

Devil's Nest

By
Mary Connealy

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 ~~again, tearing a~~ ~~A~~ scream ~~tore~~ from her ~~throat~~. Still half asleep, she ~~fought~~ ~~tried to fight~~ her way out of ~~a~~ ~~the~~ nightmare.

Or was it real?

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

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

~~A~~ cry escaped ~~her~~ ~~but she gritted her teeth.~~ ~~Powering through the pain, she~~ ~~and~~ shoved at the pillow ~~and sat~~ ~~to sit~~ upright.

Thunder ~~once more rumbled~~ ~~streaked across the sky~~ ~~—built,~~ ~~—building~~ force ~~—came.~~ ~~It came~~ for her like a soaring, diving predator. She fought to stay ~~upright as if fighting for her sitting as if she fought for her very~~ life.

The window lit up ~~and she noticed it was huge and~~ : ~~She saw that the window~~ arched ~~at the top,~~ ~~Huge,~~ stretching from the floor to a cathedral ceiling fifteen feet ~~high~~ ~~above.~~ ~~, it glowed in the flashing light.~~ The window and ceiling were

magnificent, ornate—but she'd never seen them before. ~~It was all clear.~~ Her vision worked but a fog ~~seemed to~~ enveloped her brain. ~~and she couldn't reason out what was going on.~~

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

~~A new barrage of thunder nearly toppled her. 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 nearer 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, but jostling. ~~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—and. ~~She had no idea why at 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 again rolled ing across the sky and she. ~~It seized the house, shook it in its teeth. She~~ staggered under the its violence.

The window lit up yet again.

When She she looked at the white robe she wore and she saw black stripes. Like jail cell bars. But the ~~The~~ stripes glistened wet.

Her fingers too ~~were tipped in black~~. She spread them wide and looked at her palms.

Both hands smeared with black. Both wrists. Both arms.

The ~~window lightning~~ again flashed ~~hit up~~ and the black became red. Bright, wet, warm—
crimson. ~~crimson~~.

Blood.

She shook her head ~~to rid it of this insanity~~ and as the pain slashed through her skull
again, 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~~ there on her head.

The thunder exploded. Stunned from the vivid blood and ~~the~~ vicious pain, she stumbled
and fell back onto the bed. Her head twisted away from the ugliness of ~~her~~ the fear she couldn't
face.

But ~~The~~ the fixed eyes of a man glared at her instead. A gaping slash crossed his throat.-