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My Thoughts Are My Friends

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push the door shut tightly. By the distant glow of a street light through the leaves he could see the narrow bed against the far end, the overhead bulb which he partially unscrewed. Quickly he shed his clothes, folded them neatly into a package that could easily be grabbed and run with, and put it under the bed. Mary Sue was a mound beneath blankets and he slipped in beside her as she whispered Hi. Although he was quietly laughing his arms and legs were shaking badly. Their bodies touched, and he realized that she was naked; his hearthammered once in erratic rhythm, and he threw back the covers to see in the dim light her full breasts, belly. “We got to wait,” she said, slowly pulling the blanket to her chin. “Until the house lights go off. And if anyone comes in here you got to look like Pat. I’ll say you’re asleep.” Oh jeezus, he thought, torn between desire and fear, seeing himself caught naked in this gawdamn narrow house trailer with only one small door and no windows big enough to jump through. His hand slid across her body, held the strong hard loveliness of her breast, and if that wasn’t enough to convince him she reached under her pillow and handed him a rubber. “Stole it from my father,” she said. He gripped it tightly and waited, knowing after all these years he could wait a little longer; knowing finally that the long wait had led to this ancient trailer house, this narrow bed, the warm soft heavy body which lay beside him, the shadow patterns of leaves on the walls.

Albert Drake

MY THOUGHTS ARE MY FRIENDS

i told her that i would go out and find the others. Timmy and Sharon always run away when mother starts beating them up. Of course they’re older. It’s harder for me to get away because she usually catches me. i don’t want to be stuffed in that terrifying cubby hole, with me on the top shelf and Tim on the bottom. It gets so hot, and we can’t breathe and we gasp for breath. No one can hear us yelling and we’re afraid we’re going to die. i had better think of a way to get out of the house myself.

It’s very gray in the house and the furniture smells musty. It even feels sort of greasy and i cringe when i touch it. Maybe it’s just the yellow light bulb that makes me think that. Every place i go is so bright and hot with light that i know something is wrong with ours. Now is the time for me to go if i’m going to. She’ll start digging her fingernails into my head again until i’m almost blind with pain and she’ll push down and i’ll keep going lower and lower to get out of her clutches. Finally my head will be on the floor and i’ll be forced to knock her hand out of my head.

Ma please don’t hit me. i told you where i was, playing with the kids up the street. The others were supposed to get the bread and milk. No, i won’t be able to go to the store now because it’s eleven thirty and everything is closed. Next she’ll ask me why i bothered to come home at all and why don’t i spend my evenings where i’ve spent my entire day. i don’t want to tell her that i hate coming home to find her beating up the other kids and that i don’t want to be beaten up myself. She’ll find some kind of excuse to start in on me and i’ll be sorry. i’ll ask myself like i always do, do all little boys my age get beaten up because they’ve done something or nothing, or hit somebody or cried for someone or get punched because the cat was sick and kicked because the mashed potatoes weren’t eaten. Did i close the closet door or maybe i’m getting punished because she found my jack-knife hidden in the ripped cushion on my chair. Maybe the other boys get it too because they made twenty cents and spent it without telling anyone and maybe they wash the red out of their eyes before they go to school so no one will know. It always seems strange because if they do, no one tells me and i guess it’s a secret that you’re not supposed to tell anyone because if you do you just get punched again.

i’m scared because the other kids are gone and they usually protect me or put the blame on themselves because they can
They think they've outsmarted me but they haven't.

Where are they and don't tell me that you didn't see them or you'll get just what they got you little son of a bitch.

doing this and then i was getting punished for it.

Every time some trouble started i found a way of disappearing and sometimes even Timmy and Sharon objected to it. They sometimes even got mad at me because i was a coward. They're probably right though. After all, the more punches you take the less the other two of us would have to get. We should have worked out a system so that we could share the punches and kicks equally and mother would get tired out. She used to say i cried crocodile tears and it was probably true. i imagine if someone could hurt a crocodile through that skin he would really have something to cry about.

What happened this time mother i ask trying to keep her mind on the others and not myself, knowing all the time it was coming. She doesn't answer as usual but just glares at me with those glassy, insane eyes and tips over some of the kitchen furniture. i wish she would hit me and not glare. You'd better pray they come back with my bread and milk because he didn't smell his nose and if he did he realized the stench was much worse in the house. i bet he wished that i would be thrown out too so that we could wander off together and we could talk and i could tell him when to cross the street. And if a big dog came along i could pick him up and he wouldn't be hurt. Maybe all this time he wished he was in bed cuddled up next to me and burping puppy burp in my ear and we could dream.

I'm cornered but i will think of some way to outwit her i think to myself. She digs her fingernails into my arms and stomach and grits her teeth and i scream and yell and promise to tell the truth. And all the time i'm wishing that company would come so that she would have to finish later. She doesn't like people to know about these things and it's probably best. i just figure that they do the same thing but don't tell anyone either and neither do their little boys.

I'll find them i say and run out of the house without a coat on. i promise i'll find them and make them come home and i'll make sure that they bring back the bread and milk and you'll be able to drink your coffee then, and we can all go to bed and sleep and we'll all forget about this mess and we won't let it happen again. She screams at me to get my lying little ass away from the door but by the time she gets to me i'm out in the cold black night trying to think what i'll do next. The fog is coming in and painting the sidewalks and buildings gray and making yellow haze around the streetlamp. A dog is barking somewhere in the distance telling some goddamn nose cat to get out of his yard and his owner is probably getting up to go out and ring his god-dammed neck. He'll shut up but he has to learn the hard way too.

i decide to look into the kitchen from the front porch to see if i can tell what she is going to do next. i worry when things like this happen because you can never tell what she is going to do. Sometimes she goes in our rooms and flings all our things out onto the floor. Maybe this time she will rip them all and cut them to shreds with the scissors again, or maybe she'll clean up the mess on the kitchen floor with them. i really worry to death when i don't know what she is doing because someday she is going to find my box of valuables.
take the pain or can run faster than i can. What happens if she starts beating me again. I wonder because no one will protect me this time and i could get killed. I know she hates me even more than the others because she remembers the time that she was pouring coffee on the floor and dumping the garbage out and throwing cold cereal all over. They were crying and bleeding and hurting with blue pains and i was safe upstairs under a chair praying. I thought it would help them because we always said prayers kneeling in front of the couch. There must have been something to it. Maybe god was mad at me for taking the envelopes out of church. It couldn't be that because i only got a dollar and i'm sure he didn't miss it. But maybe he did and now i was getting punished for it.

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that i keep in my room. i have some baseball cards, a few jumbo cat’s eyes marbles and a few old coins that Mrs. Maroni gave me. i also have a bunch of miniature cars and trucks that were given to me when i was in the hospital. If she ever found them, she’d really have a ball with them, and i wouldn’t be able to do anything but cry about them and i know that they can’t be replaced. i’m glad to find that she has decided to sit down at the kitchen table and smoke a cigarette. i bet one of the kids used all her milk again on cold cereal. Why the heck not, i think to myself, that’s all there ever is in the house is cold cereal. We have it for breakfast and lunch and dinner and snacks and anything else you can name.

But it’s starting to get cold and i’ve got to find my brother and sister. They were smart to have gotten out but i wonder where they went. Probably to the junkyard again. It’s right behind the house and we can watch ma from the fence that surrounds it. It passes within two feet of the kitchen. Then i hear a whispered blue voice calling me from the direction of the junkyard. The fence around it seems to be holding in the darkest portion of the night. i’m cold again and wish that i had grabbed my coat on the way out. It would have been impossible though. i left it in the front room and she would have caught me right away. i had better plan things properly for the next time. Always leave your coat on the chair by the kitchen door. A heavy one preferably.

What happened this time? She’s really gone mad again. i think she’s going to rip your clothes up again if you don’t go back. You’d better bring her milk with you or she’ll kill the both of you.

Fuck her, she’s crazy and there ain’t no stores open anyway at this time of night. We’re not going back in tonight or tomorrow morning for that matter of fact. She’d have us stand up all night or throw some more garbage on the floor while we’re cleaning up the mess she’s already made. She’ll probably knock us down into it and laugh at us and throw scalding hot water at us.

It was a favorite trick of hers. She always liked to see how much shit she could throw on the floor. It didn’t really matter what, it just had to be in her reach, and on the floor it went. We’ve had some real good messes too, and sometimes, even though i didn’t like it, i found it fun to see how well i could clean the floor. Each bite of mess i would take out of the floor with the sponge, the more i would look forward to the whole project being finished. Sometimes too, she wouldn’t hit you while you were cleaning because she wanted the mess picked up. A few times before the mess was left for her because we all ran away and she had to clean it up herself. i wonder how she liked it?

You’re right but i told her i was coming after you. That was only an excuse to get out of the house. i thought the yells would wake up the neighbors and they would have the cops down here again. For awhile i was hoping a cop would sneak up and surprise her. You know her, she’d stand at the door and say in that sweet other voice, what can you mean, i don’t hear any noise and there’s no one here but me. Even if you were bound and gagged like the last time. i’m staying with you. Sharon gives me her coat because she has a sweater underneath it.

When are you going to go back?

After school. She’ll probably have calmed down a lot and she might even pick up her own goddamn mess the lunatic. i’d like to report her to the SPCC.

What’s the SPCC?

Never mind you stupid kid. Button up that coat so you don’t get a cold or pneumonia or something!

They help me over the fence and we all go to our favorite spot. This is one that mother doesn’t know about. We all sit in the bathtub and covers most of the way with a huge box. We can see her in the kitchen with her back to the yellow, smoke-stained window, blowing gray puffs of clouds from her mouth. Her head keeps twitching back and forth. She says it’s because of her nerves. The heat from the others feels good and they are ready to go to sleep.

i sit and think how they are out of trouble because when they come home she will be glad to see them. She’ll start beating me or punishing me because i was a sneak and a coward and didn’t come back. She knows that i didn’t intend to come back anyway. The cat is probably upstairs under the bed crouched in some cobwebbed corner and the kitchen floor will probably need another coat of wax. She will mumble in the window until three or four in the morning hating everyone because she can’t have a cup of coffee. She’ll perk right up when she hears a noise near the house thinking it is one of us. She’ll pace the floors for awhile and drink
that I keep in my room. I have some baseball cards, a few jumbo cat’s eyes marbles and a few old coins that Mrs. Maroni gave me. I also have a bunch of miniature cars and trucks that were given to me when I was in the hospital. If she ever found them, she'd really have a ball with them, and I wouldn't be able to do anything but cry about them and I know that they can't be replaced.

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coffee with powdered milk in it. Then she'll forget about the night and go lay down on the couch with her raggedy dress and sweater on and pull a stiff, wiry blanket over herself and fall asleep.

All the while I'll be thinking about the SPCC and what it is and I wish I were upstairs under the bed with the cat. Why doesn't the fog like the daytime and why doesn't someone tell me about what is happening. Should I keep this all to myself or should I run away with my favorite shoes so that they can see more than just the school and how long is all of this going to last; do adults go through this same routine and if so why don't they talk about it and why don't they do it in front of us. Do grown-ups cry and when and if they do are their tears salty or are they like glue and just stick to the face and look wet when they're supposed to. I wonder why the puppy had to die? Maybe because I broke her rosary and dropped the beads out of the window one by one. When I run away I have to remember to get my jackknife out of the cushion and is it wrong if I turn over three times to the left in bed and only once to the right and what should happen if the number shouldn't be even. I think about all the other little boys in the world and wonder what kind of dreams they're having and if they're not having dreams what their nightmares are like. Would it be wrong for me to tell the teacher at school that my pants got ripped on the way to school and not in the junkyard?

Should I run into the house and tell mother I loved her very much and that no matter how hard she hit me I would always love her? Am I crazy because I swallow the gum she gives me instead of throwing it away? If I throw it away I throw part of her away. Should I ask her if God is going to beat me because I took the envelopes out of church and blew one of the red candles out? Would I go to hell if I didn't clean the floor?

Does anybody care if I go back to that hospital again and maybe it would be best for me? Should I tell my brothers and sisters that I want to leave home and am not happy and what would they say if they caught me and Richard in the cellar skipping school? Will all of the flowers remember from year to year what they have seen and will they know exactly how to let down their petals and will they know when to open up their centers even when the clock is turned back an hour and why do they always have to look the happiest in the rain?

Is the garbage on the kitchen floor bored with just staying there? And the moon is so damned bright and beautiful and I think about if there is someone on the moon watching me and if they have junkyards and cardboard boxes, and I wonder if I should hide everything I have or give them away so that they can't be taken. I wonder how many people are alone and why isn't there a hotel where they can all stay and not be alone. I wonder if candy would taste as good if I didn't have to steal it and why I'm not supposed to talk to my grandmother. I think about how it rained one day in the front yard and not in the back and should I bury a bird in a shoe box or just dig a hole with a spoon and drop him in and who would answer all these questions for me. I wonder why Timmy and Sharon snore and why mother sleeps with her leg hanging over the edge of the bed. But I get tired...

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