

Tick Tock

It was a typical evening at Seth's house, his family going about the usual routine of playing games, watching television, and in other words, just unwinding from the activities of the busy day. Seth was up in his room playing with some model tanks and helicopters, he could hear the sound of the television from downstairs where his mom was enjoying one of her favorite shows, and his father could be heard out in the garage tinkering away at some sort of electronic gizmo. It was a fairly small house you could pretty much hear what anyone was doing regardless of where they were at. It wasn't very old, built in the mid to late '80s perhaps, woodside paneling stained in a cedar-looking stain although the years and weather had taken its toll on the panels. The property was large, with several acres of land that was a mostly dense forest which gave the illusion of being completely severed from the city which was only a few miles away. Overall a nice quiet home that Seth had called home since his birth. He was an only child which for the most part he enjoyed, although from time to time he found himself wishing for some companionship. He had friends from school, sure, but he rarely saw them outside of class. After all, he was only 8 years old and obviously couldn't drive. His parents both worked the majority of the time, constantly away for a business, sometimes for a week at a time. His mother was some sort of business consultant for a rather large technology company, and his father was one of the engineers from the same company. Whenever they did have to leave for business they had a family friend come over to the house to watch Seth. Her name was Lily, and she had been around for as long as Seth could remember. It was difficult to put an age to Lily, and quite honestly Seth had never really even thought about it. She looked younger than his parents, that is as much thought as he had ever given it.

His parents were getting ready to go on another one of these business trips in the morning, at least working for the same company they got to travel together the majority of the time. Seth heard the tv shut off downstairs, which he knew meant that it was soon going to be time for bed.

"Seth!" he heard his mother's voice coming from the bottom of the stairwell. "Time to get ready for bed, start picking up your toys and putting them away, and don't forget to brush your teeth!"

"Can I keep my tanks out tonight!" Seth shouted back at his mom who had begun to make her way up the stairs and towards his room.

"No, not tonight, the last time you left your tanks out I stepped on one and it hurt for like a week." She replied, giving him that mom look.

"But they help me sleep." Seth pleaded to try to bargain and barter his way to keep his tanks out for the evening. "Besides, you and dad are leaving before I'm even awake tomorrow, and I need my tanks and troops to keep an eye on my closet for me in the morning after you have gone. I don't want to get scared again." Seth had said in an almost eerie way.

Ever since Seth was very young he has had an irrational fear of the closet in his room. At least, that is what his parents had called it, Seth was still scared to death of that dark little nook in the room hiding who knows what at night when you can't see.

"No Seth, now pick them up. I don't want to ask you again. There is nothing to fear from your closet, see, look." She said as she gestured to the closet that she had just slid open.

"Nothing."

Reluctantly Seth put away all of his tanks and troops as his mother had asked. "There, all done," Seth said.

"Thank you, sweetie, now go brush those teeth and get ready for bed." His mother had said, kissing him on the forehead and telling him goodnight. She shuffled off down the hall to her bedroom and gently closed the door. But not before blowing Seth one last goodnight kiss and smiling at him.

Seth had finished getting ready for bed and wandered downstairs to tell his dad that he was going to bed. "Goodnight Dad!" He shouted out into the garage where his dad was still working on some electronic kite-looking thing.

"Goodnight bud!" He heard his dad reply as he stepped into view around a heap of scrap metal. "Be good for Lily this weekend will ya." His dad said to him as giving him a hug that lifted him off the floor.

"Oh, I will like always," Seth replied headed back into the house. He walked back up the stairs and into his room where he climbed into bed, threw the covers over himself, and slowly started drifting off to sleep.

It was a cool evening out and the wind was blowing the trees from side to side. Seth was having a hard time staying asleep because one tree particularly was scratching at the side of the house right outside of his bedroom. He laid there tossing and turning a bit, trying his best to ignore the annoying scratching sound that the tree produced as its branches slid from side to side against the paneling of the house. The wind had started to die down a bit and Seth was starting to drift off a little once again when he heard a very loud sound. It wasn't the tree branch scratching that he had been struggling with all night, this sound came from inside the house. Impossible to ignore Seth's curiosity got the best of him and he climbed out of his bed to investigate. He cracked open the door to his bedroom and peered out into the seemingly endless darkness of the house. It took a few seconds for his eyes to focus on a clock that hung on the wall in the hallway. Tick, tick, tick. A steady and reliable noise, the only thing to be heard in the pure darkness of the hallway. Seth stood there for a second listening for that loud noise that had startled him back awake. He swore that it sounded like a yelp coming from somewhere inside the house, but after a few moments of not hearing anything besides the clock, he decided to go back to bed. He was trying to convince himself that it was nothing and that in his half-asleep state his mind was just messing with him. But in all honesty to himself, he was pretty much scared shitless. Seth knew that getting any more quality sleep that night, regardless of how hard he tried or even wanted to for that matter, he wasn't going to.

Seth awoke the next morning, tired and cranky from an endless night of tossing and turning. He left his bedroom and headed downstairs to see his parents before they headed for the airport, but to Seth's surprise, his parents were nowhere to be found. He ran back up the stairs to see if maybe they had been still packing. No one there. Seth found this very odd because his parents had always told him goodbye before leaving the house, even if they were just running errands

and would be back within an hour. But today they hadn't woken him up to say goodbye, or even leave him a note. A little annoyed, and a little sad and confused Seth figured they had been running late and had to leave in a hurry. It was still early and Lily wouldn't be coming until a little later, so Seth made himself a big bowl of cereal and parked himself in front of the tv. He grabbed the remote and turned it on, trying not to be too upset about his parents leaving without a goodbye. "I'll talk to them when they get to the hotel later anyway." He thought to himself. The tv was nothing but static, Seth flipped through the channels trying to find anything but the static. Seth was unsuccessful. "Great." He thought to himself somewhat sarcastically. He turned off the tv and finished his cereal. Seth hated being alone in the house, it always felt eerie to him as it was dead silent and all the creaks and moans of the house seemed to get ten times louder when he was there alone. Off in the distance, he could hear the tick, tick tick, of the clock up the stairs. He stood there for a moment just listening to it when he was abruptly rattled by someone unlocking the front door. A little jumpy Seth looked around the corner towards the door to see Lily stepping inside.

"Hi, Seth!" Lily said in a very enthusiastic and excited tone. Lily and Seth had always gotten along great, she would play soldier with him, and take him for ice cream, and was always there to help him out whenever his parents were gone. She was almost like a second mom to him.

"Hey, Lily," Seth replied in a still sleepy-sounding tone. "Do you know if my parents went to the airport already?" He asked.

"I didn't think their flight was until a little later, why are they not here?" She replied. "No, I woke up and they were already gone. Usually, they would wake me up to say goodbye, but they didn't." Explained Seth. "I don't know why they would've left without saying goodbye," Seth explained, hurt about the fact.

"Well I'm sure they have a good reason for it, sweetie, maybe they came in and you were sleeping so soundly you don't remember, or they didn't want to wake you." Lily tried to explain, attempting to make him feel better about it. "I'm betting that's what happened." She finished off. "So, I have a laundry list of fun things I figured we can do today if you want to." She changed the subject.

This piqued Seth's interest, Lily always had a list of fun things to do, and Seth had a hard time choosing which to do first. After getting ready for the day the two of them headed out for a day of fun, sugar rushes, and memories.

The day seemed to come to an end all too soon, it always does when it is spent with Lily. They had just returned home from seeing a new action movie that Seth had been wanting to see. Before that, it was dinner at his favorite pizza place, and the zoo, and several different toy stores. Needless to say, Lily spoils Seth, whenever his parents are out of town and she is there to watch him. Lily unlocked the front door to the house and the two of them were greeted by the darkness. Seth reached over and flipped on the light switch illuminating the entryway. They set down the random collection of toys and miscellaneous novelties that Lily had gotten for Seth throughout the day and began to settle in for the evening.

"Lily, can I try and call my parents now?" Seth asked, almost forgetting about the call due to the distraction of all the new toys he had collected.

"Of course." She replied, getting her phone out. She began to dial his parent's number and handed him the phone as it began to ring. He held it up to his ear and listened to the ringing, one ring, two rings, right after the third ring he got an answer.

“Hi, Dad,” Seth said into the phone eagerly awaiting a reply. Nothing. “Dad, can you hear me?” Still, nothing. Seth listened closely and could faintly make out a noise in the background. Tick, tick, tick, and then silence. Seth, trying not to appear to be freaked out, handed the phone back to Lily and explained what he had heard.

“Maybe it’s a bad signal.” She said looking at the bars on her phone. “Let’s try your mom’s number huh?” She looked back down at the phone and began to dial. “Here sweetie, it’s ringing.”

One ring, two rings, and again after the third ring an answer. “Hey, Mom,” Seth said into the phone. “Mom, are you there? I just tried to call dad and the reception must have been bad because I couldn’t hear him, I just heard a ticking noise.” Tick, tick, tick. Seth almost dropped the phone.

“What’s wrong Seth?” Lily asked with a hint of concern in her voice.

“It’s just ticking again,” Seth said, starting to get more freaked out. He handed the phone back to Lily who began to look at it and fidget with the screen.

“It says I have full bars here, so it’s probably your parent’s reception wherever they’re at.” She explained it off. “Tell you what, why don’t we unpack some of your toys so that they’re ready for you to play within the morning. It’s getting late and you look tired.”

With that, Seth and Lily unpacked toys, played just for a quick minute with some new toy soldiers, and then headed off to bed.

Seth wasn’t able to fall asleep at all that night. He hadn’t talked to either of his parents since the night before they left, which was very unlike them. He couldn’t shake the feeling of dread from the pit of his stomach, something just didn’t feel right. He got up to get a drink of water from the bathroom sink. Opening his door he looked out into the pure dark nothing again, hearing the tick, tick, tick, of the clock. He wanted to take the clock off the wall and smash it to bits. What is normally overlooked noise had become a reminder of his unease. After building up the courage to venture into the dark hallway he hurried past the clock and down the hall towards the bathroom. Not quite a run, but much faster than a normal walk. As he approached the guest room which was right before the bathroom he noticed something odd. There seemed to be a faint, dim, and flickering light coming from under the door. Why he couldn’t have seen it before from his room was beyond him. A little voice in his head told him to keep moving and ignore it, but just as he started moving away from the door he heard a voice.

“Seth? Is that you?” A voice from within the guest room called. “Come here, I have something I want to show you.” It sounded like Lily, which coming from the guest room only made sense.

Not thinking twice about it being assured that it was Lily, Seth opened the door and gazed into the room. As he did, the pit in his stomach felt like it had exploded into a black hole. Scattered across the room were lit candles, and strange markings on the floor. Lily was sitting in the middle of the floor surrounded by strange objects that looked like they belonged in a Halloween store.

“Do you still want to talk to your parents?” She asked, giving him the scariest smile he had ever seen. “Come.” She motioned him over to her.

The little voice in his head now said, “Fuck this, run!” Without hesitation, Seth turned and bolted out of the doorway and towards the stairs. As he was reaching the bottom of the stairs two hooded figures appeared at the bottom, blocking his escape. They didn’t say anything, just stood

there blocking his exit. At the top of the stairs, Lily stood letting out a twisted laugh of pleasure, and excitement.

“Come on now sweetie, let's play!” She began laughing that twisted laugh again as she descended the stairs.

With nowhere to run Seth was trapped. He could feel his knees get weak, and his vision gets blurry, the world seemed to close in around him until there was nothing but darkness. Darkness, and the tick, tick, tick of the clock.

Seth felt a hand on his shoulder, shaking him, and a familiar voice saying, “Wake up sweetie.” He opened his eyes with a startle, he was covered in sweat and breathing heavily. He rolled over to see who was there and locked eyes with his mother.

“Dad and I are headed for the airport now, but we wanted to say goodbye first.” His mother said calmly. “You must have had quite the nightmare, I could barely wake you up from it. Are you ok?”

After a few deep breaths to calm his nerves Seth replied, “Yes, I'm ok now.”

“Well good, we have to go but we love you, and behave for Lily ok.” His mother said. “Call us if you need anything.” She kissed him on the forehead and hugged him. Seth didn't want to let go of that hug after having such a terrible dream.

“Love you, mom,” Seth said, finally releasing his mother from the hug.

He walked down the stairs and saw his parents out the front door and watched as they loaded the car. They backed out, waving goodbye and blowing kisses. Seth smiled, knowing that they wouldn't have left without saying goodbye first. As he headed back into the house, he heard the tick, tick, tick of the clock on the wall, when suddenly the ticking was drowned out by the sound of screeching tires and a loud bang. The sound of crunching metal, and breaking glass sounded like it was right beside him. Time stood still, Seth walked over to the front door and looked out to see that his parent's car had been T-boned at the first intersection leaving the neighborhood. Panic filled Seth, things went quiet, tick, tick tick, boom. The car exploded in a ball of smoke and flames. Seth let out a scream but couldn't hear himself over the crackling of the flames that now engulfed his parent's car. Somehow, all he could hear was the tick, tick, tick.