

2022 600-Word Horror Story Contest

Winners

Honorable Mentions

Escape

By Michael Gauss

Blocked on Snapchat. Quietly evicted from the group chat. Muted, then removed from the school discord after a series of angry outbursts. So aggressive that people cross the hallway just to avoid me. But none of it's my fault. Right? No. I am more than certain something is going on here. Something big. Against me. Everyone I know plots against me. "You need help I can't provide. Please get it." The final text from my loyal girlfriend who has joined the endless ranks against me. I hear my heart pounding. I take one last look at my phone and hurl it against the wall.

Fast forward. It's the fourth night I've sat brooding till morning. The heart beats beneath my floor and in the walls. Slowly speeding up. Impending doom approaches. I'm obsessing over when they will come for me. All of them drag me to a fate worse than death. I slink into the bathroom, gripping my knife, forced to satisfy that need. I catch a glimpse of a monster in the mirror. Just like me, but pale white with black sunken eyes. Maybe it's ok. I start to relax my grip on the knife. Then I see the other monster. Sent from my enemies to drag me to hell. I break into a sprint.

I'm out into the pitch black night, running as the icy wind cuts me into a thousand pieces. I can't see it, I can't hear it, but I know the monster's there. My feet sink slightly into the muddy forest floor. And then I'm running through a cemetery. Sprinting without noticing the chiseled names racing past. Until I collide. I'm sent sprawling. My leg hits the ground hard. My knee hits a tombstone harder. I crumple and feel warmth in my pants. Then I notice something. My phone is in my pocket. A realization hits. That must be how they're tracking me. My uncut fingernails finally have a use besides shredding the flesh hanging from my face. I pry my phone open, rip out the motherboard, and snap it in half. A tiny victory.

But the monster still comes, silently stalking me. Adrenaline numbs the pain as my mind rushes to formulate a plan. Now I'm dragging my mostly limp leg as I scale the railway bridge in the center of my town. It's just a waiting game, right? I slowly walk, just fast enough so the monster can't get me. By now a heart is beating on every surface. I lose track of time. It's all meaningless. Everything is meaningless but taking that next, painful step. One step is ok. The next is agony. Rinse and repeat. Then the plan pays off.

I hear it and am washed in light. I turn around. I face the monster every person I have never known has sent to face me. I see it for a soul chilling split second. Then time gets really slow . . . or really fast. I'm diving through the air and the train is howling and clanging and then I'm in a ditch, battered and bloody. I cover my ears and curl into a ball as the mechanical nightmare races past, assaulting every sense. Then it hits me. I won. I drag myself up the drainage ditch I landed in and wander onto the highway.

When the cops find me, I'm eighteen miles from home. One quick interview and I'm locked in a cop car bound for the hospital. Another and I'm tied down in an ambulance, bound for an institution. But I'm laughing. Laughing the whole way. Why? Because I won.