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Disappear into Darkness

Sarah Landauer

The flashlight lies on the ground, its light glaring into the shattered, bloodstained pieces of the mirror across the room, scattered beneath a frame hanging on the also bloodstained but otherwise empty white wall, freshly cleared of all the photographs documenting Elle's life through high school. Door and windows remain unopened. None had heard the struggle, the scream that came out more like a breathless whisper as Elle dropped the flashlight, big blue eyes reflecting the all-too real shadow of her nightmares, before her slender body struck the wall, the mirror, her flesh torn by claws or fangs—it doesn't matter what, the gashes are spilling blood all the same.

But after hitting the wall, the ground disappears.

She falls

through

the dark

void

that

replaced

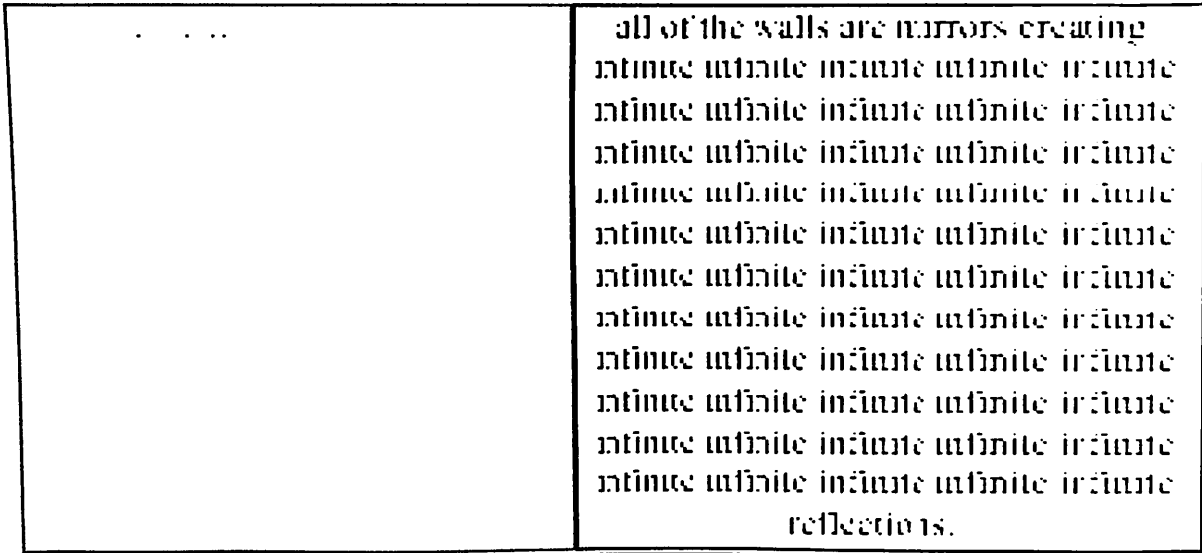
her bedroom

floor,

until

landing on glass

with a thud, all her breath stolen, her mind and vision shockingly clear despite
both pain and lack of sleep. 1,472,933 heartbeats later she manages to stand.



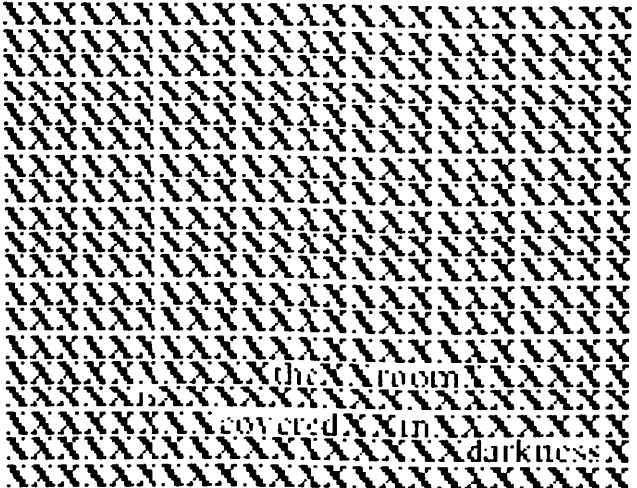
Her tangled blonde hair is sticky with blood, some of which has crept down her face, past her eyes like red tears. Elle bites her lip, looks down at her mangled body, a less unnerving sight than the countless copies of her in the mirrors, cornering her in this room that, somehow, with no light source to be seen, is still well lit.

There is no sign of the creature, but she can't relax. She grabs a shard of glass from the mirror she had landed on and clutches it in her hand. In all the ten years she has had to face it, it has never simply vanished. Always there. Prowling.

Stalking.

Growling.

She takes one step to see if she can still move properly, in case she has to run—although there's nowhere to run—and then whatever had been lighting the room before disappears, and before she can gather her thoughts into something even resembling coherence,



...a...da...kness...so...
...thick...so...black...that...
...she...see...anything...can...
...not...even...her...
...hand...in...trembling...
...her...front...face...
...only...the...
...the...push...blackness...
...surrounding...her...
...engulfing...her...
...mocking...her...
...as...she...stands...
...completely...
...alone...

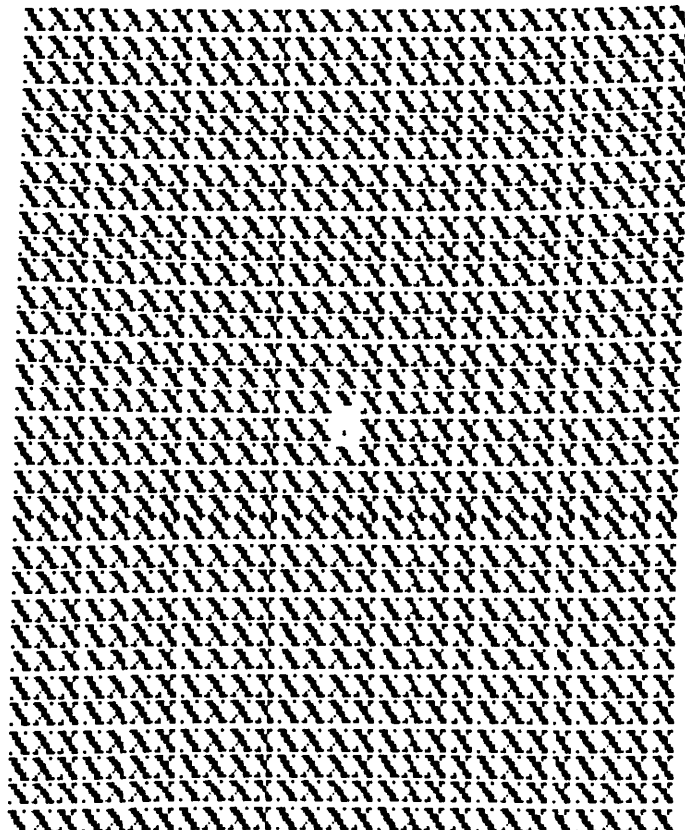
except

she

isn't.

She can see a small light in front of her where a mirrored wall had once been, now taken away,
but by what she can't tell in the darkness. With the dim light she sees the
room has narrowed, lengthened into a long
corridor, perfectly straight,
perfectly black,
with a dark

speck



Elle glances back to see if there's
anywhere else to run, but the darkness behind
her is still impenetrable. She turns back to the
corridor, the light still there, the
speck

still there.

The only way to go is forward. She
takes a few cautious steps. Then a
few more. The light is so far off. Too
far. It doesn't even effectively
penetrate the darkness around her.
There are walls, only about a foot
away on either side, but they are
simply black. The light doesn't seem
to be getting any nearer. The corridor
never ends; the light just taunts her.

But then she blinks, and the speck is no longer a speck, but a large, hulking
form glaring at her with invisible eyes. It holds its black claws out, dripping with some sort of
liquid.

Blood?

Elle's free hand moves to her chest, her stomach, her throat, but the gashes are gone, the
blood is gone from her clothes, her face, her tangled hair. Not even the palm where the mirror
piece she is clutching is bleeding.

And then the light disappears again.

The creature's low, rumbling growl echoes around her.
She can't scream. Or won't.
Are her eyes open? Or closed?
The back of her throat itches with a bitter, acidic taste. Is this what dying tastes like?
Were the claws—the fangs—her death—so swift?
She can't feel anything, but her body isn't numb.
Where has her body gone?
And

where has the sweet darkness gone?

White walls. Sickeningly clean white walls on which nothing had ever been hung. No mirror. No nail holes where high school photographs used to smile. No shattered glass scattered around her. A small puddle of stomach acid, but no blood. No creature. Just a simple bed and Elle. Alone.

“Elle, you have a visitor.”

A pause.

“Sweetie, what are you doing on the floor? You have a bed right there.”

Elle doesn't move. The attendant bends over to take her hand, which is clenched around a crumpled piece of paper.

The attendant can't see her other hand, also clenched around something, but this something isn't crumpled. It's cutting into Elle's palm.

Elle envisions her throat, can feel warm blood trickling down her cold skin.

She glances up, the slight movement exposing her neck, the small but deep incision glistening red, and drops the piece of glass in her hand while gripping the paper tighter, until her eyes close and the sound of the attendant's rushing footsteps and cries for help start to fade.

