

Ghost Eyes

By Max McCrory

The darkness was terrible. It pressed in, like a velvet cloth, suffocating and absolute. I could feel my eyes were open, yet when I squeezed them shut it was as if my eyelids were clear, no difference in what I saw. Or didn't see. There wasn't much difference.

I couldn't move, couldn't turn my head. I had no idea whether some nightmarish creature crouched beside me, or if I was alone in this place. I had no idea which was worse.

I waited. There was no time here. What felt like hours could have been minutes. Flashes of light danced on the edge of my vision, illusions spawned by my mind. I knew they weren't real.

I became aware of faint vibrations in the surface I was lying on. *Wood*. I could feel a fog beginning to retract its tentacles from my mind. There was still no light. The vibrations grew stronger, resolved into pounding footsteps. The fog lifted more. My throat hurt, and a hot pain in my temple throbbed. I tried to lift my hand to touch it, but I still couldn't move. I was breathing, frigid, musty air filling my lungs. It was *freezing* here. The tips of my nose and ears stung with the cold. The air felt like a spike driven into my lungs.

I heard muffled voices, shouting, grumbling. They were looking for me. I knew this. They wanted to rescue me from this place. *Here!* I wanted to scream. *I'm here!* But of course I couldn't.

The footsteps below grew louder. I heard a door being wrenched open, and a draft of warmer air reached me. Thundering steps came up, up towards me, and a light, real this time, shone on cobwebbed rafters above me.

"He's here! He's in the attic!" *Attic?* Things started to come back. A dark door. Steep, old stairs. A mirror.

A man in a police jacket came up the stairs, breathing heavily. His eyes widened when he saw me. "Oh, god." He rushed to my side, put two fingers on my wrist, then my neck. He breathed out. Turning to the stairs, he yelled, "He's not conscious, and he's hit on the head! I'll bring him down!" Strong arms lifted me carefully, and I felt myself being carried down a curved stair, away from the attic, to somewhere safe.

And then it was a blur of bright lights, blue and red, then I was being loaded onto a cart, pushed down a walk. A mask was slipped over my face, filling me with air, and my vision started to grow fuzzy again. *No!* I tried to struggle. *I don't want to go back to the darkness!* But it came anyway. The last thing I saw was the outside of a house, a dark window at the very top.

I was in darkness again. *No*. I forced myself up, my eyes open. I was not in the attic. I sat up in a small, light blue room with white cabinets and a large frosted window. Two folding chairs sat against the wall. I sat in a hospital gown. I reached my fingers up to feel a puffy bandage on my temple. My legs felt unused, like sticks, and I wobbled a bit as I got to my feet. I hobbled to the door, twisted the cold handle, and went through.

I stood in a tiled hallway lined with doors, fluorescent lights on the ceiling. I began to walk, my bare feet slapping the floor. This place was bright, no shadowy corners or blackened

doors. It felt safe. I heard murmuring voices, and turned a corner to see a waiting area. A nurse in scrubs gave a jump.

“Oh! You should *not* be out of bed. Which room are you?” Her eyes flicked to my bandage. “Oh, of course.” She got up and started herding me back down the hallway. “There’s a lot of talk about you. Turning up in that creepy old house.” We reached my room. “Here we are. Sit on the bed, will you? Keep your eyes open for me.” She held up a light and shone it into my eyes. She checked my bandage and held a hand to my forehead. “Well, you seem to be alright. I’ll get Doctor Henry.”

A few minutes later, a man in a doctor’s coat walked in. He had frameless glasses, the ends of which pushed out his ears. He sat down on one of the folding chairs.

“Hello, Ezra,” he extended a hand. “I’m Doctor Henry. How are you feeling?”

“Good.” My throat was dry and scratchy, as if I had been yelling.

He nodded. “That’s good. Do you remember what happened?”

“I was in...” I remembered what the man who had carried me had said. “An attic. It was dark.” Doctor Henry nodded.

“Do you remember how you got there?” I shook my head. “Try to. Think back. How did you get in the attic?” I strained my mind. It was like there was a spot where nothing was there, and I was trying to look at it but it was impossible to look at for long, like the sun. I shook my head again.

“I remember walking home from school. ... and then... I noticed something.” I stopped. What had I noticed? Doctor Henry waited patiently. I gave up. “I don’t know. I can’t remember. I noticed *something*, but I can’t remember what.” Doctor Henry sighed and nodded.

“You have a head injury, but not a concussion. You shouldn’t have any memory loss, at least not from that. I don’t know what hit you, but the police might. Don’t worry,” he said. “You’re not in trouble. They only want to find out what happened to you.” I nodded. He clapped his hands on his thighs. “Welp, get some rest. Your parents will be here soon. We called them as soon as we found out you were awake.” He left, closing the door softly behind him.

My parents arrived, and there was a flurry of hugs and pats and “we’re so glad you’re okay”s, and I was given clean clothes and the ones I had been wearing when they found me, neatly folded, and I was walked back to the car. The parking lot was lit by the afternoon sun shining through the autumn leaves.

“We’ve got one more stop to make, buddy.” My dad said. “The police want to ask a few questions, and then we can go home and you can rest.” A nap did sound nice.

We pulled into the police station parking lot, a small patch of asphalt with five spaces, two of them filled with squad cars. We walked in and sat for a little, then were taken to an office with a desk, behind which the man who had found me sat. He smiled tiredly as we came in. In brighter light, he looked like a normal guy: brown suit coat, messy hair, pencil tucked behind his ear.

“Hi. Good to meet you. I’m Detective Milford, but you can call me Dan.” It felt weird to think of him as Dan. It seemed so informal.

“You were the one who found me.” Detective Milford--Dan--nodded.

“I was. Did the doctors tell you?” He shuffled some papers on his desk.

“I saw you.” He stopped shuffling the papers, then carefully put them down.

“Your eyes were closed the whole time.” He shook his head. I know they were. Maybe you opened them a crack.” He looked at me, waiting. I shook my head.

“No. I couldn’t move, but I saw your flashlight on the ceiling, and then you came up the steps and checked my pulse. Then you carried me outside to the ambulance.” Detective Milford’s eyes widened.

“That’s exactly what happened, but I could have sworn you were unconscious, or at least that your eyes were closed. You’re sure you *saw* me?” I nodded. He pinched the bridge of his nose. “I was tired, but I don’t know if I could have missed that.” He shook his head. “Anyway, we’ll let you go after one more thing.

“Do you remember how you got in the attic of the house?” I shook my head. Was he going to ask me the same questions as the doctor? “Do you remember which house it was?”

Images flooded into my brain. A tall, old house, with peaks and chimneys and a turret, squeezed into a normal plot between two houses. Remnants of a fence lay in the overgrown yard. Dusty floors. Stairs...

“There was a door.” I remembered. “It was blackened, like it had been burned. But nothing around it was like that. It was in that old house. The one with the turret.” The detective nodded.

“Do you remember what you were doing there?” I shook my head. “You won’t get in trouble if you tell me. We just want to piece together what happened.” He reached under his desk and pulled out a heavy-looking chest. “We found some blood and hair of yours on this,” he said, pointing to a stain on the corner. “We think this is what hit your head. Does it ring any bells?” I shook my head again. He sighed, like the doctor had. “Well, you can go home now. Get some rest.”

The drive home was short. I was tired, and just wanted to crawl into my bed and go to sleep. Though it was still bright as I stumbled into my room and collapsed on the mattress, I fell asleep almost instantly.

Darkness. It was everywhere, weighing down on me, blinding me. Bile rose in my throat. I thrashed, trying to break out, and finally untangled myself from my sheets and tumbled out of my bed. My eyes adjusted, and I relaxed as I realized I was in my bedroom. Everything looked strange, like it was insubstantial, translucent. I was hungry.

I padded downstairs. The microwave clock said it was one thirty. I was rummaging around in the pantry when I heard steps behind me.

“Ezra?” My dad stood in the kitchen, looking worried. When I turned, he paled and whisper-shouted upstairs. “Anna! Come down! I think Ezra’s sleepwalking!”

“What? No, I’m awake.” I was confused. Dad looked at me, uncertainty creeping across his features.

“But Ezra-- your eyes are closed.”

“No, they’re open.” My dad started to look afraid. I could see my reflection in the window behind him. It showed me, just as I expected--except my eyes were shut, unseeing.

My dad called the doctor, and we went over to the clinic around two. Doctor Henry greeted us, rubbing sleep out of his eyes. We told him what had happened.

“How could he have seen anything? Could he have seen through his eyelids somehow?” My dad asked.

“No.” Doctor Henry looked grave. “There is no way anyone could see with their eyes closed. They’re our only way of seeing. The most likely thing is that you *thought* you were able to see--you know your kitchen so well you can envision it in your mind.” My parents nodded, relieved for a rational explanation. I wasn’t satisfied.

“But I could see dad. And I knew exactly where everything was. I was seeing the kitchen like it was *right then*.” The doctor shrugged and shook his head.

“I can’t explain it completely. Your other senses probably contributed. But there is simply no way you could have been seeing if your eyes were closed.”

We left with nothing but a recommendation for more sleep. I knew I had been seeing, but no one believed me. It was early, too early, and I felt sleep dragging my eyelids down.

I was in darkness again. I felt strange, like I was underwater, and something was holding me there. I fought, and the grip of the darkness pulled tighter. I concentrated, straining until I could feel my hands and feet and ears. I could see now. I broke through and the darkness vanished. My ears popped. Everything had that strange quality to it again, slightly transparent.

Where was I? I was standing in a moldering kitchen, with an old-style oven. Everything was covered in a layer of dust, save the floor, which had countless boot prints, as if a lot of people had been running around in here. A memory flashed. I knew where I was. *The house*. Panic rising, I turned and ran through the kitchen, out into a carpeted corridor, which led to the front door. I burst out into the sunlight, sprinting across the junk-scattered lawn, stopping at the sidewalk.

I looked back up at the house, looming above me, the attic window like a dark eye boring down into me. The world had lost the strange look. I noticed my hands were stinging. Looking down, I saw they were bloody with splinters and scratches. My gaze shifted to the door of the house, hanging open, and the fresh pile of boards next to it, nails poking through.

As I walked home, picking splinters out of my palms, I tried to remember how I had come to be there. I remembered falling asleep in the car, then... nothing. Maybe I *was* sleepwalking.

When I got home, I went to my parents. How was I supposed to ask this? I hid my beat up hands in my pockets.

“Uh, what happened after I fell asleep in the car?” My mom gave me a strange look.

“Did you? I don’t remember. If you did, it wasn’t for a long time. You were up when we got home. Remember, you went on a walk?”

I didn’t remember anything. But there’s no way they wouldn’t have noticed if my eyes were closed. What had happened? What had I done? Why had I gone to the house?

I spent the rest of the day pondering these questions, going through the motions of the afternoon. Several times I found myself going outside without a reason--once I made it all the way to the sidewalk before I realized what I was doing. The sun began to set, throwing ornate shadows on the dining room wall. I began to relax. There was probably a normal reason for all this. Whatever it was, I could deal with it tomorrow, with a fresh mind. I drifted off to sleep with a feeling of certainty that everything would work out.

A stabbing pain in my hand awoke me. I gasped, sitting up-- and hit my head on a cobwebbed rafter. I looked around, wildly. It was dark, but light enough to recognize where I was. *The attic*. It was freezing, even though it was only the beginning of fall. I could see my breath frosting in the air. Everything had the strange translucent look again, but there was a spot that did not glow--an oval mirror in the corner. Instead, darkness radiated from it like a halo, sucking all light in.

I could feel it *looking* at me, the darkness, something intelligent, calculating, and *old*. I could feel the weight of years pressing down upon me in that gaze.

Looking down at my hand, I saw a piece of glass sticking out of it--with the same darkness as the mirror. I yanked it out of my hand, and the blood began to flow freely.

My breath grew short. I shouldn’t be here. I knew it from the very core of my being. I knew that I needed to get out of here. I rushed down the twisting stairs, the scorched door at the bottom slamming shut, blocking my path. I could hear movement up the stairs behind me--dusty objects shifting, sliding across the floor, and a heavy dragging sound as if someone was pulling an object of enormous weight.

I hurled myself against the door, feeling it flex. I braced myself against the stairs and kicked wildly at it, hoping beyond hope it would break.

The dragging sound from above ceased. I stopped kicking. There was a moment of terrible silence. I waited. Was it over?

Bang! A large chest barreled down the curving stairs, trailing cobwebs and sending dust into the air. It was going to crush me. There was nowhere to go. Unless-- I braced my hands against the walls, trying lift myself up, but my sneakers slid and my hands were sweaty and--

I felt the impact distantly, as if I had turned off my senses and could only watch. The chest slammed into my legs, crunching them into the door, twisting it off its hinges and throwing into the room beyond.

I lay on the floor, partially trapped beneath the chest. *I'm okay*, I thought. Then the numbing faded and the pain burned through, screaming, tearing up my legs. I tried to pull them out from under the chest, but agony shot up my body. I managed to sit up, and inch by excruciating inch, I managed to shift the chest off me. It was heavy, and it sounded like there were pieces of metal inside.

My legs had twin gashes in them where the chest had hit, and I could see dark bruises already beginning to form on my shins. Blood was welling up from inside, spilling over and streaming down my leg. In the darkness, it just looked like black liquid.

It was dark again. At some point, my vision had gone back to normal, but occasionally it would flicker into the glowing world. Why was it doing this? What was going on with my eyes? I rubbed them, squeezed them shut--

I could see. The translucent, glowing world was back. But I could feel my eyes were closed. I opened them. The world vanished. I opened and closed my eyes several times, the world glowing then disappearing. *I could see with my eyes shut*. That was impossible. My eyelids weren't translucent. Someone would have noticed. And why did everything look so much clearer when they were closed? No, I wasn't seeing through my own eyes. But then whose eyes was I seeing through?

I heard more sounds from the attic, things being thrown and smashed against the walls. I closed my eyes and could see the darkness radiating from the top of the stairs, coming closer, almost in view.

I ran. Or, I tried. I attempted to stand and my legs collapsed beneath me. Squeezing my eyes shut, I managed to lift myself onto my hands and knees, and limp-crawled away from the door as fast as I could, each step jarring my legs and making me grind my teeth in pain. I could see the top of the stairs leading down to the first floor.

I reached the top of the stairs looking back to see if whatever it was had followed me-- and saw it standing at the base of the attic stairs. It looked vaguely human shaped, as if it had once held the form of a person but had forgotten what people looked like. It was a silhouette of darkness, the same devouring of light that the mirror had. I could feel its hate from here. It wanted to kill me.

I crawled and slid down the stairs as fast as I could, not daring to look back. I reached a dusty parlor, and I could see the kitchen through a doorway. I forced myself to my feet, leaning on the banister, and made my way to the kitchen, stumbling from banister to chair to wall to the doorway. I could see the hallway that led out, and the front door, with its window glinting at the very end. I practically ran toward it, bracing myself against the wall, ignoring the screaming in my legs. I burst out the door, down the porch stairs, and limped to the sidewalk. I knew it could see me from the attic window. I didn't look back, locking my gaze forward. I could feel its gaze burning into me, with all the hate and resentment built up over a long time, like dust in a corner..

I continued down the sidewalk, the edges of my vision turning dark, but I knew if I closed my eyes and fell asleep, I would go back to the house. I kept going. The house fell out of view, and I felt a weight lift off my shoulders, like I was floating, and then I saw the ground rushing up to meet me and I tried to put my hands up but darkness overtook me one last time.

I awoke in a familiar bed. I was back in the hospital, with its bright lights and clean floors. A nurse sat dozing in one of the chairs. I sat up, feeling my legs twinge. They felt strangely stiff. I pulled the blanket off and saw they were wrapped with gauze. I got out of bed and discovered I was able to walk, albeit slowly.

The nurse woke up and called Doctor Henry, who came in with my parents, who looked relieved. He clapped me on the shoulder.

“Hello, Ezra. Glad to see you’re up and about. You’re lucky those people saw you collapse in front of their house. Otherwise we might not have found you until morning.” He tucked a pen he had been toying with in his pocket. “We know this isn’t the first time you’ve gotten out of the house at night and wound up here, but I think I can tell you why.” I waited. What was he going to say? *You’ve been possessed by a malevolent spirit intent on murdering you?* “You are a somnambulist. You sleepwalk. It’s pretty common, actually, but usually people don’t get as far as you.” He ripped a page off a notepad and handed it to my parents. “Here’s a medication that will hopefully help. It’ll lighten your sleep, so hopefully you’ll wake up if you start to walk around. Take one pill a day, and you should be fine.”

We went to the pharmacy and picked up the pills. I didn’t think they were going to help. I wasn’t sleepwalking. Just to be sure, I closed my eyes. I could see faint auras around everything, like light shining through a thin surface. I hadn’t been dreaming.

Who could I talk to? Doctor Henry would just explain it away. My parents would just go back to Doctor Henry. Maybe Detective Milford could help. When we got home, I told my parents I was going on a walk (which was technically true), then walked to the police station.

“Can I talk to Detective Milford?” The policeman at the desk looked up.

“Do you have an appointment?” I shook my head.

“Tell him it’s Ezra.” He got up and walked through the door. A few minutes later he returned.

“He’s the fourth door on the left.” I went through the door and headed to Detective Milford’s office. It looked the same; filing cabinets and shelves with knickknacks. Detective Milford looked the same.

“Hey, Ezra. How’re you doing?” He gestured for me to sit.

“I’m okay. Actually, I’m not really. That’s why I’m here.”

“What happened to your hands?” I hadn’t realized he could see them. I had plucked all the splinters out, but there were still lots of cuts and scratches in them. I slid them out of view.

“I’m not completely sure.”

“Ezra...” Detective Milford began. “Did you... do this to yourself? You won’t get in trouble if you did. In fact, we can help you. It’s not uncommon”

“No! No, I didn’t. I came because I don’t know what’s going on and I think I need help, but not in *that* way.”

He leaned back on his chair, listening. “Go ahead.”

“I still don’t remember any more, but I know something... weird happened.” I paused. “Doctor Henry says I’m sleepwalking, but I don’t think that’s the case.”

“Why not?”

“Well, I don’t know. I’ve never sleepwalked before. I don’t even have dreams. Why would I start now? Also...” I looked into his face, which was open. “Do you believe in... ghosts?” The word felt ridiculous in my mouth.

Detective Milford chuckled and shook his head. “No, can’t say that I do.” How could I convince him of the truth? I closed my eyes, bringing the world back into the strange translucency again.

“Hold up your hand.” raised his right hand, looking confused. “It’s your right one.” He switched hands. “You just switched.”

“Okay. Which one now?” He kept both of his hands folded on the desk.

“They’re both on the desk, right on top of the left. You switched them again.” I said as he reversed their order.

“Okay. It’s a neat trick, but it doesn’t prove anything.” I kept my eyes closed and waited.

“You just scratched your cheek.” He froze, mid-scratch. “You stopped.” Detective Milford looked a little annoyed, a little scared.

“Alright, I get it. Open your eyes.” I did. “I don’t know how you can do that. It’s weird, I’ll give you that, but I don’t see how it has anything to do with a ghost.” I sighed. This was going to take a while.

I told him about the house, and what was there, how I had ended up in the house again and again without meaning to. How I had found myself there last night, what had happened, what sent me to hospital this time. When I was finished, he looked at me with skepticism.

“That’s quite a story, Ezra. I want to believe you, but it is *out there*. Maybe I should call Doctor Henry.” He reached for his phone.

I shot out a hand to stop him. “No!” He looked at me. “Doctor Henry’s just going to prescribe something or say I should get more sleep. I’m not hallucinating. *This is real.*” Detective Milford nodded, and retracted his hand.

“Alright. I won’t call him for now. Just stay safe and don’t go back to the house, you’ll be fine. But you should tell your parents about this. They need to know so they can help you. ”

“I’m *not insane!*” I got up and stormed out of the room.

After all that, he still wasn’t going to be any help. I walked back home, kicking acorns. Something was calling me to the house. I could feel the slight tug, even now. That something wanted to kill me. Why? I hadn’t done anything to it. Maybe it chose me randomly. Maybe I

walked past that attic window at the wrong time. I knew it could control me when I was asleep. I knew that when I went to bed tonight, I would end up at the house, no matter what I did.

Resolve gathered in me. I couldn't stay awake forever. If I was going to the house, it would be on my own terms.

I got my bag. I picked up a flashlight, put it down. I didn't need it anymore. I grabbed an extra coat from the closet, and found some mittens in the attic. It had been cold up there. I didn't normally drink coffee, but I figured I might need it to stay awake, or warm. I heated some in the microwave and poured it into a thermos. Almost ready. I took a crowbar from my dad's workshop. I triple-knotted my shoelaces and took my bike from the garage just as the sun was dipping below the horizon, a golden-red glow through the trees.

I biked briskly, looking straight ahead. I could feel the house, its presence. I could have pointed directly toward that attic, the dark window, the mirror. I listened to the *snick* of leaves under my tires, felt the cold air rushing past my ears, and it seemed to me that the world was so cozy, so *nice*, and my heart ached at the thought of entering the dark house and facing whatever was there. It was possible I wouldn't come out. I knew that. Of course I knew that. But I was suddenly aware of the beauty of this evening, and that I might never again feel the cold October breeze on my face, smell the woodsmoke from people's chimneys, watch the sun set and the sky grow blue and orange, the first stars peeking out. But I couldn't ignore this. It would only get worse. I kept pedaling.

I arrived at the house, letting my bike fall in the weeds of the yard. I didn't look at the attic window. I knew what was up there. I walked up to the door, stepping over the pile of boards that had held it shut. I put my hand on the handle, tentatively, and swung the door open silently.

I almost turned back. Fear gripped me, standing on the threshold. Behind me; the last of the sun still illuminating the sky, a cold breeze. In front; nothing but a dark hallway, leading into oblivion. I stood there for a good minute, savoring the cold air, the smell of leaves and smoke, then stepped forward and closed my eyes.

The hallway was clearly visible now, traced by light, and I could see the kitchen at the end. I continued forward, carefully, though I wasn't certain anything could hurt me down here. I was at the kitchen, cold and dark. I stepped a foot in, and--

Warmth. Light. People moving, chopping, stacking plates. A fire crackling in the oven, the smell of turkey, or chicken, permeating--

I snapped back to myself. *What was that?* I shivered. It was cold in here. I took out my coat and put it on. I moved through the kitchen, slowly, and into the parlor beyond. I could see the dust covering most of the furniture. I reached down, and my finger brushed the arm of a chair--

Lamps burning, books stacked on tables, people talking, soft laughter, reclining easily in the plush cushions. The clink of glasses, a haze of cigar smoke, a fire burning in the grate, warming the room and shedding orange light--

The dusty parlor returned. I had a feeling that these were memories that had slipped through the cracks like tiny pieces of paper, and that the cracks were widening, letting them through. I stood at the base of the steps. Cold radiated from upstairs. I slipped on my mittens, steeling myself, and started up.

It knew I was coming. I could feel its wrath, even on the stairs. It was like a thick fog, the air heavy with it, almost unbreathable.

I reached the top of the stairs, ready to dodge, but nothing flew at me. The burnt door lay on the ground, its hinges still attached to the frame. The chest lay there on its side just as I had left it. I started towards the twisting stairs, the air getting colder with each step. I closed my eyes. I could see the dark halo radiating from the top of the stairs.

I started up, crowbar raised in front of me. The darkness pulsed, but there was not a sound as I crept up the stairs. The fog of hatred grew stronger, my ears popped and there was a rushing sound as the darkness coalesced for a moment into a misshapen figure at the top of the stairs, then dissipated.

It was waiting for me up there, where it was strongest. It wanted me to know that. It wanted to scare me. Of course I was scared. But I wasn't going to stop now.

I reached the attic.

My breath frosted in the air, small puffs with each exhale. There was a spike in the air, making it painful to breathe. The mirror stood in the corner, surrounded by nothingness. It was old and grimy and was missing a shard, a shard which I could see lying on the floor a few feet away, crusted with my blood.

I waited for something to come rushing at me, for one of the boxes to hurtle out of a corner, but nothing happened. The darkness of the mirror seemed to contract, to grow more compact, and then all at once it rushed forward, enveloping me.

I was buffeted by roaring winds, almost lifted off the ground. I crouched, trying to stay on my feet. I could feel my head growing heavy, incongruous with the world howling around me, debris flying through the air. It felt as if a cloud of calm had descended over me, and I could feel my eyelids drooping...

I forced them open. I could not fall asleep. I could feel its frustration. A dark shape hurtled out of the maelstrom surrounding me and I barely dodged a box as it flew past my head. I could see the darkness of the mirror in front of me. I clenched the crowbar in my hands and swung wildly, once, twice, *crack!*

Everything stopped. The mirror stood in the corner, a crack running down the center. But I could still feel it, whatever it was.

A scream of rage, of hate, tore through me. A pain, starting at the base of my neck, shot through my body like fire. My hands were twitching, out of my control. The crowbar dropped to the floor. It wasn't waiting for me to fall asleep this time. I could feel it trying to take over, and I fought back.

My foot took a step forward on its own, and I yanked it back, toppling over and smashing into the floor. My hand shot out and scrabbled at the floor, trying to drag me towards the mirror and what it contained. I clenched it into a fist, trying to control it, then felt a sharp pain in my leg. My other hand clutched the mirror shard, which was halfway into my leg.

I battled for control of my limbs as I lay writhing on the floor. I curled up into a tight ball, trying to stop it from making me go any closer to the mirror.

Crates in the corner started shifting, as if something was walking among them, then one after another they flew at me, crashing into the low-hanging rafters, then turning to make a second pass. One box hit me on the leg, opening my stitches. The wound gushed warm blood, and I barely had time to register the pain before the corner of another clipped my skull, turning the world upside down.

I pushed myself backwards across the floor until I felt a terrible presence at my back. I turned. I had pushed myself into the corner with the mirror, and in it I could see a terrible grin, and burning eyes.

I felt a wash of horror come over me. I had no idea what I was doing. I was in *way* over my head. I had walked in here, thinking I had figured out this thing, thinking I could defeat it, and now I was going to pay.

I turned back just in time to see a crate being hurled at my head. I jerked my head to the side, and it only glanced off me, its course diverted right into the mirror.

I had a split second to see the grin twist into a gaping mixture of rage, horror, and disbelief. Then the mirror shattered.

My ears popped again. My sight went dark, and I could only see the shards, tumbling through the air, shining like little beacons. I could see faint shapes moving in them, like they were not shards of a mirror but windows to somewhere else. Then they hit the floor, and the darkness was complete.

I waited with my eyes closed, hoping beyond hope that It was over. I heard nothing. I opened my eyes. There was a faint light, poking in from small holes in the ceiling, barely enough to see by. It reflected off the scattered shards of mirror, which glinted on the floor of the attic. I could see the crowbar, lying on the floor. The air was cool, but my breath was no longer visible.

The first thing I noticed was how much my leg hurt. I looked down, and my pant leg was drenched in blood. I pulled it up to expose my wounded leg, blood still streaming down. I took off my shirt and tied it around my leg, zipping my jacket back up over my bare skin.

I pulled off my mittens and picked up the crowbar, sticking it in my backpack. I crouched, collecting the mirror shards. There were still faint reflections in it, things that moved around that didn't here. One by one, I dropped them into a mitten, straining my eyes, looking into every corner. I would have to come back with a flashlight to make sure I hadn't missed any.

As I limped back downstairs, the house felt empty, old, and abandoned. I couldn't feel anything else. No visions sprung up when I touched the chairs. I walked through the darkened kitchen, down the hallway to the front door. I did not linger in the foyer.

The sky outside was dark, with only a hint of light left from the sun. I could still smell smoke on the air.

As I biked home, I could see a sliver of the moon, illuminating the scattered clouds in the sky with a bright light. The leaves crunched merrily under my wheels, and the wind felt good as it whistled past my ears.

I got home, quietly set my bike back in the garage, and went up to my room. I put some actual bandages on my leg and placed the mitten with the mirror shards on my dresser. There were still things to do, but they could wait until tomorrow.

The next day I went back to the house and checked the attic with a flashlight. I didn't find anything. I buried the shards in a box in the graveyard. I figured it's the least likely place people will dig up. My parents wondered about the blood on my clothes, and I told them I ripped my stitches when I tripped. We got them resewn the next day.

The weird sight had seemingly left forever. When I closed my eyes, it was just black. Maybe it had something to do with the mirror, or whatever was in it. I still don't know.

At first it felt wrong for it to be over so suddenly, for there to be nothing left to fight, but eventually I got used to it. I had survived by pure luck. Had things been a little bit different, I probably wouldn't have made it.

Sometimes I have dreams, about the attic. Sometimes, in the corner, there's a tiny, tiny shard of mirror that I missed, shining like a beacon.