

THE NIGHTMARE DOOR

by

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FADE IN:

INT. BOARDING SCHOOL - GRACE'S ROOM - DAY

Sound of running water in background.

Stuffed toys line a shelf. Assorted animals: bears, birds -- a stag rests centre-piece.

Tucked on the end is a greeting card emblazoned with the words: 'Miss You'.

On a desk, crayons spill over a drawing -- a childish swirl of dark color. The subject hidden beneath the clutter.

ALDOUS (O.S.)
Nurse told me you were having
trouble sleeping again Grace.

The water ceases. Pipes stutter and GROAN from the building's depths. The sound plays intermittently throughout -- haunting, yet strangely soothing.

A CAT perches at the window-sill, basking in the last rays of sunlight.

ALDOUS (O.S.)
Some find their first time away
from home most trying.

ALDOUS, late 60s, one eye shuttered into a squint, shuffles out from an en-suite. He wears an academic cap and gown.

ALDOUS
I myself was no different.

He wipes his hands on a handkerchief before tucking it away beneath his gown.

ALDOUS
My dreams were filled with dark
machinations, clamoring to consume
me from shadowy reaches.

He slips out a pocket-watch, checks the time against a clock on a nightstand: 7:05.

ALDOUS

In my day it was remedied by daily exercise and a healthy dose of study. For those occasioning the Housemaster's favour a spot of Laudanum and rum.

He plucks a crayon from the desk, thumbs it thoughtfully.

ALDOUS

I too would seek to render my tormentors to the waking hours, an attempt to place some order on my subconscious malady... Still I found myself at their mercy.

Aldous snugs a monocle into place over his good eye. He takes up the drawing. His eye bugging through the lens.

ALDOUS

Fascinating. Do you know what this creature is?

GRACE, 7, a mop of blond curls, peeks wide-eyed from beneath the covers of her bed. She shakes her head.

Aldous ponders this a moment. Lets it go.

ALDOUS

I find a good story to settle a restless mind.

Grace's eyes follow Aldous as he moves to the window.

He removes his cap. The shadow of night creeps up his body as the last moments of daylight slip away.

ALDOUS

Would you like to hear mine?

Grace gives a hesitant nod.

ALDOUS

It's the very same that was told
to me this night so long ago.
Perhaps one day you'll tell it to
another.

He turns, his face now cast in shadow. One eye looms large
behind the monocle.

Grace flinches as the cat leaps onto the bed. It settles
into place upon her chest, PURRING loudly.

ALDOUS

What is today?

Grace thinks a moment. She opens her mouth to speak.

ALDOUS

Saturday..?

He pouts disappointed.

ALDOUS

Oh but today is so much more than
a mere name. It's the day that
occasions the beginning of our
tale. Where would we be if not for
a beginning? An entrance, if you
like. A most fitting place to start.

He moves to Grace's bedside and plucks the clock from her
nightstand. He winds it with a slow and deliberate manner.

ALDOUS

For this tale concerns a door. Not
like a door such as that which
stands before us.

He waves dismissively towards the bedroom door.

ALDOUS

An unremarkable threshold to some
lesser room without, far from it.
The door of this particular tale
lies beyond our mortal tether. Some

(MORE)

ALDOUS (CONT'D)

would say it leads to nowhere.
Others would say nowhere leads it
to us. As birds flock to some
distant shore and fish seek a river
from the sea, so this door is bound
to the curious nature of this
universe. To appear with the last
night of the tenth month, to vanish
with first day of the eleventh.

He tilts his head to look at Grace.

ALDOUS

Your Saturday... A dash of Sunday
were we to concern ourselves with
trivialities. Which we most
assuredly are not.

His eyes rise to the ceiling as the pipes continue their
orchestrations. He replaces the clock. The TICKING settles
into a gentle rhythm.

ALDOUS

This, is a door unto itself. As
given to embrace our passing as
to ward us from our plight.

Aldous takes the toy stag from the shelf. He studies it a
moment. He closes his eyes in a brief moment of sincerity.

ALDOUS

I can tell you, that which leaves
is not that which returns.

He returns the toy to its spot.

The sounds swell. The cat's PURR; RUMBLE of the pipes and
TICKING of the clock seem to blend into one.

Shadows play upon the walls and ceiling, as if cast by the
toys. Wings stretch. Slender necks unfurl, their long beaks
yawning. A set of antlers looms above the other shapes.

The shadows flicker across Grace's face. She stares
straight ahead as if mesmerized by sight and sound.

ALDOUS

Of course all this must surely
lead us to the notion of what
could lie beyond such a door?

The cat tenses. Its fur shifts and bulges as its feline
shape slowly morphs into a hunched and twisted figure.

It turns to stare down at Grace with a burning malevolence.

She closes her eyes.

ALDOUS

I fear the answer to be found in
that which lies without.

Grace takes a deep breath into sleep.

EXT. MEADOW - DAY

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

Grace exhales. She opens her eyes. Birdsong greets her.

She stands in a meadow. The sun rests low on the horizon
basking everything in a golden light.

She turns her face, soaking in the warmth.

A distant LAUGHTER draws her back.

A knot of CHILDREN run playfully along the brow of a hill.

Grace smiles and steps forward.

The children slip from view.

MOMENTS LATER

Grace runs towards the hill -- faint LAUGHTER from the
other side.

EXT. HILL - DAY

Grace reaches the brow and stops. She looks around for sign of the children.

The LAUGHTER comes from a small copse below.

Her smile returns.

She takes off towards the trees.

EXT. COPSE - DUSK

The last rays of light break through the canopy. Darkness closing in fast.

Grace picks her way through the undergrowth. The LAUGHTER always ahead -- leading her on.

EXT. WOODED CLEARING - NIGHT

Grace steps from the brush. A boy stands in the centre of the clearing, his back to her.

She takes a tentative step forward. Looks around, unsure of this place.

Soft LAUGHTER drifts from the tree-line. Grace creeps forward, her eyes stray nervously to the shadows.

A step behind him now, Grace reaches out, touches the boy on the shoulder. He doesn't respond.

She edges around him. Still he remains frozen.

KA-CHINK. She looks down, her foot has snagged a chain. She follows the links to a manacle wrapping the boy's ankle.

She looks up into his face.

He stands breathless. Skin deathly pale, one cheek streaked with blood from an empty eye socket.

She stares at him in shock. Opens her mouth to speak.

YOUNG ALDOUS, 7, raises a finger to his blistered lips. His eyes dart nervously to the forest.

The LAUGHTER turns to a feral SCREECH. The wind gathers from a rush to a ROAR.

Shadows emerge above the undergrowth. Heads turn. Slender necks unfold. Wings stretch. Jaws and snap and yawn.

A set of antlers rises above the other shapes.

The children stand there, not daring to move. Swallowed in the growing clamour.

Grace closes her eyes.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. BOARDING SCHOOL - GRACE'S ROOM - DAWN

Silence. Aldous stands before the bed bathed in dawn light. He slips away the pocket watch and replaces his cap.

Grace stirs beneath the covers. She sits up. Studies Aldous. The cat rubs against her with affection.

ALDOUS

Welcome back old friend.

INT. BOARDING SCHOOL - KITCHEN - DAY

A pair of hands tack a drawing into place upon a fridge.

ALDOUS (O.S.)

A most welcome addition.

Aldous steps back in admiration. He raises his hands to a brief patter of applause.

He turns to regard his audience.

A number of CHILDREN sit either side of a table -- Grace among them. The table is set for breakfast.

TIRED BOY, 7, sits bleary-eyed and unkempt. He pours cereal into a bowl. Reaches for a spoon -- a small, soil-stained hand beats him too it.

He looks up at Grace.

She holds up the spoon, pausing to study her reflection as it appears, naturally distorted in the steel curve.

Satisfied she hands it back. Holds Tired Boy with a stare.

His eyes drop to the spoon. His reflection screams in silence as blood streams from gouged eyes.

The spoon lands with a clatter.

The Tired Boy stares open mouthed at Grace.

She simply pours herself a bowl of cereal. Aldous wanders past them, moving on down the line.

ALDOUS

Eat up one and all. The sun has
risen and the light of another day
awaits.

The refrigerator door stands thickly adorned in drawings. All seemingly from a child's hand.

A similar theme among them -- children cowering as dark and twisted beasts gather around them.

ALDOUS (O.S.)

As surely does the darkness of
night.

The latest addition takes pride of place. It shows a girl with yellow curls huddled with a boy in a forest clearing.

Nightmarish creatures reach from the shadows about them.

FADE OUT