

Ashley

By Jonah Wisneski

Sarah stared at the ceiling. No matter how hard she tried to sleep, she just couldn't. Every time she closed her eyes, she heard what sounded like someone jumping on the bed in the room next to her—in Ashley's room. But Sarah was alone, and she had been for a little while now. At first she blamed herself and her overactive imagination, but by the time 3 A.M. rolled around, Sarah knew that the sound wasn't confined to her mind. Exhausted, she pulled back the red covers and crawled out of bed.

As soon as Sarah stepped out of bed, she heard a voice. "Don't go mommy," the voice whispered from under her bed. "That isn't me in there." Sarah froze for a moment, barely able to process what she had just heard. But the voice never spoke again, so Sarah pressed on towards the door. As soon as she gripped the cold, metal doorknob, she heard the voice again.

"Mommy I'm scared," the voice whispered again. "It's so dark down here." Sarah paused again as a chill reverberated up and down her spine.

No. This wasn't Ashley's voice, Sarah thought to herself. *I'm just tired. None of this is real.* And with that statement, Sarah considered returning to bed. *But I keep hearing that jumping noise. I should at least investigate that.* Sarah turned the doorknob and opened her bedroom door. As she did, she could have sworn that she heard a faint crying noise coming from underneath her bed.

Sarah pressed on, and as she did so, she couldn't help but look out the window. She stared at her new red Mitsubishi Mirage. Just looking at that hideous car made her sick to her stomach. As she grew closer and closer to Ashley's room, the jumping sound seemed to grow louder. But as soon as she opened the door, all noise ceased. Sarah couldn't even hear the traffic driving by outside. Satisfied, Sarah shut the door. But as soon as she did, the jumping resumed. Immediately, Sarah opened the door, and immediately the jumping ceased.

"Is someone in there?" Sarah asked the empty, pitch-black room. She tried to peer into the darkness, but could see nothing.

"I'm sorry mommy," a voice said from the bed. "I couldn't sleep and I didn't want to bother you, so I was playing by myself."

This response chilled Sarah to the bone. She desperately tried to find some way to respond, but she couldn't. She could barely open her mouth, let alone move.

"Could you tuck me in, mommy?" the voice asked. Sarah stood there, dumbfounded. "Please mommy; I'm so cold."

Without thinking, Sarah approached the bed and peeled back the covers. But there was nothing there, neither on top of the bed nor underneath the covers. The door slammed shut behind Sarah, but she barely noticed as tears began to fall from her eyes.

“Why are you sad mommy?” the voice asked. “You always told me to smile and be happy, even when I wanted to pout or cry.”

“I...” Sarah stammered before falling silent.

“It’s ok mommy,” the voice replied. “Would you lay down with me until I can fall asleep?”

“I...” Sarah began to say.

“No mommy!” a voice called out from under the bed. “That isn’t me! Mommy go back to your room so I can protect you!”

“I...” Sarah stuttered before crumpling to her knees in a mess of sobbing tears. No matter how hard she tried to speak, the right words remained elusive. She could do little but sob.

“Mommy don’t cry,” the voice on top of the bed said. “Everything will be alright.”

“No mommy it’s lying,” the voice from under the bed cried. But by then it was too late; Sarah had made her resignation. Silently, she rose to her feet, climbed onto the bed, and just stood there, waiting.

“Thank you mommy!” the soft and musical voice of Sarah’s daughter whispered in her ear. “Now we can be together forever!” Sarah felt something clasp itself around the top of her shoulders. It hurt at first, but after a few moments the feeling became quite light and freeing as Sarah almost felt herself fly around the room. And in that moment, she finally felt happy again.