Dead Eyes Never Lie

A short story by

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To Kristen Breanne:

Thank you for always finding my stories interesting! You make writing easy when I know that you are there to back me up.

I've always seen them. My mother said as a baby I would wail and look at empty spaces. I'm sure it was the eyes. They always came out at night. My Gram said I had the dead sight. I didn't understand what she was telling me (I was five at the time) but something she's told me always stuck with me: Dead eyes don't lie.

I thought Gram was just telling the things adults say when they didn't understand why children are scared of the dark. She understood. I wouldn't know that until much later. She had the dead sight, too. As a child, though, I never felt like anyone understood. Psychologists would blame it on an overactive imagination. They gave me letters like it made a difference. PTSD. ADD.

They weren't prepared for the truth. How could they be? It was happening to me and I wasn't ready for the truth. My truth came in the form of a young girl named Olivia. I was sixteen at the time. It was an awkward time and I was an awkward girl. My breasts were just making an appearance and they made me uncomfortable. Not them specifically, more the attention they garnered. I tried to hide them to no avail.

I saw her the first time when I was hiding myself away under the bleachers. I recognised her. She would have been a couple years older than me except she had died four years before. So, she was fourteen. Her death had been ruled an accident. An unfortunate incident. I rounded the corner and there she was, sitting on the ground with elbows on

knees, staring through the bleachers with these tragic eyes. My heart wrenched. I never understood those words until I looked into Olivia's eyes. My heart wrenched.

I didn't know what to do. I stood there stupidly looking at her. She was so sad. I couldn't take it, so I ran. I didn't stop running until I was safely at home. Later that night, my mom came busting through my door. The school had called, told her I had ditched half way through the day. I knew better than to try and explain. I made something up. Told her that I had cramps and a migraine. She accepted that. It was easier the lie than the truth that her daughter was a freak that saw dead people and then ran home.

Now, understand, I'd been seeing dead people my whole life. I didn't go running home every time one popped up. Olivia was different. Her eyes haunted me. They were like an open wound in the skin of the universe. The dead aren't like the living, I would later come to realize, they didn't have the pretenses that shielded us from the rawness of emotion.

The excuse about my menstrual cycle would not get me a second day off. My mom gave me a bottle of Midol and told me it was just something a young woman had to deal with. I couldn't tell her I was terrified. Scared out of my mind. I knew she'd be there. I didn't think I could take seeing that much pure sadness again.

I was right. I saw her between first and second period. Olivia was standing in the hall. Students brushed past her like she didn't exist. But everyone would pause and shiver when they brushed by her. I almost dropped my books. I'm sure I was shaking like a leaf. When I first caught sight of her, she was facing away from me. When she turned towards me, it was like everything else just melted away.

I was caught in a maelstrom of emotion. Sadness wrapped in anger and pain. Later, I would learn to better weather such storms but not this day. That day, I was taken unaware. I felt insignificant against the tidal lash of emotion. Like a bug in a tornado. Next thing I knew I was walking up in the nurse's office. I had passed out. I didn't know how dangerously close I'd come to never coming back, to being washed away.

It is a danger that those of us with the gift have to be on guard against. Nothing ever prepares you for such an onslaught. When someone like me sees a spirit, they never died peacefully. They are angry, sad, or in pain. Quite often all three. That was Olivia that day. A sad, raging wind funnel of pain. She overwhelmed me. But I know, it could have been worse. She could have left me bare, stripped me of me. I walked away with a severe headache and I count myself lucky.

My mother decided that I could be seriously sick and let me stay home from school. I wasn't idle. I went online and read accounts of people seeing the dead. I wanted to be prepared the next time I saw

Olivia. It was all because I saw something beyond the anger, sadness, and pain. Frustration. Trying to tell someone something and knowing they would never understand. I empathized.

Three days later and I was back in the halls. I didn't notice the wide berth the other students gave me. I was focused on one thing: Olivia. I wouldn't see her until nearly lunchtime, again between periods. She was again standing in the middle of the hallway.

I was mentally ready. When she turned to me, I didn't falter. I looked into the abyss and she looked back at me. I stood my ground. I memorised every detail. And I finally saw it. I hadn't recognised it before because I didn't know what I was looking for. Also, I didn't really know her but I should have seen the resemblance.

Olivia’s little sister Monica.

Monica was a grade behind me but she looked like an echo of Olivia. Down to the eyes that drowned in sorrow and pain. I didn't know why Olivia was so fixated on her sister but I had to find out. She was staring at her like she was a tragedy being written. I had to help them.

I wracked my brain for an idea but I was a socially awkward sixteen year old girl. Nothing came to mind. I finally just screwed my courage up and talked to her. An opportunity wouldn't present itself until the end of the day. We were both waiting to talk to the school counselor.

‘‘My name is Charlotte. You're Monica, right?” I said and stuck my

hand out. I felt like such a tool.

‘‘Uh, yeah,” Monica said. She shook my hand and I couldn't help notice how weakly she gripped mine. It was like she afraid to actually shake hands. “You're the girl that fell in the hall a few days ago? How are you feeling?”

‘‘Yeah, that was me. I'm fine,” I said, color rising to my cheeks. “How are you?”

‘‘I'm okay, I guess.”

This exchange was getting me nowhere fast. “Do you believe in the supernatural?” I blurted out.

Monica's eyes widened slightly and she unconsciously leaned away. “Sure, I guess,” she said in a time that said she was apprehensive of what I may say next.

I took a deep breath and measured my next words. “I don’t think that you are okay.”

‘‘Why would you say that?” Monica said. She had begun to sweat and her complexion had taken a decidedly white pallor. She was shaking.

‘‘It is… a feeling that I get when I look at you.”

‘‘Well, you are wrong. I’m fine.”

‘‘You aren’t and I don’t know why you’d hide it,” I said. Though, to be honest, I know many reasons someone would. I hid my pain all the time.

‘‘I think maybe you should mind your own business,” she said. She looked at me now with narrowed eyes and clenched fists.

‘‘I’m sorry, that was rude of me. I’m not very good at this. I just want to help.”

‘‘Well, there is nothing to help with, I’m fine,” she said, clearly intending it to be a declarative statement but falling short.

We spent the time waiting for the counselor in awkward silence. I knew something was wrong. Olivia was proof. I just didn’t know what at the time. I’d soon find out.

I was leaving the office and was ready to head home. I wasn’t one of those lucky sixteen year olds who had been bought a car. I was on foot patrol. When I was leaving, I saw Monica being picked up by, who I assumed, was her father. Olivia was there. The only way I could describe the way she looked at their father was malevolent.

This was my first hint that Olivia hadn’t died peacefully.

I noticed the solicitous way that the man acted around his daughter. It was creepy. How he put his hands on her and the familiarity with her

body. When she was getting in the car, I was pretty sure that he cupped her ass. Olivia turned to me. I think she was begging in her own way. Pleading with me to do something.

It took me a moment to really comprehend. This was their dad. He was someone who was supposed to protect them. It was becoming clear that he had done something to Olivia. What really got me, though, was this wasn't a spirit crying out for vengeance. She was angry to be sure but what I saw was she was trying to protect her little sister, even after death. It was a depth of caring that I had never come face to face with before.

I resolved that I had to do something. I didn't know what, though. How could I get anyone to believe me? I couldn't tell them that the ghost of a girl four years dead was trying to protect her little sister from the monster her father was. As they drove away, I felt ineffectual.

That night, sleep alluded me. So, when Olivia came to me at 2am, I was wide awake. There it was again, that pleading expression but now it was coupled with urgency. She was gesturing for me to follow. It was surreal, done as it was in complete silence.

I threw on some clothes and followed her out of my house. It wasn't my first time sneaking out nor would it be my last. Olivia blinked in and out of existence, disappearing and reappearing further down our path. She was leading me to someplace I knew well: the old rock quarry. It was

somewhere that I had had many dark moments where I sat on the edge and contemplated death.

When I got there, I saw Monica standing on the precipice. She was only wearing a nightgown and it looked to be torn. She was holding it together with a savage intensity. Tears were streaming down her cheeks. This was a young woman that the world had given too much to bear.

Olivia stood next to her. The weight of pain written across her face was unbearable. She wanted to comfort her sister but couldn't. She was forced to watch her Monica contemplate suicide and do nothing. It was heartbreaking.

I didn't know what to do. "Monica!" I blurted. It was almost disasterous as Monica almost flew off the edge.

‘‘Charlotte? What are you doing here?"

‘‘I'm here to save you."

‘‘Why do you think I need saving?"

‘‘You are standing on the edge of a cliff. I think that is my first clue," I said lamely, forcing

a smile.

‘‘Why do you care? No one else does."

‘‘I get that," I said, "I totally do. We are all wrapped up in our own lives that we don't notice the people that are dying around us. Honestly, I

would have never noticed you or your pain, I would've never looked outside of my own head if I hadn't been forced to. But there is someone that does care for you, so much that she wants me to help you."

''Who?"

''Your sister, Olivia."

''My fucking God, what is your damage? Do you think it is funny fucking with me like this?"

I saw that I was losing her and grasping at straws, I said, "She showed me that your father has been molesting you!"

There was a pause. A sharp intake of breath. "What did you say?"

''She showed me what your father has been doing. I mean, she can't tell me but she looks at your father with such hatred, I can't imagine what he did to her. And she looks at you with such sadness, I can't imagine what he is doing to you. I know that it has to stop. But not this way, he wins this way."

I thought for a second that she was going to hit me. She stood there a moment, poised, and then she just crumpled. Deflated. She drew in wracking, sobbing breaths. It was painful to watch, to know that this young girl had something so horrible done to her that she had been taken to the edge. All that she had left was crying. No anger, just anguish.

I was able to coax her back to my home. I woke my mother and had her call the police. She took one look at Monica and did so without question. I helped Monica tell her story once the cops arrived. They wanted to take her to the hospital and give her a rape kit. I went with her. It wouldn't be until sometime after 8am that I finally got home. I brought Monica with me. My mother didn't say anything.

I wish I could tell you that this story had a happy ending. It was life. Monica and Olivia's father was arrested and charged with a host of charges ranging from rape to abuse. In the course of the investigation, it was uncovered that he had killed his wife, Monica and Olivia's mother. He was sent to prison and was sentenced to a very long time.

Olivia became more peaceful but never really went away. She was stuck. I don't know how it all works but I had hoped that she would get her hereafter. She really had suffered too much.

Monica stayed with us a while but was eventually put into the foster care system. I tried to keep up with her the best I could. She was talking to an endless procession of therapists, trying to get past everything that had happened. Through her twenties she had three unsuccessful marraiges that produced three beautiful children. Last time I checked on her, she was doing well, not perfect. She'd finally found a man that she was around for longer than 9 months and her children were growing up into fine little people. It took nearly twenty years but it looked like she was

finally finding a way to put it all behind her.

As for me, I still see dead people. I do all right, though. I had to learn that I couldn’t help them all. That was a tough lesson. But the shocker of the whole experience wouldn’t happen until a few weeks after the whole incident had taken place.

My mother and I were sitting on the porch. Just sharing some companionship. My mother had changed towards me in the last few weeks. She was more...motherly.

‘‘I couldn’t do it, you know?” she said out of the blue, breaking the silence.

‘‘Do what?” I asked.

‘‘Help that dead girl save her sister.”