

Horror.
2464 Words.

The Nightshift.

By

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Emily bent down and blew a stray piece of her long chestnut brown hair out of her mouth. Rolling up her plaid shirt sleeves she pulled out a small black bucket sealed tightly with a plastic lid, she peeled the lid off slowly to take a peek, but before she could catch a sight of the bucket's contents, the sour stench of spoiled mince violated her nostrils. Emily reared back from the bucket, almost dropping it as she gagged loudly on the foul odour. She sealed the container back up and tossed it into the garbage bag next to her feet, wiping what little residue was on her hands onto her torn denim jeans.

“Everything alright in there?”

Emily heard Her father, Mr Harper, call out over the sound of the Spice Girls on repeat. She whipped off her purple headphones and placed them in the front pocket of her dirty brown apron, right next to her Walkman, which by now, had seen better days. Emily popped her head around the double doors of the tall steel fridge that sat in the back eastern corner of the kitchen, “Huh, you say something?” She asked.

“Just seeing if you were alright,” Mr Harper replied, a weary smile across his face as he admired his daughter, “You’ve got your mother’s eyes you know,” he said warmly as he gripped the small gold cross that hung around his neck as he looked skyward. “Gosh, she’d be so proud of you.”

“I don’t know, I think she could have emptied this fridge just as well as me.”

Mr Harper chuckled, “Same sense of humour too.”

The pair smiled for a moment in silence, before Mr Harper continued, “Anywho, it’s midnight, I’m going to bed... Are you sure you don’t want me to stay with you? I can sleep in one of the booths.” Mr Harper’s voice trailed off as he turned and pointed to a

booth in the corner of the diner.

“Dad,” Emily popped her head around the fridge door for a second time, “I’ll be fine. Barely anyone comes past at this time, and besides, if anyone comes in and tries something funny, the handguns behind the counter.”

“That gun is a tool, not a toy.” Mr Harper said sternly.

Emily stepped out from behind the fridge doors and closed them with a satisfying thud. She quickly raised her hands as if she were wielding the handgun, “Trying to rob my diner? I don’t think so!” she threw her hands back, imitating a handgun’s kickback as she mouthed *Bang*.

Mr Harper stared blankly at his daughter, as she pretended to blow the smoke coming out of a gun barrel like an old western hero. The diner’s lights flickered off for a brief moment then flickered back to life, “Gotta get that wiring fixed,” Mr Harper said as he scratched his head, “anywho, I’m off to bed,” he said gently, as he turned around and headed for the diner door. “Use the landline if you need me,” he said with a wave above his head. Within thirty seconds Mr Harper had hobbled out the front door and made his way across the road to his farmhouse leaving Emily alone in the ghost town of a diner.

It was a quiet night, Emily kept her Walkman tucked into her apron with her headphones placed firmly over her ears blasting the Spice Girls on repeat. *Ok, fridge completed*, Emily thought to herself as she proudly admired her organisational work. She looked down at the large black garbage bag that sat next to her on the floor filled with produce that needed to be thrown out. She hated throwing out this much produce, but lately, the business had been undergoing a bit of a rough streak. “They’d rather live safe, cushy lives in the city than

do an honest day's labour," Is what Mr Harper would say. he had run this diner for just over thirty years, but with the town's numbers slowly dwindling, so did the income.

Emily kicked the backdoor open gently as she heaved the large garbage over her shoulder. The night's crisp breeze greeted her with a sudden gust, instantly sending goosebumps up her arms. With a sigh she hefted the garbage bag up a bit more on her shoulder, making sure to leave the door slightly ajar so she didn't need to bring her keys with her, a bad habit she had developed when she was still smoking. *It's easier to just leave it unlocked than asking for the keys to unlock it every 30 minutes*, was her reasoning, and even now the habit still stuck.

The dumpster itself wasn't far away, no further than 50 yards, it was getting the rubbish into the dumpster that was the trouble. Emily had always been a head shorter than her friends, often getting mistaken for a child, and heaving a heavy garbage bag took a substantial amount of effort. With a loud grunt, Emily managed to heave the garbage bag into the dumpster and began heading back to the backdoor when something caught her eye. The door was now wide open, and the kitchen light was off.

Emily stood frozen like a child caught elbow-deep in a cookie jar, terror began to crawl its way up her body, digging its claws into her flesh as it inched higher and higher. The kitchen light then flickered back on, its warm glow slowly casting the terror back to the shadows. *Faulty wiring, and the wind you scaredy-cat...* Emily scolded herself silently as she hurried back to the door, before entering, Emily paused to look up at the night sky. It was overcast, as Mr Harper would say, "God's about to help the farmers."

The next hour was uneventful for Emily as she had finished

organising the kitchen the way she liked and had since slumped into a booth to listen to music when the *Brrrrrrnnnnngggg!* Of the diner phone cut through the pitter-patter of rain pecking at the diner's long glass window front. Emily was stunned for a moment, *why would anyone be calling now?*

Brrrrrrnnnnngggg!

Emily remained still as the phone screamed again, *It's gotta be Dad, probably thinks it's too scary for me to be looking after this place by myself.* Emily hopped up at the third *Brrrrrrnnnnngggg!* slung her headphones back into her apron, and snatched up the phone off the diner counter. "Dad, I'm fine, it's just a little rain."

Silence.

Emily sighed as she swapped the phone to her other ear, "Hellooooo, can you hear me?"

Click.

The dial tone hummed gently as Emily stood at the counter confused, "He hung up on me?" she said as she slowly placed the phone back down on the receiver. She began biting the left corner of her bottom lip, another bad habit she had developed, this time from her childhood. Her "Thinking face," is what her mother calls it.

Brrrrrrnnnnngggg!

Emily jumped at the sudden noise before quickly snatching the phone up for a second time, "Hello?" she asked, still jittery from the jump scare.

A young man's voice calmly spoke back, "Hello? Can you hear me now?"

"Yes," realising that the voice was much too young to be Mr Harper's gravelly voice Emily quickly remembered the standard phone greeting for the diner, "Sorry, Mickey's 24/7 diner, how can I help

you?"

The phone remained silent for a moment before the man replied, "Mickey's diner? Does that make you Minnie?" The man let out a soft chuckle at his joke.

Emily groaned as she swapped the phone to her other ear, she turned around on the diner stool she had sat down on and glanced up at the clock, 2:20 am "*Nice one, only took you one bailout to have the balls to make it.*" Emily put the phone back down on the receiver, *don't they have something better to do?* She thought to herself.

Brrrrrrnnngggg!

Emily looked down at the phone with disdain, groaned and picked it back up, "What do you want?" She said bluntly.

"Woah, I'm sorry, I was just messing around." The man said, trying to sound as soothing as he possibly could, "I'm just looking for a friend."

"Sorry, no one else is here, you sure he comes to our diner?"

"No one else? I swear he said he'd be there."

"Like I said, it's only me, so you should probably try another number--"

"Wait, don't hang up."

Emily hesitated at those words, she'd be lying if she said that despite not knowing whoever was calling, it was comforting to hear someone else's voice while she was here alone.

"Ok, well, I'm just not sure what I can help you with," Emily said as she twisted on her stool, allowing her to lean against the counter.

"You said our diner. You don't own the place? Pretty rough hours to work for a young woman all on her own."

"It's my parent's place, they built it decades ago, I just help out when I can. Besides, it's not too bad, the only people that come in at this time are regular drivers on their route."

"It must get pretty lonely doing the night shift though."

"I mean, it's quiet, but it's not all bad, I get free coffee."

"Ha, if I had access to free coffee I'd never sleep. But don't you get bored?"

"Nah, I usually just work on my college work or watch TV."

"Oh, College work? What are you studying?"

"Creative writing. I want to be an author someday, maybe work in films or TV."

"That sounds like a fun subject, what's your favourite genre to write?"

"Romance."

"Let me guess, your favourite movie is Titanic."

"Guilty."

"What about horror?"

"No, I hate horror, why would anyone want to be scared?"

"You find out a lot about yourself when you're scared."

"Oh yeah, like what?"

"Like how fast you can run."

"I could just join track to do that."

The man chuckled at Emily, "So you really prefer lovey-dovey nonsense over an exhilarating thrill?"

"So much so that if Leonardo DiCaprio himself came to visit this diner and told me his favourite genre was horror, you know what I would do?"

"What?"

"I would tear his poster off my wall."

“Harsh, in that case, maybe I can be your visitor.”

A sudden sense of uneasiness struck Emily, those words had felt a little too close for comfort, especially since Emily still had no idea who she was talking to. “You know, I really should get back to work.”

“I’m sure that booth *really* needs your attention.”

Emily froze as her eyes went wide with fear. She quickly jerked around to face the Diner’s glass window front, her teeth slowly ground together as her jaw clenched. “W-who the hell is this?” Emily stammered trying to not show any sign of fear in her voice.

“Ooooh, language, don’t think Daddy would approve of H-E double hockey sticks, now would he, Emily?” The voice taunted back.

A mixture of terror and anger began to boil up within Emily, “Who the fuck is this!” She screamed out, her voice becoming shriller with each syllable. “I swear I-I’ll-”

“You’ll what? Cry?” The man laughed viciously. It was clear to him he had gotten under Emily’s skin. He could hear the fear in her voice and was savouring every moment of it.

“I’ll call the police!” Emily screamed as tears began to swell up in her eyes.

“You call the police and I guarantee I’ll gut you before they even send a squad car.” The man barked.

Tears were now streaming down Emily’s cheeks as she desperately scanned through the glass windowfront to no avail, the once soft pitter-patter had now been replaced by heavy beads of rain, bombarding the windowfront, obscuring the limited vision she already had. “I-I have a gun asshole! You come in this diner and I’ll put a hole through your head!”

“A gun! Oh, no,” The man mocked Emily.

Emily jumped up from her stool and desperately ripped open the cabinet behind the counter that held the handgun. She picked it up, her fingers trembling as they gripped tightly onto the steel. It was heavier than she remembered but was confident that if she had to use it, she could remember the basic training her father had given her. Emily made her way back around the counter brandishing the gun, trying to instill some sense of courage in her voice before screaming into the phone “You show your face here, you’re dead!”

SCRRRRRCHHHH!

Emily jerked around violently to the sound of the front door glass being carved, the phone plummeted to the floor as she flinched. Emily quickly raised the gun at the figure and in panic, shut her eyes and squeezed the trigger.

Nothing.

Emily opened her eyes and squeezed again.

Nothing.

Emily dropped the gun as she crumpled to the floor in fear, backing up onto the countertop between two stools as she stared up at the large, dark figure, towering in front of the glass door. His rain poncho flapped in the wind as the rain pelted his porcelain white mask of a face. Its hard-defined edges blending with the soft curves made the face look like a gaunt ghoul with endless voids for eyes. And in his right hand, carving into the glass front door, was a large serrated hunting knife.

The man reached into his poncho pocket swapping his knife for a small, thin piece of metal, holding it up for Emily to see. Emily’s heart sank as she stared at the thin piece of metal the man held in his hand, as she looked down at the handgun. Emily grabbed the gun off the floor quickly, her hands violently trembling as she turned it over

in her hands.

The magazine was gone.

She dropped the gun again as the terror consumed her, coiling its way around her throat, choking out any hope she had left. The man's head tilted in delight as he returned the magazine to his pocket, redrawing his knife and pointing it at the phone on the floor that Emily had previously dropped. She glanced at it and then back to the figure who remained in his spot, now slowly nodding his head. Emily picked up the phone, fumbling it multiple times before raising it to her ear. She heard the man speak softly, her fingers barely keeping the phone to her ear.

"Another thing we learn when we're scared is, do I have a good memory?" The man said as he took a step away from the glass door back into the shroud of the storm, vanishing from Emily's sight.

"In your case, Did I ever lock the back door?"