

“Lamp”

“-- thirty-five year old, Michael Veski, is just one of the hundreds of victims who have spontaneously exploded this month because of the moths. The United States Department of Homeland Security had advised its citizens to keep indoors until they have figured out how to exterminate the moth population. It seems that regardless of how many layers of clothing an individual wears, the moths will still explode upon human contact--” the news reporter suddenly cut herself off with a terrified scream she looked off to the side of the camera.

A blur of color appears on the screen, inching closer to the newscaster in a rapid manner. “Cut!” she wails her demand to the cameraman, running out of frame. A faint crackling was picked up from the audio before a deafening explosion erupted, splattering bloody matter on the lens before the television cut off to static.

Daniel reached for the remote and turned the TV off, slumping back against the couch cushions with a hefty sigh.

It started the day after Columbus day; people started combusting in random successions anywhere and everywhere in the U.S.

It was only a matter of time when he or his loved ones would die in the same manner.

He stood up from the couch, heading to the occupied bathroom in annoyance. “Hurry up, I need to piss,” Daniel grouched, knocking on the door.

“The more you annoy me, the longer I’ll take,” Daniel’s sister sang, the water coming from the showerhead muffled her voice.

The brother started banging his head on the door next, “I’ll pee on your bed if you don’t come out in two minutes, Molly,” he threatened.

He heard her giggle through the door, “I’d like to see you try.” She knew her brother wasn’t serious. Well... hopefully not serious.

Washing the last of the suds left in her hair, she turned the dial of the shower head off. Stepping out of the bath, she patted her body dry, ignoring the thudding on the other side of the door from her brother.

Molly took time putting her clothes on, leisurely rubbing lotion over her exposed body parts.

She unlocked the bathroom door, greeting her brother with a wall of hot steam that swallowed his breath.

“Finally,” he muttered, pushing past her to lock the door and relieving himself.

Molly made her way to her bedroom, squeezing her hair with a towel in an attempt to dry it faster.

She wrinkled her nose at the musty smell that seemed to encompass the room. Daniel wouldn’t let her open the windows in fear that moths may get inside. She looked towards the closed bathroom again, contemplating if she could get away with opening the window to get some much needed fresh air.

Molly reached for the pane, pulling it up with the tips of her fingers until the glass reached the top. She took a deep breath, sighing in pleasure from the crisp air filling her lungs.

She laid her head on her folded arms, the chilled air flowing on her face. The roads were mostly uninhibited; people too scared to come out of the safety of their home. They were just like cows hiding behind the doors of a slaughterhouse.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” she heard her brother shout from behind her, his arms reached above her to hastily close the window.

Molly looked back at her brother with the same fury, their matching dark brows drawing together. “There’s a goddamn net in the window, stop being such a hardass,” she glared up at him.

“Sorry for wanting to stay alive like a normal human being.”

“*This,*” she motioned the area with her hands, “isn’t living.”

Daniel stared at his little sister for a few moments, before turning and leaving her with a spark of guilt. “Sue me for wanting to keep you safe.”

The teenager stared out the window again. Her longing to be outside again overshadowed the guilt of her brother’s caring. Daniel might’ve accepted their fate, but she couldn’t. Sooner or later, Daniel would leave to go out to restock their pantry and she would join him if he allowed it or not.

The brother grumbled to himself, exasperated from how his sister still didn’t understand the gravity of their situation. Thousands of people were dying daily, and they’d be next if Molly wasn’t careful.

He turned his wrist, checking the time. *7:26 pm*. It was almost sunset when he’d have to start the daily ritual of blocking the windows since moths were nocturnal and attracted to light. Even if the moths had no way of getting past the windows, Daniel liked to be more safe than sorry.

He opened the small compartment stashed away behind their collapsing couch. It was a quilt like object that him and his sister stitched up of their old clothes to put over their thin curtains.

Daniel attempted to buy blackout curtains as an easier alternative, only to find the curtain section of their local mall to be completely empty as occupants of the town seemed to be one step ahead of him.

It was frustrating in the least but they made due. He tucked the multi-textured fabric onto the rod of the curtain, tugging it a bit to make sure it hung sturdy.

Having finished with the living room curtains, he did the same in his own room. Not bothering to go into Molly's because he didn't want to experience another spat.

Daniel made his way to the cramped kitchen, the sweet twinge of rotting food coming from the trash can assaulted his nostrils, he quickly exhaled from his nose to remove the scent. Covering his nose with the collar of his shirt, he began to make dinner.

He took some bread slices from the pantry, along with a jar of mayo. Opening the fridge, he grabbed the tub of cold cut roast beef, cheese, and lettuce.

Assembling the dinner in an orderly fashion, he yelled for Molly after his completion. "Dinner!"

"Coming!" he heard her shout back, the clattering from her room creased as he heard the creakings of the rotting floorboards coming closer.

Molly groaned, "Roast beef again? When are you going grocery shopping again? I'm gonna become a vegan if you keep feeding me this shit again."

“Hey,” the brother defending, talking through a mouthful. “I could’ve gotten tuna instead, be grateful.”

The sister gagged, just the prospect of tuna made her gag reflex tickle.

“And I’m planning on going to the market tomorrow morn-”

“Ooo, can I go with you this time?” Molly cut off, eager to finally be able to get out of the house.

Daniel sarcastically laughed, “No.”

“But-” she tried.

“I don’t know why you ask every time, you what my answer will be every time.”

Molly sucked her teeth, grabbing her sandwich and leaving the living room to hole herself up in her bedroom again. She felt the beginnings of her nose starting to burn with tears. She didn’t want to admit it, but she hated how her brother turned out since the moth situation.

He treated her like a locked up princess who cared more about his conscious than her happiness.

Setting her plate on her desk, she dabbed the tears starting to line her eyes. She sat on her bed, curling onto herself in false comfort.

I could just leave the house when Daniel leaves to go grocery shopping tomorrow, she thought. A plan she never dared to attempt until now. Her desire to feel the fresh air was much too strong to keep suppressed anymore. The moths were mostly nocturnal anyway, they couldn’t kill her during the day, she reasoned.

Molly started formulating the plan to herself as she nibbled on the sandwich. This could actually work.

Daniel sighed, his chewing slowing as he lost his appetite eating the tasteless meal. He stowed the rest of the sandwich in the fridge with a burp. Before making his way to his room and turning off of the night.

He left bad for what he said to his sister, but it had to be said. He couldn't risk losing another loved one. Daniel just wished Molly would understand where he was coming from, he understood why she's so angsty.



Double checking his wallet, Daniel made sure he had his debit card and keys with him. He was almost ready to leave to go stock up on their necessities. Their toilet paper could only last for so long.

He peeped inside Molly's room, seeing her nestled under her covers. He made sure to go when she was sleeping so the temptation to follow him would decrease.

Satisfied, he silently closed her bedroom door and made his way to the front door. He made sure not to make as little noise as possible when he locked the door behind him to not startle his sister.

He was greeted with a lifeless street, cars passing him once in a blue moon as his feet stumbled over the cracks of the sidewalk. The brother was on full alert, flinching every time he thought he saw movement in the corner of his eye, only to find it was nothing. His mind was playing tricks on him.

But unbeknownst to Daniel, however, Molly was awake since sunrise; impatiently waiting for her brother to finally leave so she could make her escape.

She kicked the covers off of her, the material dragging uncontrollably on the rough texture of her jeans as she did do.

She quickly put her trainers on and grabbed for her purse hanging by the front door. Molly hesitantly opened the door, looking through the crack to make sure her brother wasn't waiting on the other side like a sad imitation of the grim reaper. But she was only welcomed with a lone breath of air caressing her cheeks. Giddiness swelled up inside her.

Hastily closing the door behind her, Molly made quick steps down the porch steps and hid behind a shrub. She sought over the plant, seeing a figure at the end of the block. Her brother's red jacket unmistakable. She could practically taste Daniel's anxiety rolling off him from there.

She followed her brother a block away from him, seeing curtains rustling as she passed various houses, eyes judging her through the cracks, wondering who was stupid enough to risk their life being outside.

Maybe Molly was idiotic, but she thought her brother was more so since he never learned to drive so they couldn't drive everywhere. Daniel always preached about being safe and cautious, but look at him now risking his life because he didn't know how to drive. She didn't understand her brother at times.

Watching her brother arrive at the local market, he quickly ducked inside, the doors were no longer automatic from the fear a moth may get inside if the doors didn't close fast enough.

Staring off to the side, Molly noticed a playscape a few fences off the market. Grinning in excitement, she stealthily ran to the small park, making sure she was out of sight from the tall windows at the front of the store in case her brother saw her.

Her feet sunk into the wood chips, scraping her ankles as she ran to the swings. Wiping the puddle of water pooled at the seat, she hopped on. Tucking in her locket adorning her neck under her shirt, she started to vigorously pump her legs back and forth to gain height.

Letting out a gleeful shout when she reached the highest point, her stomach dropped to the familiar feeling of swinging back down. This was the most fun she had in a while and hoped her brother didn't find out about her endeavor later.

She didn't realize she closed her eyes until she opened them again, stinging as the air sliced into her eyes from the force of her swinging. Through her watering eyes, she saw a blurry gray mass coming closer to her. She hurriedly brought the sleeves of her sweater to her eyes to clear the liquid. Only for her vision to clear to see a moth dancing towards her.

Molly flinched back, trying to fly backward off her seat, not paying mind to how dangerous it was to fall at how high and fast she was going. Breaking a leg seemed like the better alternative to dying.

She tried to wiggle herself off the seat, but her sweater latched onto the crevice of the chain link handles. Desperately pulling at the sweater's corner, her attempts were naught as the moth landed on her cheek, it's legs tickling her soft cheek.

Molly tried to fling the insect off of her, but it dug its legs into her cheek, it's temperature rising before promptly igniting and exploding her body.

Her terrified scream was drowned out by the explosion.

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Daniel winced, the plastic handle of the bag dug into the apex of his arm from the weight.

He managed to get some turkey cold cuts and bacon instead of roast beef this time around, knowing how his little sister absolutely adored the taste of bacon in the morning. It wasn't a lot, but at least it was one less thing Molly had to despise about living in their current situation.

He was close to their house before he heard a faint booming echoing behind him. Paying it no mind, he continued his trek. Whoever fell victim to the moths was their fault for not being cautious.

Daniel crossed the street, violently flinching when he heard a buzzing whiz past his ear. Whipping his head around, he saw it was just a bee. He cursed to himself, his heart would probably give out if stuff like this kept happening.

He shuffled up the creaky stairs of the porch, digging into his pocket to get his keys out and inserted it into the lock; only to find the door was already unlocked. The brother's blood chilled, he swung the door open, desperately shouting, "Molly! You in here?"

He wildly searched the house, crashing into her bedroom open only to find messy sheets and no sign of his sister. He looked at to the side of her door, seeing a pair of shoes gone and her jacket missing from the hook. *Shit.*

Running back to the front door, he roughly swung it back; the resounding sound of the door slamming the wall shook the crippled house.

He ran back onto the street, the threat of moths bypassing his mind altogether as he tried to find his sister as fast as possible. Retracing his steps, he assumed Molly tried following him. Meaning that areas around the market would be safe bets on the whereabouts of his handful of a sister.

Daniel left stupid for trusting his sister not to do anything rash for once. Whatever happens to her, he knew it could permeate his consciousness for the rest of his life.

Finally reaching the store, he looked around his vicinity, trying to put himself in Molly's shoes to where she could've possibly gone.

A sudden chilling thought made him halt, the sound of the explosion earlier came from this direction earlier. Could she have...? Daniel hoped to God that his pessimistic thoughts weren't a reality.

Hearing faint creakings from a distant swingset to his left, the brother ran towards it. Of course! His sister loved playing on playscapes even though she was at the age to drive.

He choked on his breath when he reached the swing set, seeing red coating the wood chips; organs were haphazardly splattered around the area.

Daniel gagged, falling to his knees to throw up, but nothing came up from his stomach. Only regurgitating a burning sour taste on his tongue and throat. Shakily standing up, the brother gazed at the gore, an object reflecting the sun caught his eye.

Slowly making his way through the wet wood chips, only to halt when he heard a deep crack from under his foot. He really hoped that wasn't what he thought it was.

Bending down towards the object, his fingers dug into a chunk of flesh, a squelching sound met his eyes. Holding the necklace up with hesitant fingers. "*Oh dear God,*" he whispered in horror.

Jesus Christ-- he recognized that cursed necklace. It was Molly's.

With a trembling hand, he unclasped the locket. The picture that greeted him ransacked him with guilt. The pictures were curling on the edges from the wet blood that seeped through.

One side of the heart was a small picture of him and Molly when they were children. Seeing his sister's cheesy grin had his nose burning. Whilst the other side were their deceased parents. He hung his head in grief.

I couldn't protect her. I'm sorry Mom and Dad. Maybe you'' better protect her up there?
Daniel thought, his fist clenched the locket, it's edges cutting through the palm of his hand.