

The Intruder

You are alone in the house today. Well, almost alone. You hear the intruder shuffling downstairs, opening and slamming drawers, doors, and cabinets, searching. You hold your breath and pray not to hear the ominous creaking of the **thirteenth** step, forewarning the intruder walking up the stairs. You close your eyes and try to calm the frantic pounding of your heart, beating as loud as a drum in your chest and endeavoring to break free. There is hurried rustling, enraged cursing, the loud smash of something glass and fragile. Your eyes fly open and you glance out the **locked** small, paneled window to the still night outside. The silhouette of the sink against the full moon casts forbidding shadows across the walls. You look in the mirror to discover a terrified expression painted in the wide eyes and creases of your face. You stiffen sharply and glance back at the door at a *thump*. For the hundredth time, you wish the bathroom had a stronger **lock**.

You're **locked** in it now. You were caught on the toilet when you heard the front door being forced open. It wasn't your parents, the agitated muttering voice was unfamiliar. You have sat frozen here for the last ten minutes with the light turned off, silently and *desperately* imploring that the intruder will not come upstairs. You wonder where your parents are now, if they're on their way back yet from the fancy grown-up party they went to a few hours ago. The clunking footsteps pause, and then abruptly start marching up the stairs. You quietly count...there it is, the **thirteenth** step's sinister creaking. Your breaths seem to be whispered thunder in the enclosed space.

Suddenly, the bathroom is much too small. There's nowhere to run and your heart is racing like you've run a marathon. An ache fills your chest and you squeeze your eyes shut, imagining your tombstone. Your name is engraved in **hasty carving**, and underneath it is the

date: June 6, 2006. You are only twelve and much too young to die. The walls are pressing in, the room is shrinking as you breathe, and everything is spiraling and falling at once...falling, falling, falling, falling. The room tilts and there's a *thump* and then you're lying on the floor, the cold seeping in through your clothes and into your bones. The **yellow** bulb in the hallway outside the bathroom flickers on, and your eyes flit to the bottom of the door, which is right by your face. The **golden light** that shines through sends a frenzied panic throughout you.

Your chest is tightening like somebody is wrapping **heavy chains** around your ribcage and it's difficult to breathe. Your hands shake as you precipitously push yourself up, banging the back of your head on the underside of the sink and pressing your hand to your mouth as you stand with a muffled gasp of pain. You teeter precariously for a brief moment, flinging your arms in front of you to steady yourself before turning to face the tiny window. You blink furiously at the floating black spots that dance wildly in your vision and the boiling tears that dangerously threaten to spill over, your fingers trembling as you fumble with the **lock**. You're not in your right mind, there's no way you'll fit through the space, but you must, you *must*, **YOU MUST!** Because the intruder is striding down the hallway and the **lock** isn't opening-it's *stuck*-and you feel a *strangled scream* rising in your throat and it's building and building and you're quivering in absolute fear.

What's going to happen? Will you die? It's not a question, you *will die* tonight. Oh, but you're so young and frightened and the footsteps pause in front of the bathroom and you wrap your hands around your throat to stop the *petrified shriek* from escaping. You're going to die going to die going to die but you *don't want to die don't want to die don't want to die* and you

voicelessly *beg* **PLEASE DON'T KILL ME!!** The intruder grapples with the **lock**. In despair, you remember it can be **unlocked** from the outside as well.

The door opens.