

Sleep Tight

By Reaper

"So do you want to come over this weekend?" Heather asked. Heather and Andrea had been best friends since grade school, although their parents had been extra strict lately with both girls and they hadn't been allowed to hang out after school or sleep over for months.

"I'd love to," Andrea replied. "Do you think my mom will be as cool as yours about it though?"

"Maybe, you should ask her. I mean, there haven't been anymore killings in months now. Most people think the person who was doing it is dead or in jail."

It was the theory that the the news had been reporting in recent weeks. Normally Andrea's town of Shady Hills, Virginia was what parents liked to call "a great place to raise children." It was set back in a wooded area that was only two hours away from the nation's Capitol, but still had a country feel to it.

Recently though, a number of murders had occurred in Shady Hills and two of the neighboring towns. The victims had all been teenagers and young women, and they had all been found in bed with their throats cut. The police didn't have any credible leads so far, but the killings had mysteriously stopped nearly seven months before. This lead the authorities to believe that the killer had been arrested for an unrelated crime or even that he was dead.

While the killings were happening, the news covered little else, and everyone had been terrified. The town police had imposed a curfew, but both Andrea and Heather's parents had imposed their own curfews as well. Ever since, Andrea and Heather only got to see each other in school and talk to each other on the phone. Now, with over seven months since the last killing had taken place, their parents were finally starting to relax, and Heather's had finally agreed to allow the friends to begin hanging out after school.

"I don't know how my mom will feel about me spending the night away though," Andrea said. Both she and Heather knew why.

"But it hasn't been as bad lately has it? I mean, you barely have episodes anymore," Heather reasoned. Although Heather understood Andrea's problem, she underestimated Andrea's mom sometimes and her protective nature.

"Yeah, they're not happening as often these days, and they don't last as long as they used to. The doctor says the key is for me to relax and it will end sooner," Andrea said. "But even so, my mom may not want me being away from home at night."

When she had been only eight years old Andrea had been diagnosed with what she considered to be a horrible affliction but while her doctor had assured her it might seem awful but was not dangerous. Andrea had concealed her "episodes" from most of her friends and therefore very rarely stayed overnight at her friends houses or had them stay overnight at hers. Heather had become close enough to be one of the few Andrea had let in on her secret because she knew Heather would never tease her over it.

More recently her episodes had started to decline, and she would sometimes go an entire week without a single incident. This helped gain her confidence and hope that she would eventually stop having them altogether. She would even gladly settle for having one every month or so.

"It doesn't hurt to ask your mom though. We haven't had a sleepover since last year and you'd be as safe with my family as you would be at home, even if the killer is still out there," Heather said.

"Alright, I'll ask her and give you a call back. But don't be too let down if she says no," Andrea said. She and Heather said goodbye and hung up. Andrea steeled herself and went into the living room where her mom was watching television.

"Mom, is it okay if I stay over at Heather's tonight?" she asked hopefully. Andrea watched as her mom muted the television and both of her parents turned to see her.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Andrea's dad asked.

"More than anything! I really miss staying over at Heather's house," Andrea said.

"Your father and I still don't think it's a good idea to be out at night, no matter what the news has been saying," Andrea's mom said. A crease above her forehead told Andrea that her mom was getting ready to dig in her heels on the matter.

"Mom, there haven't been anymore killings in months, and I'm sure Heather's parents are just as cautious as you are. I don't want to live in this house like a prisoner out of fear anymore, and I really miss my friends. Can't I please stay over this once?" Andrea's argument came out in a loud huff and she stared back and forth between her parents. Her mom's forehead crease was fading, a good sign.

"Your father and I just want what's best for you. We're not trying to keep you from having friends sweetie. If we let you stay at Heather's house will you promise to keep her bedroom door open and make sure all the windows and doors are locked?" her mom asked.

Andrea knew she had won and she started to feel excited again. "Of course we'll keep everything locked. We'll be perfectly safe there together," Andrea said.

"Alright, we'll let you spend the night at Heather's tonight," Andrea's mom said.

Andrea ran back to her room and called Heather at once.

"I can't believe it! They said I can come over and stay the night!" Andrea squealed into the phone. A resounding scream came over the phone from the other end.

"Okay, my mom says not to come here alone even though it's less than a mile. So we're going to pick you up around four and you can eat over here. We're having pot roast tonight so make sure to come hungry!" Heather said before they hung up.

That afternoon, Heather's dad came to pick Andrea up.

"Stay safe dear, we love you" her mom said. She was even fighting back tears.

"I will. I love you both" Andrea said and kissed her mom and dad each goodbye.

Andrea got into the car next to Heather and both girls rode back to Heather's house talking and laughing.

"Sorry about the heat," Heather said when they walked into Heather's house. "I forgot to tell you that the air conditioner broke last night. At least Sammy won't be here to bug us."

Sammy, Heather's younger brother, was away at a summer camp and wouldn't be back until the following fall.

"I'm surprised your parents even let him go this year," Andrea remarked. "I mean, they wouldn't even let us hang out after school but they're okay letting your younger brother go to summer camp."

"Well, all the victims were young women, not boys. Besides, they probably think he's safer there than he is here anyway. I mean, the campground is over an hour away from here." Heather said.

Spending time with Heather was as fun as it had been before the killings began and everyone had become scared. Andrea and Heather talked about boys, gossiped about the other girls in school, discussed what they planned to do after high school, and of course, talked about boys. Heather, who had always been the more athletic of the two, was hoping to play basketball in college and coach girls basketball someday. Andrea shared Heather's ambition for teaching, but thought teaching elementary school was more her style.

Before Andrea knew it, it was getting close to midnight and she and Heather were getting ready for bed.

“Want to tell scary stories tonight like we used to?” Heather asked.

“Actually, I think I'd like to draw the line there,” Andrea said. “I know the killer is probably in jail, but I don't really want to fall asleep thinking about scary stories if you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, I guess you're probably right,” Heather said, though she looked a little disappointed. Heather's mom kissed her goodnight.

“Now don't you girls stay up too late,” Heather's mom said.

Heather yawned, “Don't worry mom, we're probably going to turn in now anyway.”

Heather's parents had made sure that the doors were safely locked and Heather's father had even installed a dead bolt that had not been there the previous winter. Each of the windows was closed and bolted shut before the family turned in for the night. Heather had been right in her assertion that Andrea would be just as safe here as she would be at home. Probably safer, since Heather was with her too.

Andrea and Heather spread out blankets on the floor where the air was coolest and did their best to make themselves comfortable. Despite their best efforts, though, the room was stifling and even with no sheets, both girls were unbearably hot.

“Maybe we can crack the window just a little and let some of the night air in,” Heather suggested thoughtfully.

“Are you out of your mind?” Andrea whispered fiercely to her friend. “You know the killer usually enters homes through unlocked doors and windows.”

“There haven't been any killings for months, remember?” Heather countered. “Besides, even if the killer is still out there, what are the chances he's going to come to my house and find the one unlocked window to get in?”

Andrea bit her lip as she considered Heather's argument. Heather was right about the odds, and she would never be able to sleep with the room being as hot as it was.

“Okay,” Andrea said, “but don't open it anymore than a few inches and don't tell my mom anything about us doing it.”

“Are you kidding?” Heather said with an amused expression. “If you think I'm going to let my parents find out I did that, you're mad. I won't say anything to yours if you won't say anything to mine.”

“Deal,” said Andrea, settling back in. She found it was easier to drift off with the light breeze from the window cooling her a bit. Soon Heather's breathing beside her became regular and soothing, and Andrea found herself drifting off to sleep.

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Andrea wasn't sure how long she'd been asleep or what woke her, but she opened her eyes and listened. Then she heard a sound. Something was walking outside the window. Probably an animal, she thought to herself. No sooner had that comforting thought occurred to her when she heard the sound of the window being forced open.

Andrea opened her eyes and tried to get up, but found she couldn't move. She couldn't have picked a worse time to have one of her “episodes”. Andrea's great affliction was sleep paralysis. A condition where she could wake up and be conscious but her body needed time to realize she was awake before she was able to move. According to her doctor, everyone had sleep paralysis at some point during their lives but she was far more prone to it than most people. Worse still the typical

feelings of fear and panic she felt while paralyzed only made the sleep paralysis last longer.

Andrea tried to call out to Heather but found she was unable to speak at all. She watched helplessly as a man slowly crawled through the now fully open window.

The police had no pictures of the killer, but everyone had some idea of what the killer might look like. Usually the scariest looking man they could think of. A huge man with wild eyes and long, oily, black hair. The man Andrea saw climbing through the window did not disappoint the imagination. Andrea thought he was the scariest person she'd ever seen. She heard his breath coming in ragged huffs, and she could smell a stench of earth and sour sweat coming off him. Completing this horrifying picture was a long hunting knife gleaming in his right hand.

For such a large man, he was surprisingly quiet. He dropped into the room with hardly a thump and looked at both girls. Andrea had slammed her eyes shut and focused every particle of her being on trying to move. She attempted to relax, knowing that panicking would only make things worse, but she found she was unable to help panicking. Try as she might, she was still locked in her paralysis and couldn't escape or warn her friend.

As Andrea felt the killer's damp hair brush against her face she involuntarily moved the one part of her body she could and opened her eyes. This movement wasn't lost on the killer who looked directly into her eyes. If Andrea could have shrunk back at the crazed cold glare of the man's eyes she would have. Never in her life had she been felt this trapped and frightened.

Horribly, after a moment, the killer grinned an insane grin at Andrea and put a grimy finger over his lips in a shushing gesture. He then moved over to Heather and gazed upon her sleeping body.

Andrea tried desperately to scream at Heather to wake her up, but her lips refused to move. Was it her panic making the sleep paralysis last this long? It seemed to be going on for an eternity, or maybe it just felt like it. Either way, Andrea was powerless to do anything but watch as the man crouched over Heather's body and brandished his knife.

In a single swift motion, he took the knife and plunged it up to the hilt in Heather's neck. Heather instantly opened her eyes and tried to scream and flail, but the man easily overpowered her and jammed his hand over her mouth, stifling her screams. Andrea watched as he sawed back and forth with his knife, opening Heather's throat from one ear to the other.

Blood from Heather's neck sprayed out in tiny geysers, landing both on the man and on Andrea's immobilized face. Heather kicked spasmodically for several more seconds, then lay still. The killer released Heather's limp body and stood for a moment, admiring his handiwork. Then he bent down and dragged Heather's body closer to Andrea, where he rested Heather's head right up against Andrea's own.

Andrea had never wanted to scream more than when Heather's bloody hair fell against her cheek as the killer positioned them to appear like sleeping lovers. Then he turned his attention to Andrea. Straddling her on his knees, he both pinned her down with his weight and simply observed her. Andrea involuntarily tried to kick and scream. Maybe it was just her imagination, but it seemed like she might be moving her leg just a little bit.

She continued to watch the horror sitting on her as he placed the blade of his knife against her bare stomach. In a spasm of terror, she wondered if he was going to open her up along the belly and remove her organs. She felt a shudder go through her at the idea. Even though sleep paralysis could immobilize her, it wouldn't stop her from feeling pain at all.

But the killer did not cut her stomach. Instead, he dragged the tip of the bloody knife along her body as though tracing a drawing, but not making any cuts. Despite her inability to move, she knew the killer was reading the fear in her eyes. Reading it and enjoying it. It was for this reason that he didn't kill her straight away. He wanted to revel in her terror.

Andrea forced herself to relax as best she could. She could feel the sleep paralysis beginning to ebb away. Even in a panic, she knew by now that it wouldn't last forever. If she could make the killer think that she was paralyzed and then catch him off guard, she might just have a chance. The killer seemed to read her thoughts, or perhaps just the change in her eyes, for he placed a powerful hand over her mouth to prevent her from screaming. Then with the same elegant motion, he drove the knife into Andrea's neck as well.

The pain shot through her body like a hot bolt. The paralysis might have been ebbing away but she still wasn't able to do much. Perhaps even if she had, she wouldn't be able to fight off the killer, who probably outweighed her by a hundred pounds.

As he dragged the knife across her neck, a white hot fire seared her in a necklace of pain, and she felt a spreading wet warmth run down her chest and back. At the same time, a sinister coldness began creeping into her arms and legs. She looked into the killer's crazed eyes for only a few more moments before blackness began stealing over her vision, and for the first time the killer spoke.

“Sleep tight.”

Andrea had just enough time to recall what her doctor had told her about sleep paralysis: “There's really nothing to worry about, although I know it feels scary. You're in no more danger than you would be if you were still sleeping. It certainly isn't a fatal condition.” Andrea knew that this time her sleep paralysis would be a fatal condition, and she would never move again.