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One Long Night

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One Long Night

Shannon Leigh

Spooky Story Contest Honorable Mention

Another test, another all-nighter.

“Why did I start that new show *before* I started studying?” I moan aloud, my papers and textbooks splayed out around me on the bedroom floor. My roommate, clad in pajamas, retainer already in place, frowns sympathetically down at my predicament.

“I told you it was addictive, Clara. And that twist at the end of season two—”

“Spoiler! Don’t tell me, I stopped after that creepy clown came back. He hid in the closet until everyone was asleep, and then...” I trail off because that episode had me checking all the closets this morning, and it still gives me the heebie-jeebies if I think about it for too long. “Are you sure you don’t want to take this test for me, Bea? You love this biology stuff.”

She snorts and shakes her head. “You’ll be fine. Just try to get some sleep tonight; you know you can’t think straight when you’re too tired.” And with that she leaves me alone with my nightmare stack of notes and chapters to memorize by morning. It’s only ten o’clock, I can do this!

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It’s 12:30 a.m., and I’m not so sure I can do this. One minute I’m reviewing aquatic food chains, and the next I find my eyes closing without my permission. I need to get my blood pumping and sugared up, so I go prowling for snacks. I hunt down goldfish crackers and some chocolates, but as the plastic crinkles in my hands, I hear another noise. I whip around but see nothing besides our frayed couch and deep shadows. My eyes flicker to the entryway closet, and I try to steady my nerves. *Clowns aren’t real*, I remind myself. Well, they are, just not the murdering kind. Well, probably not.

I sidle back to my room, keeping an eye on that closet. This time I close my bedroom door behind me and breathe a little sigh of relief at the well-lit sense of security in here, which somehow makes this closet less menacing. Back to biology.

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The snacks are finished, and so am I. I've been stuck on this PowerPoint for ages. Why should I care who discovered which types of fungus?

Bea told me she takes power naps when she needs to push through like this. I glance over my study plan, see all the untouched chapters, and decide to try it. I set my alarm for twenty minutes and hope this will work.

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When my alarm jangles, I struggle through my tangled blankets to turn it off. The dreams were vivid for such a short sleep, featuring all kinds of characters from my new television addiction. If only I had gotten hooked on a comedy. But no, instead my dreams were full of monstrous attacks and lots of running away. The only perk is that I have plenty of adrenaline in my system now, and I put it to good use.

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During the wee hours, time passes strangely. After that scary small sleep, I blast through three chapters in an hour and feel like a champion studier. But then, in a matter of ten minutes, I lose my edge, and every little noise makes me jump. I stare at words on a page, but only my eyes are on the material. My increasingly sluggish thoughts keep circling back to that murderous clown, and I become very aware of the closet door behind me, and of who could be hiding behind it.

I check the time: it's been half an hour and I've barely done anything. I decide to try another power nap. But first, I need to check the closet.

I wrench open the door, #2 pencil brandished like a carving knife, and see nothing to sink my lead into but my clothes. I laugh at my own foolishness as I look in all the closet's corners, just to make sure.

This time I allow myself a longer nap. Twice the sleep, twice the study mojo, right? I set the alarm for 3:30 a.m. then change it to 3:33 a.m. Three is my lucky number, after all.

I will myself to have good dreams and fall asleep immediately.

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It is morning, and I'm late. No time for coffee, just change clothes and fly out the door. I am hoping for light traffic, and hallelujah, I zip across the bridge in record time. I race across the parking lot, up the stairs, and into the classroom. I am surprised to see no one is here yet, but then realize that the fast drive saved me more time than I realized. I grab a pencil and set down my bag as the door opens. A girl walks in whom I have never met. She looks surprised to see me here. I smile at her since I need to tell her she has to leave.

"I think you're in the wrong room; we have a test today. Monday tests are the worst, aren't they?"

She looks confused, glances at her phone, and looks at me like I'm speaking Finnish.

"Today is Tuesday."

My pencil hits the floor. Some nightmares do come true.