on the light carpet.

She clenches her eyes shut, shaking her head weakly as they attack like a pack of hungry animals, pulling skin and flesh from her body in small rips. Her crying moans are put to an abrupt stop as the shovel is swung hard, hitting the back of her with a strength that does not match the small statues. As she loses consciousness, she hears the giggling start, feels the small hands pulling at her body.

As the sun rises and people start opening their doors, their newspapers waiting for them on their door steps, their warm coffee in mugs, no one notices the yard decorations standing there, their cheeks a little more red, their tools looking a little rusty. No one notices when the ambulance comes and takes the body of the old crazy woman away.

Music:

Sat, 11 Oct 2008

7:14 PM

## The Maze

When I was hired for the job, I did not realize just how big the place was. My cubicle was closer to the exit so I was lucky the first year or so. The bright red exit sign was my teether, the leash around my wrist, like a small child at an amusement park. I would glance over my shoulder every half hour or so, the sign smiling at me, letting me know I was still okay, I could still escape.

But then I was promoted. With promotions come larger offices, better cubicles. I packed up my boxes, full of supplies, pictures and quirky comic strips. I looked over my shoulder one last time, seeing the sign flicker, flashing a little and going dim. I am not sure why that sent a chill up my spine but it made me almost throw up. I was sure it was a bad omen.

The office lackey shows me my new cubicle. I set my box down, aware that I have gained maybe one more foot of space than before. I roll my eyes, raising my hand in thanks. The guy shrugs, walking off as if he could care less. I scowl, sitting down, placing all my personal items where they were before.

I stare at the gray carpeted separator, listening to people around me work quickly, their fingers moving over keyboards, phones being answered. I easily fell into the routine of work again, the only difference being I could roll my chair back a couple more inches. I still looked over my shoulder, searching for the beacon of hope. I got a sick drop in my stomach when I could not find it each time. Gradually I became used to it, knowing my leash had been cut. When I thought of that, the panic in my chest would start, my breathing coming in jagged quick jerks.

One day, as I typed at my computer, the day passed by, the sun was setting quicker than I expected. I looked up, surprised at how quiet and empty the building was. I shut my computer down, the evening shadows already moving in.

"Hello,"- I call out, picking up my briefcase. I stand up, looking into the sea of cubicle partitions, waiting for some other late worker to pop up, their head appearing like they were on a pogo stick. No one appeared. I waited, pleading with someone to jump up and answer my call.

"Anyone- here," I call out again, my voice echoing slightly. I start walking toward the exit, turning and weaving. Each cubicle looked exactly the same, some with family pictures, some with comics. I kept moving, turning around, searching for the exit. I could feel my heart rate pick up, not seeing the end to the cubicles anywhere.

"How is this possible,"- I asked myself, staring at the expanse. I feel like I am looking into a room filled with mirrors, the cubicles reflecting over and over again until there are the tiny half walls everywhere. I feel the anger starting, my anger at the situation. My cheeks start to flush as my fists clench tightly. The cheap leather handle forms to my hand, the sweat making the material more pliant. My nails dig into it as I pace quickly, hitting dead ends of cubicles, the stupid trolls grinning at me, their fake jewels tucked into their fat little bellies.

I feel the scream explode before I hear it, as I raise my briefcase case, swinging it around, knocking the trolls into the air.

"Stop fucking smiling. Just fucking stop," I scream, beating the case on the desk. I stop, staring at the plastic carnage, my eyes blinking quickly, bringing me back to reality.

I drop the case to the floor, my work forgotten as I wander away from it, the beating having worn me out immensely. I stare out the floor to ceiling windows, watching as the sky gets darker. The windows seem so close but the more I try to get to them, the further away they become.

"Maybe if i make it to the windows, I can follow the outer wall to a door," I think, staring at the glass, seeing my reflection appear as the night closes in, surrounding the building, the darkness pressing up against the invisible barrier. I pause, the windows no longer a reasonable option. I can almost see the shadows' faces, their noses hard against the glass, licking their lips, hungry for what lay inside.

I sit down at a desk, looking around. Papers are stacked neatly in the corners, the stapler just so, waiting for papers to impale. I lean back, leaning my head back, my eyes focusing on the ceiling. I let out a deep sigh, the sound loud in the silence. The fluorescent lights flicker, their energy saving timer shutting them down. The blackness comes, swallowing me. I close my eyes, the tears of stress and fear falling as I try to relax.

I move to the floor, the carpet rough on my aching body. I crawl under the desk, pulling the chair in front of me like a door. Pulling my knees up, I wrap my arms around them, protecting myself from the unseen. As I close my eyes, I start to hear the movements, the scuffling, the crying. My hands find their way to cover my ears as I try to force myself to sleep, trapping out the sounds as much as possible. I squeeze my eyes shut as something crashes into the partition, causing it to shake hard against my body. Instinct tells me to not cry out in fear. Tears slide my face, pooling in my ear as I lay there, shaking violently.

Some time in the night, sleep overtakes me, filled with fitful nightmares. I awake to the sound of something moving stuff around above me. My eyes crack open, expecting the worse. I see a pair of legs moving the chair aside, the black slacks typical of the office I work at. The legs move away, pausing at the cubicle entrance.

I move the chair out quickly, knocking into the person's knees. The loud groan fills the area as he crumbles to the floor heavily. I crawl out, my stiff muscles screaming for me to take it slow. I pick up the first thing I see, a long silver letter opener, from the desk. The cool metal feels right in my hand as I wield it in front of me.

"Who are you," I scream, my hair standing in all directions from my half sleep. The man turns, his eyes rimmed red from fatigue and fear. He holds his hand up in defense, flinching, jerking, waiting for the blows. The moaning screams coming from his mouth are pathetic at best.

"Get up. Tell me who you are," I say, slowly lowering the weapon. I stare at him, his all-American- good looks broken by the bloody lips and dirty skin. His eyes jerk, focusing on nothing but taking in everything quickly. He reminds me instantly of a rat or a weasal, playing the dumb card but plotting their next move with each blank stare. I tighten my grip again, waiting for him to pounce.

"I'm Dan. We met in the break room last week. You know my girlfriend, Staci from human resources,"- he says, his hand mindlessly wandering over the desk. I look down as his hand lands on a stapler the size of a small child.

"So, why you here on a weekend? Working hard or hardly working,"- he laughs, the sound never reaching his eyes. I

smile, readjusting the grip on the weapon. Time slows down as I watch him raise the stapler, flipping it like a jack knife. I raise the opener, bringing it down quickly. The pop of his eye is a sick, ozzing wetness. I quickly pull it out, ramming the reddened slicer into his stomach, his toned muscles created by hours at the gym no defense for me.

His plastic smile slides off his face, the blood weeping from his punctured eye. His hand moves to his gut as I quickly pull it out, jabbing quickly and hard. He starts to fall forward, slumping. What strikes me as even more eerie than the fact that he is deranged and almost attacked me with a stapler was that he was totally silent, his face contorting in pain and anguish, yet no sound came out. With his last breathe, I hear sound coming from his lips, his bloodied body heavy against me. It is a small laugh and a whisper.

"Thank you," he says, coughing and choking as his life ends at my hand. I drop his body, my hands shaking as I drop the letter opener to the floor. I turn, covering the desk as my stomach lurches and heaves. I brace myself, the shaking passing as I breathe in deep.

I look down, picking the letter opener up and stepping over the body of Dan, his blood already cooling on the floor. I have a new outlook on this. I turn looking, sensing something different. It hits me like a brick wall at fifty miles an hour. The cubicle partitions are taller today, hitting me at eye level instead of mid waist.

I have a feeling they are growing, breathing swallow so I can not see it, stretching up slowly. I realize before the day is over, they will be floor to ceiling, blocking out any hope.

"That how you playing this," I whisper, staring at the walls. I almost feel like if stab the partions, blood will flow from them as easily as it did from Dan. I start walking with purpose, holding the weapon in front of me. I keep turning, covering my back. Each time I turn my back, I can sense the walls growing, stretching to the ceiling, reaching toward their maximum height.

The light from the far off windows gets dimmer with each step I take until I am trapped in a darkened maze of carpeted walls and cubicles, the very sound of my breathing echoing around me.

The shadows start coming alive, stretching around corners, watching as I pass their lairs, like angry dogs defending their territory. I pause, listening, aware that I can faintly hear a radio playing. Perking my ear, I start to follow it, straining to listen.

As I twist and turn, I catch glimpses of people, hiding under desks like homeless under an overpass. The only difference was all the people I saw were dressed in white button up shirts, sensible skirts, dress slacks. The looks in their eyes were those of wild animals. They looked as if they would and could claw me to death if they needed to.

The sound of the music gets closer. I start to run, trying to keep up to the sound. I see the wild office workers watching, their attire belying their insanity. I never even see the woman when she steps out from around a corner, her blouse ripped, hanging off her shoulder in tatters.

She raises her head with effort, her perfectly coifed hair stiff with hair spray and dried blood. A light glows from her eyes brightly as she holds her badge out, her name written across it with her title under it.

"I'm Staci. Human Resources,"- she said, baring her teeth as she attacked me, holding her hands out, her bright red nails like sharp daggers. The scream coming from her mouth was like that of an enraged lion, hungry for revenge, full

of bloodlust. I had killed her mate and she wanted me dead. I felt like my job had evolved into a dangerous jungle, the fight for your life around every corner.

I grabbed Staci's wrists, spinning and slamming her into the wall. Random items fell from the shelves, her scream never faltering. I could sense others watching, the smell of panic washing over everyone. The pushpins stabbed into her back, tiny nubs against her skin. I felt her nails rake across my face, tearing at the flesh around my eyes and nose. The warm blood oozed out of my skin, seeping into my mouth, the coppery bitter taste making me spit.

My hands found her slender, pale throat and locked on. I could feel her hands pulling at mine as I tightened their hold, her body fighting against its death. I watched as her clawwing became more erratic, as her eyes started squinting and staring hard at me. Tears rolled down her cheeks, yet the enraged look stayed. Her face started turning red, my hands white as I held her pressed up against the wall. I felt her body slacking, giving out. I could feel the tears and blood sticky on my face.

I am not sure when I started to hear the loud animalistic screaming. I am not sure when I realized they were my own. My fingers unclenched from around Staci's dead throat, the purple bruises the only sign that she had lived. I feel to my heads, covering my head in my arms, the screaming only getting louder. I closed my eyes, listening to the radio, the song hitting me like a brick wall.

The gravely voice of Axl rose sang softly, somewhere within the dense maze, "Welcom-e to the Jungle"-, opening his arms to me, welcoming me to my new home. I knew then that I would never leave. I knew why Dan had thanked me. I knew if I wanted to survive, I would have to kill to survive.

I looked at my hands, the blood still warm. I could do that, I thought.

Security: Public

Location: Other

Mood: Bewildered

Music: