



Don't Look

By verbal

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His tear was red, and spattered as it landed.

<https://www.storiesspace.com/stories/horror/dont-look.aspx>

Dad was at work. Mom was at the grocery store. Her sister Em was at a friend's house.

El sat on her bed, playing with her kitten, Shadow. El had a feather on a string, and tossed it out like a fishing line for Shadow to chase.

Something sounded from outside the room. Shadow jumped off the bed at once, his attention no longer on the feather. He bolted out of the room and took a sharp turn into the hallway. El followed him out.

Shadow sat in front of the open bathroom door, peering intently inside. El walked down the hallway toward him.

She heard a noise from inside the bathroom. Shadow heard it too, and bolted down the back stairs in response. El started after her kitten but stopped when she heard the noise again. A muffled cry, echoing out into the hallway from the white tiled room. She froze.

Don't look.

Don't look.

Don't look.

El heard the sound a third time, and recognized it as a child's sobbing. A boy, she thought. Her heart leapt at the sound, fears momentarily forgotten. She instinctively wanted to give the child comfort, to ease his pain.

But the crying came from the bathroom. El didn't know what the room used to be, but she was pretty sure it wasn't always a bathroom. The room scared her.

The bathroom was where she saw that woman with the angry smile. The woman who watched.

El didn't need to comfort the boy, didn't need to enter the bathroom for any reason, she just had to walk past it to get downstairs, find Shadow, bring him back to her room. She told herself, don't be a scared-y cat, how hard is it to not turn your head and look inside? Just don't turn your head. Walk past and don't turn your head.

She took the first step, then the next step. The third step took her right to the middle of the open doorway.

A voice in her heard said, Look.

She didn't know if it was her voice, or the voice of someone (or something) else. All she heard was the word: Look.

She looked.

The sight inspired no fear. A little boy, sitting on the closed toilet seat. His head in his hands. Crying.

He didn't look scary. He looked sad.

EI decided to take a step toward the boy. Ask him what was wrong. Try to make him feel better.

She stepped inside the doorway.

"What's the matter?" she asked the boy.

No response.

She asked, "What's wrong?"

Nothing.

She asked, "Do you need help?"

The boy, face still buried in his hands, shook his head no.

His voice, muffled by his hands, said, "Not anymore."

That's when the first teardrop hit the white tile floor.

His tear was red, and splattered as it landed.

A second teardrop hit the floor and splattered. Red as well.

When the third tear hit the floor she realized these were not tears. This was blood. Blood dripped from between his fingers, small droplets of it landing in nearly perfect circles. EI did not want to take her attention from the drops, the way they formed a pattern of red circles on the bright white tile, the way they were each surrounded by tiny dots of spatter.

If she took her attention off the tile she'd have to look at the boy.

The boy raised his head from his hands. EI continued to stare at the blood drops. She refused to look

in his face.

The boy said, "I don't need help anymore. I'm okay now."

Don't look.

Don't look.

Don't look.

The voice in her heard said, Look.

She still could not tell if it was her own voice, or the voice of another.

She looked.

El's attention fell first upon his hands, palms covered in blood. She saw cuts on his fingers, small ones, easily assuaged with band-aids. These cuts could not have caused all this blood. She forced herself to move her gaze upward to his face.

His chin trembled, the curve of his mouth bent into a frightened frown.

Tracks of red, like tracks of tears, flowed down from his eyes.

Or, more strictly, where his eyes were supposed to be. His eyes were gone. Dark holes took their place.

El refused to train her gaze (don't look! don't look! don't look!) on the eyes of the boy to examine the holes further.

The voice in her head: Look.

She looked.

She had been wrong. His eyes were not gone. They'd simply been gouged out.

Thin shards of glass quivered in the center of each bloody hole.

No. Not shards of glass.

Shards of mirror. Two of them, one in each eye, tinted in blood, glinting in the harsh antiseptic light of the bathroom. Within each piece of mirror shone a face. The woman with the angry smile. The woman who watched. Her face danced in the flashing twin reflections of the slivers of mirror.

“She can’t hurt me anymore,” said the boy with no eyes. “I can’t see her. So she can’t hurt me. I’m free.”

The twin women in the mirrors laughed.

El ran from the room, the laughter following her through the hallway and down the stairs she took two at a time.

Shadow waited for her at the bottom of the stairs.

El scooped the kitten up in her arms, ran outside and sat on the front porch, the dark laughter echoing from the halls of the house and El’s intermittent tears gradually replaced by warm summer skies and the sounds of gentle purring. Together they waited for Mom to come home from the store.

Mom would know what to do.