

Devil's Nest

By
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An explosion shook her awake.

On her left a window lit up. Thunder streaked across the sky growing in speed like an incoming missile. Lightning turned the night to day.

The thunder exploded. A scream tore from her throat. Still half asleep, she tried to fight her way out of a nightmare.

Or was it real?

Windows rattled and the wind howled. She felt moisture on her face and dashed tears away.

Every instinct told her to get up, run, save herself. But from what? Her mind was muddled with fear and pain. Where was she? With fumbling hands, she realized she lay on a mattress and swung her legs out of bed. Lightning-sharp pain jagged through her head.

A cry escaped but she gritted her teeth and shoved at the pillow to sit upright. Thunder streaked across the sky, building force. It came for her like a soaring, diving predator. She fought to stay sitting as if she fought for her very life.

The window lit up.

She saw that the window arched at the top. Huge, stretching from the floor to a cathedral ceiling fifteen feet high, it glowed in the flashing light. The window and ceiling were magnificent, ornate—she'd never seen them before. It was all clear. Her vision worked but a fog seemed to envelope her brain and she couldn't reason out what was going on.

“Where am I?” Before the thunder hit, she stumbled to her feet.

The thunder struck. She teetered back. Her thighs hit the bed, but she stayed upright. Distant thunder rolled steadily beneath the closer rage of the storm, adding strength to the explosions.

The window lit up. It was coming, coming, another deafening assault of thunder.

Where was this place? Glanced frantically around sent fresh torment lacing through her head. A whimper ripped loose from her throat. The salty sting of tears blinded her, even though she wasn't aware of crying. The thunder streaked toward her again.

Roughly she wiped tears away with both hands. When she jostled her head, she set off another round of raging pain. Her hands were so wet and sticky with tears she ran her wrists and forearms over her cheeks to rid herself of the salt that cut like acid into her eyes. She wiped her tear soaked hands on her nightgown and touched heavy, soft fabric.

Strange robe, strange room, strange window. She had no idea what had brought her to this place and time.

She looked again at herself but the flickering lightning died and plunged her into darkness. She touched the unfamiliar cloth. Slid her hands down it, knowing she'd never seen the robe before. The thunder rolling across the sky. It seized the house, shook it in its teeth. She staggered under the violence.

The window lit up.

She looked at the white robe she wore and saw black stripes. Like jail cell bars. The stripes glistened wet. Her fingers were tipped in black. She spread them wide and looked at her palms. Both hands smeared with black. Both wrists. Both arms.

The window lit up and the black became red. Bright, wet, warm, crimson.

Blood.

She shook her head to rid it of this insanity and the hurt finally made sense as it slashed through her skull. Not tears. Blood. She wiped at her head again and felt the source of her pain in a gash on her head.

The thunder exploded. Stunned from the vivid blood, the vicious pain, she stumbled and fell on the bed. Her head twisted away from the ugliness of her fear.

The fixed eyes of a man glared at her. A gaping slash crossed his throat..