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It was my senior year when I decided to run away from home. My parents and I resided in the suburbs where cars were locked after they were abandoned and children never ventured out of their parents' sight. These rules sent me into a frenzy of emotions that left me feeling trapped with no salvation. That is why I decided to run away. But little did I know I was not running alone.

The house was near a beach. It was an old place where nobody lived for years. It was said that from time to time somebody would open a window or a door and spend the night there, but never longer. My best friend occupied that house when we were nine. Nelly was an only child and so I was the closest thing she had to a sibling. I knew everything about her and her me. I used to travel to her house every evening to play but then one day they were gone. No one knew where. No one knew why.

The bus stop was a good two blocks away from my home and so I decided to pack up one day and have it carry me away to her old house. The ride on that old rusty bus was the saddest loneliest ride of my life. The sky outside had just faded to dusk and the fog was enveloping the bus to where the windows weren't clear to see out of. My mind wandered back to the last night I spent with Nelly.

Her dad was working late so her mother was in the living room on the phone with her friend Marge. She was too absorbed in her conversation to realize we were carefully carving our names into the door frame of Nelly's bedroom. We heard a loud boom as the front door swung open and hit the entry wall. Her mother was mumbling about how dinner was almost ready. She just became sidetracked but he paid no mind to what she was saying. We heard his heavy feet stomping up the stairs in what seemed like an eternity when finally he was standing in Nelly's doorway. He saw where we had tried to carve our initials into the flimsy wood and his face swelled into a dark shade of scarlet. He calmly, through his teeth, told me I needed to get home now. As I passed him, the smell of whiskey stung my nostrils and I knew this couldn't end well.

The porch was dark and barely visible in the moon's shadow. I considered turning back and getting in the bus and going home but the bus was gone. I was alone. I found the old flashlight Nelly and I used for nighttime hide and go seek in the same spot as last time. Luckily the batteries still worked and it helped me find the doorway. I wasn't as frightened of the house as others because I knew the old occupants but I couldn't help but feel a trace over my spine when I stepped inside and smelt the vanilla of her mother's perfume still clinging to the air. I looked around and everything was still in the same place as the last time I saw it. I looked around the entire house and everything was the same and eerily untouched. It all seemed strange to me but I went up to Nelly's room despite. As I walked into her room I went straight to the door frame. I noticed that there was a message there. It said "GET OUT NOW." If I wasn't frightened before, I was now. I was just about to sprint down the stairs when I heard it. The booming steps from nine years ago that shook my very

core. And I wasn't just imagining it, either because then I smelt the whiskey. I hurriedly climbed under her bed and covered my mouth so I wouldn't scream. I saw the shadow of a man at first and then I saw his feet in the doorway. The shoes were familiar. For they were the ones Nelly's father wore but it couldn't be them. It couldn't be him! He walked past the room and just as I was about to climb out from under the bed to climb out the window, I saw her. It was Nelly! Her body was curled up with her arms outstretched. As if trying to prevent abuse and her eyes were still open full of fear. She wasn't breathing. She was still the eleven-year-old girl I had remembered but her remains had rotted down and begun peeling off the bone like something seen in a horror movie. I burst into tears and tried as hard as I could not to scream. But I was too late. A little whimper slipped out and I heard the footsteps stop descending down the stairs and they began hustling at a quicker pace back to Nelly's room. I had to do something or it would be the end of me! I found a piece of glass from where someone had tried to break the window in by throwing rocks at the old abandoned house and I got in the closet. I was dead silent. And he stood in that doorway again for what seemed like an eternity. I watched him, though. His eyes darkened and his face hollowed. He was like a dead man walking and maybe he was. I had little time to see anything else because as soon as he left this time I saw Nelly's spirit. She was in the closet with me and she was looking at me with that same look of concern she always had as we were growing up. She didn't say anything she just pointed to the door frame where it said "GET OUT NOW." I looked back and she was gone. I didn't know what to do so I ran down the stairs to find him in the kitchen. He was sitting at the table with a fork in one hand and a spoon in the other, staring at the seat across from him. He croaked out, "Where's... my... dinner..." Then I heard her. Nelly's sweet mother who cooked me dinner all these nights but she had forgotten that one night of their disappearance. She simply said, "I got sidetracked. Marge called me and well..." Then I heard a shrilling scream. He had thrown his fork across the room and stuck her in the chest and then she disappeared. They were both gone. I didn't know what was going on so I spun around and was headed back out the door but as soon as I turned around I hit a tense, empty body. It was her father in the flesh. He grabbed me by the arm and I held the knife Nelly and I had used to carve our initials into the door frame to my neck. He was breathing his whiskey coated breath into my face and shouted, "You like messing up others' property! You like to mess up what I worked for! I worked 24/7 to feed and provide for my family and this is the thanks I get!" I stammered out, "N-n-no, sir... we were just having fun... we didn't mean to mess anything up..." He retorted in rage, "I worked all the time and I thought you were a good friend for her! I punished her and her mother and you will soon see what I do to little girls and women who misbehave!" He raised the knife up and aimed towards my heart so I closed my eyes picturing my parents. How much I took them for granted but as I was waiting for my life to end I suddenly felt myself fall. I heard the police surround him and then felt my mother's arms surround me. As they picked him up off the floor and put handcuffs around him I knew it was over.

The mystery of the old "haunted house" had been solved and I knew that Nelly and her mother could now go home now and so could I. But even now when I smell a hint of whiskey, I shiver to the core.