

Sarah

In the rigid corner of a bare prison cell a mother sat sorrowful, confused and terror stricken. The concept of why she should even be there escaped her, every time she tried to think about it reality would slip away; her mind could not grasp it. So she sat shaking.

The resonating clang of a cell door elsewhere and from nowhere a voice in her rang out! She couldn't hear what it said, if it said anything at all, but the sound of it stung behind the eyes and singed the fabric of her mind. She couldn't help but feel divided; alone but yet connected to someone else, someone horrible...

*As a child her mother had scolded her for crying. It was babyish and completely forbidden. The hateful woman would watch her endlessly as Sarah scrubbed the entire household, cooked, and then went on to clean up after all of them. "A woman and a mother keep their feelings aside and do what must be done to keep order," she'd squawk while her daughter laboured and sobbed inside. If she wept, if she yelled, if she acted disobediently there would be consequences. A child soon learns what will earn a rod, and childhood habits are the toughest to break.*

The ringing in her head never ceased. She was alone in that cell so there was no way of finding out if the noise was real, no one to rely on, no one to help her. Suddenly the ringing stopped and gradually a voice cried out, beginning as a whisper and growing till it screamed in her head! It yelled insults and accusations, screeching terms of hatred to every name she held in her memory! Sarah fell to her side in agony at the sound and held her hands over her ears. She tried to drown it out and soon found herself screaming in that ever shrinking cell! Now she knew that the noise was inside her... because the only voice that she heard was her own.

*When the time came, and too soon, Sarah married. He wasn't what she'd dreamed of; she scarcely found the initiative to dream. She'd barely known him a few months when he asked her to marry him. And who was she to reject him? It was hardly orderly to cause such dismay... So Sarah and Mike bought a quaint, old house and soon had a child. A beautiful boy who, it was insisted, would be named after his father. He was barely two when his father left. He didn't sneak off in secret or let Sarah down gently. No, there was no need. He just went up to her one day and told her she would be alone, she was alone; he was leaving and would never be coming back. He knew she wouldn't cause any trouble or resist the idea. That would have made things messy. Instead the topic became forbidden; no one spoke of it, it was never mentioned. Sarah's silence and restraint of her emotions left her heart bleeding and unattended. Never once did she vent the pain she suffered from the actions of that putrid, deceitful man she had called a husband. He hadn't even had the decency to divorce her, but did she bother him for it? No. Instead she held in her suffering, that burning pit of rage buried in some forgotten place of her being. As always, she concealed herself with normality; for the sake of simplicity and vanity of course.*

*So Sarah went about her daily life, not mentioning, not mourning, not hating aloud, just...being. Of course, there was no point in being sad or angry. He was already gone, and telling her son, Michael, or her family what he'd done would only be a*

*disruption to their lives. Better to stay calm and quiet. But not all of her was so obedient...*

She could hear the voice clearly now. It had stopped its endless cries and shrieks and began to talk in a dreary, bitter version of Sarah's own voice. It told her of its repression; how it had been hidden all these years, stored in the farthest back hollows of her skull. It moaned about the misery of never escaping; and just there, when its voice would lower in an agonized groan, a barely audible whisper would sound behind it... *Michael is dead.*

Sarah jumped at these words. She still sat shaking, now in the middle of the cold, stone floor. She considered what this could mean and after a few moments... actually *grinned*. The hatred of years swept over her as she imagined that cheating, arrogant, selfish pig of a husband dead! Dead!

Wait. This wasn't her. This wasn't Sarah thinking these things was it? No. This place was driving her mad, she was losing it. Mike was a good guy, he'd had to leave that's all. They were still married. He wouldn't leave his son behind...

Something inside her laughed. She shook her head once more, trying to clear it but to no avail. Why should Mike be dead? She hadn't heard from him in ages, this couldn't be real. The voice kept laughing...

*Sarah had watched Michael grow from a baby to a young boy and all without her husband. The knowledge of how he'd left them haunted her, but she busied herself with work and with her child. She went about with a smile and a loving disposition. But somewhere inside there was another part of her, and it hated even his name. Michael, Mike, all the same. She loathed that man. Every day, every moment she saw his offspring she could see him in it, and she wanted it gone. She wished it gone, never to see it again. She wanted to erase the memory, the existence, of Michael. But Sarah loved him; she had to, didn't she? That's what a mother does; she cares for a child no matter what.*

An icy draft filtered its way around the cell door. Sarah awoke from the dream-like state she'd slipped into and images flashed to her. A spider. A grotesquely misshapen, ugly mess of a spider in its flimsy web. She remembered it, and yet it slipped her mind, as everything did these days. She growled at herself with frustration. The beastly, shrill laughing had dwindled, but now rebooted twice as hard.

The voice came again, *Michael is dead*. Sarah gripped the sides of the bench built into the cell wall and gritted her teeth. The memory flashed back. Piece by piece. But no sense could be made! What was it?! What is this thought that haunts her so and yet will not surface to be seen properly? The frustration it built was too fierce to bear. Sarah fell to her back where she's sat and that cold, hard floor met her head.

*Sarah dropped the keys on the mantle piece, ignoring her usual habit of hanging them on the neatly placed peg in the kitchen wall. The aged wooden stairs groaned beneath her feet and her robotic, unchanging gait. Her left hand rested on the pine wood banister, gently indented from years of use. In the other hand was held a thick rope, the frayed bits of hemp straying to rub raw the foul intentioned hand where it lay. Where the*

*weak mind of most days would have shaken violently at the very thought of what was about to happen, this other side walked calmly up the stairs.*

*There at the top of the staircase, looking out the hall window to the garden stood the boy. That revolting creature of the man who destroyed them. And now that vile creation of his would be destroyed. The last remnants of his harmful doings would leave that house and leave Sarah, at last, alone like he'd promised.*

*The boy made little resistance. He was still small and trusted his mother. When she brought her fist down on him he barely looked shocked, barely saw it coming.*

*A moment later and the rope served its purpose dutifully. The boy hung there, unconscious and quiet. She looked out the window and dipped her head below the sill to see. And there, on the underside of the windowsill, hung a spider. A horrible spider, never seen before now. The grossness of the creature had been there for years perhaps, cocooned in its own web. The ornately varnished, deep cherry sill had covered it for all that time.*

Sarah rose. Blood rushed from her head as she stood. Her legs wobbled beneath her. Her son. Her son. Michael was dead! She'd done it herself! Her head lolled on her trembling neck. The lump in her throat lifted further and her eyes swelled with emotion. At last, the tears cascaded down her pale, ashen cheeks. They flew to the cold floor and dripped their warmth into the stone.

The voice died down. Her mind quieted as a lifetimes worth of anguish plummeted from her body. Her mother, her husband, her son; what difference did it make? They were all dead to her. And she didn't care anymore.

Sarah stepped forward, her first step without the weight of lives on her shoulder. At last she stood alone. She placed her foot to the ground and it slid to the side. Her once shuddering knees now fell from beneath her. She toppled to the side and fell further down. Her skull met the bench as it reached the floor. That cold, hard floor now greeted Sarah as if a welcoming hand. She didn't feel pain. Warm blood flowed from her head that once cluttered head. She looked to the window and smiled. At last she was free, at last she was whole. And with her final breath, with closed eyes, she heard the running footsteps and shouts of the medics as they rushed to an already lost cause.