

## A LIVING NIGHTMARE

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[Assignment: Describe an experience which caused you to grow or to change significantly. This may have happened recently or long ago. Make the narrative interesting for the reader, using clear time signals and effective details. Looking back, was the change positive or negative?]

(1) The chime of a grandfather clock echoed through the house and told me that it was only one in the morning. I yearned for the time to pass quickly. Lying wide awake, I noticed all that was around me. Debbie's collection of Barbie dolls was strewn all over the floor, along with her grass-stained clothing and muddy shoes. Through the partially opened blinds, the moonlight created strange shadows in her room. I wondered if her closet door was completely closed. I hoped so.

(2) My cotton pajamas collected sweat from my nervous sixth grade body, releasing the fresh smell of a fabric softener. My clammy hands clutched a worn teddy bear for security. My stomach hurt. It wasn't the kind of pain one feels after eating too many stale Cheetos or raw cookie dough. It churned from my building anxiety, causing nausea to set in.

(3) I could hear Debbie's breathing. It was calm and occasionally interrupted by a soft sigh. She was so tranquil and peaceful. How I longed to get through the night. I wanted to be normal. My other friends could sleep over anywhere without any problems, why couldn't I?

(4) A car horn, tires squealing to a stop, loud and rebellious teenagers out past their curfews, and distant sirens were only a sampling of the sounds that drifted through her second story bedroom window that night. Where are the crickets, I wondered? These were not the sounds I was accustomed to hearing.

(5) A door opened down the hall and careful footsteps approached Debbie's room. I pretended to be asleep as Debbie's mother slowly opened the door. It was obvious to me that our mothers had talked and were probably as nervous as I was. She straightened the covers over me and seemed convinced that I had finally overcome my fears. Satisfied that everything was fine, she quietly returned to her own bedroom.

(6) Thoughts of my own mom checking on me triggered tears. Flipping my pillow, I searched for a cooler spot to comfort me. I shivered as a light breeze floated through the room. I really hated this bed. It was too firm. My bed was more comfortable, sagging in the middle due to its frequent use as a trampoline. My pillow was soon damp from my tears.

(7) I missed my parents badly. The fear that something awful would happen to my family and I would be left alone in this world was one that I could not put out of my mind. I wanted to be myself and admit that I was scared, but I truly wanted to be with my friends too. I didn't think I could deal with it if the kids at school started thinking that I was strange and made fun of me. Why was spending a night at a friend's house so hard for me when I knew in my mind that nothing would happen?

( 8 ) The overwhelming urge to call and plead with my mom to come and pick me up mounted. Terrified, I tried talking to myself through this living nightmare. "Morning will be here soon . . . go to sleep and everything will be fine when you wake up," I repeatedly told myself. As my eyes continued to wander about the room, I noticed Debbie's phone was right by my side, within my reach. I struggled with myself not to pick it up. I did. The dial tone seemed to sound through the entire house and alert everyone that I was giving in to my fears. I quickly replaced the receiver in its cradle.

( 9 ) Why can't I fall asleep? It was always so easy at home. I was then startled by the grandfather clock's bellow telling me that it was now 3:00 a.m. I started to relax, realizing that time was passing slowly but surely--I was going to make it through the night. I had to--I needed to prove it to my parents, my friends, and most importantly, to myself. I never heard that clock chime four and the waking sun had never been more friendly.