

When You Are Alone

By: Moises Gabriel

"Hey, it's Abby from work. I didn't see you at work today or yesterday. Is everything alright? I know we don't talk often, but I just want you to know that you can talk to me if you need it. You aren't alone."

I delete the voicemail.

I lie on my bed facing the ceiling, my mind and body numb from the meds my therapist prescribed. Every day goes by painfully slow. The silence in my apartment is awfully apparent. The world usually is full of static and noise, yet right now I hear none of that. The only sound I hear is my heart pulsing in my chest. I turn to look at the clock on my nightstand. It's only 7 p.m. on a Monday, and I have the rest of the week off from work. Taking the week off was a good idea, I don't think I could've really made it. Things have been so hard, and honestly, I just need some time to gather myself. A little bit of alone time will really help me, I think. I went shopping this past weekend, so I have all the food and supplies I need for the week. I sit up and swing my legs over the edge of the bed. I look at the clock again, 7:01 p.m. There's a knock on my apartment door. It echoes around the apartment. That's strange, no one is supposed to come over this week. I put my slides on and walk to the door.

"I'm coming! Hold on," I say.

"No need! Just letting you know that the cable and internet are going to be out for tonight. The cable company is doing some maintenance to increase our internet speed and add more channels. I'm just letting the tenants know," says an older man's voice, "Have a good night!"

That must've been Aaron, our landlord. He's an older man, about 80 years old or so. I don't bother responding because we never speak to each other. He only comes around to let the tenants know if something is going to be happening around the complex. Unfortunately, not having cable or internet tonight is going to suck. Netflix and YouTube

were all I had to look forward to. I walk over to the couch in my living room. It may not be the biggest or nicest couch, but it is really comfortable. Right as I am about to sit, the power in the apartment goes out.

“Great. Of course. Why wouldn’t the power go out right now?” I complain to myself.

The breaker is downstairs in the basement. All I have to do is go and flip the switches for my apartment. The only annoying thing is, I have to do it quick because it’s dark as hell down there. This week is supposed to be a time for me to relax, not stress.

I’m not entirely sure what I should do. This could just be a minor outage and it’ll come back on after a couple of minutes. I guess I’ll just check the breaker. No harm in that. I walk back towards my room to grab the flashlight my sister bought me. I left it next to my desk. Right as I get into my room, I hear the someone knock on the door again.

“Yes? Who is it?” I shout. No answer.

What the hell? I grab the flashlight and start moving to the front door. Aaron must’ve come back. I step out of my room and my heart starts pounding. It beats so loud; I can hear it in my ears. There’s a piece of paper stuck to my door...on the inside. My door was locked. Did Aaron have a key? Did he leave a note for me?

“Aaron? You there?” I yell, “Who’s there? Hello?”

Sweat starts to drip down my forehead. How did this note get there? Why does this have to happen to me? I step a little closer. There’s words on the paper. It actually is a note. The closer I get to the paper, the harder my heart beats. I can’t breathe.

“Come back to your room, friend,” read the note.

Who the hell put this here? Why the hell is this happening? I double check to see if the door is locked. There is no way someone snuck into my apartment. I always lock the doors and I live on the second floor of the complex. I take a deep breath and open the door fast. I peek my head out the door and look around; all the apartments are closed. I don’t hear a sound.

“This is weird. Usually I can hear people talking,” I mumble.

I take another deep breath and close the door. I look at the note again

I’m feeling kind of nervous for some reason, but I don’t know why. The thought of going to a pitch-black basement on a day like this just doesn’t sit right with me. Then I realize something. Where is Aaron? He was just on this floor. There’s no way he finished knocking on all the doors and then proceeded to the next floor in the span of a minute or two. Why is it so quiet? Where is everybody?

“Hello? Aaron?” I say loudly.

What the hell is going on? Things feel weird, but I know I have to just flip the switch in the breaker and go back to my room. I can at least feel weird in my apartment with the door locked. I get to the stairs and start descending. Usually there are lights on the stairs but they’re off.

“I guess the power is out in the whole building,” I whisper, “Why the hell did this have to happen today?”

After descending for a bit, I get to the basement door and open it. It is so damn dark in there. I turn my flashlight on so I can see better. I shine the light into the room and see the breaker at the other end. I’m about to take a step when I feel a hand on my back. Suddenly, I’m forcefully pushed into the room and the door is slammed shut behind me. I slip, fall, and my head hits the ground. My flashlight flies out of my hand and lands a few feet away. My head feels like static. It’s so dark and quiet I feel like my senses broke. I lift head slowly. I feel so dizzy and confused. Now there’s a slight ringing in my ears. This room is too dark. I can’t see very well and there are things cluttering the floor. What happened?

“The breaker.” I try to stand up slowly “... the switch.”

I try to walk forward, my bare feet touching dry concrete. My slides must’ve fallen off when I fell. The sound of my every step bounce off the walls. The echoes are so loud. I kick a glass bottle and it spins across the floor. I stop walking. I’m scared. My confusion starts to wear off as I begin to worry about who pushed me, and what happened. I see

the light from my flashlight on the floor, near the breaker. I start to move forward but then, I hear it. A scraping sound. Long scrapes followed by short silences. It sounds distant at first, far away even though I am in an enclosed area. The flashlight flickers. Suddenly the scraping sound is much closer. It sounds behind me. Now I hear slow breathing. Soft, yet wet, like a heavy smoker's breathing. The hairs all over my body begin to stand. Goosebumps rise on my skin. I can hear it coming closer. I turn my head just enough to see its silhouette out of the corner of my eye, partially illuminated by my flashlight. It's so thin, with arms that reach the floor. Its long nails scraping against the concrete, and its bare feet slapping against the floor with every step. It sees me looking at it. It steps ever so slightly to the side, leaving my view. Then I feel its hand on my lower back. Its nails digging into my skin through my shirt. I can't move; I can't run even though my body screams that I should. I'm shaking. Whatever it is, it leans forward and applies more pressure to my lower back. I feel its breath on my neck. My heart is beating incredibly fast, pumping blood throughout my entire body. I can run, all I have to do is get my legs to move. I am just about to move when I feel it disappear. My legs give out and I collapse. I can barely breathe. There are no sounds around me anymore, only the sounds of me hyperventilating. I start to cry. I want to sleep. I am so tired of everything going wrong. I squeeze my eyes shut and begin to pray.

"God, please let this end. I have survived every test you have sent to me, but I don't think I can anymore. Help me plea- "

"Why are you praying to a god that's abandoned you," whispered a voice into my ear, "Your prayers have reached no one...no one except me. Rejoice in the fact that only I will come...when you are alone.". The voice so close that I felt its lips, and then it's gone.

The basement door slams open with Aaron standing in the doorway, bathed in a warm light. I cry harder.

I weep, "Don't leave me alone, please."