

Rhiannon: Flash. That's how the dream always ended. It's dark, the moonlight making everything faintly glow blue. I'm in a long, tiled hall, and I hear psithurism coming from an open window, with taffeta curtains fluttering in the midnight breeze. I hear footsteps, but I'm paralyzed in horrific epiphany. Everything is hazy as if I'm viewing it from underwater. Suddenly, I feel someone breathing down my neck, but it's cold and soulless, almost predatory. Its keeper hisses in my ear something unintelligible and the cock of a gun makes my heart explode. I whirl around, desperate to see whose hand holds my death, and before I can take another breath, it goes BANG, flash, hiding the murderer.

Johnny: I hate her. I hate her because now, everyone hates me. The baby of the family, who could never do any wrong, finally taking a blow, and it isn't even mine. 16 years old and kicked out of my own house, while my sister is 18 and still lies around here depending on Mom and Dad. Rhiannon, who always gets blamed for my misbehavior, gets me in trouble for something I didn't do. As usual, she was quiet that Saturday morning. That is, until mom left for work. She told me off about her taking on *my* opprobrium because our parents loved *me* more, which is true. Then it got nasty. I defended myself, but this just riled her up more. The screaming and cussing abruptly stopped, she got close to my face and whispered,

“I'll get you yet.” I have no idea why, but this made fury flare up inside of me, until it could no longer be contained. As if some force of recklessness came over me, I punched her in the eye. She wailed and gave me a look of pain, of fear, and I liked it.

Rhiannon: I ran up to my room, slamming the picket fence white door so hard it shook the house. Looking in the mirror, I brushed my fingers across my black eye, but they sharply receded in pain. I winced, thinking of the malevolent face he wore, an almost, do I dare say, satisfaction gleaming inside. The words made it sound so scary. 'JOHNNY STRUCK ME' blazed across my mind, burning deeper, branding my thoughts. I had always taken the blame; he has always owed me for it. My little brother, who it seems, just yesterday, was running from a spoonful of cough syrup and drawing dinosaurs, punched me *on purpose*. Sure, I provoked him, but after years of doing so, he had by no means hurt me physically, and I felt something I *never* imagined I'd feel towards him; fear. Rage and sorrow fought inside me, trying to decide which I felt, but the only result was a stomach-ache. I honestly had no idea what to do, but that

quandary was dependent on Johnny. That look he gave me when he punched me hit me harder than his fist. I had never seen more than harmless annoyance up until then, but that moment, I saw pure, unreasonable wrath. I had tried to deny it, but I knew, no matter what the repercussions, I knew I had to tell Mom.

Johnny: So she went and tattled to mommy. Called her up and poured her guts out, not that there was much to tell. She attempted to hurt me so I fought back, what else could I do? I'm not a little boy anymore, I may be younger than Rhiannon, but I am stronger, and I think maybe it would help her to see that if I used a little force. Mom told Dad, and that's when everything got crazy. Dad freaked out, yelling and threatening, while Mom just stood there, arms crossed, giving me a look of untainted disappointment that will haunt me forever. Dad barked at me,

“Get your stuff and get out!” Then, holding back bitter tears, I threw some clothes, my laptop, and a few other necessities in a jet black Hefty bag and stomped out. I didn't know where to go, it was 8 pm and I was shaken. I cut into my money stash and spent a night at a cheap motel, and the next day I rented out a tiny condo in the slums. And so I wait, lying low until I can carry out my revenge, and when I do, she'll rue the day she dared defy me.

Rhiannon: After Johnny left, all was quiet. We seldom speak around here much anymore. Mom looks as if she's seen a ghost, the milky white blankness of her eyes making me feel the same, and Dad, he just always has a face of devastation on. They was always so proud of Johnny, needless to say they shouldn't have been, and guilt consumed me, locking every word I intended to speak in my chest. It's just that their reaction was so unexpectedly formidable. All I wanted, all I anticipated, was a scolding. He *did* punch me, and I suppose violence always has been a capital offense in our family, but I was upset, and wanted instant karma. It must have been more the fact that, in their eyes, he had never *really* misbehaved, and this magnified the transgression. I ran this whirl of thoughts through my head, half conscious, until the blissful ignorance of sleep melds everything into the back of my mind, waiting for tomorrow. I had the nightmare again, and it is starting to get weird. Since I was little, I've had dreams that predicted a real event, but they were never this vivid and realistic. I just have to be on my toes from now on.

Johnny: I figured out a brilliant plan to get back at Rhiannon. Some two days before the event, she told me about some stupid nightmare she kept having. Something about a haunted house and a murderer, some stereotype. Anyway, for as long as I can remember, she's said that her dreams came true sometimes, and she really does believe that. If I can get her to think she's being stalked, she'll trust that the dream was a prophecy! I'll start with a death threat in the mail, written in red ink on dirty, crumpled paper. Quickly, I dig through the piles of rubbish, finding a notebook and pen. I scrawl, "RHIANNON MATTHEWS RUN WHILE YOU CAN," in scribbly handwriting. I chuckle evilly, and at 10 pm I set out to deliver the message.

Rhiannon: It has started. Monday morning I walk out, ready for another monotonous school day. Remembering to check the mail, I find a grungy piece of lined paper crumpled up. My stomach drops, I start hyperventilating as I read, "RHIANNON MATTHEWS RUN WHILE YOU CAN." It's all true. The dream digs itself up from my thoughts, I look down, seeing the ground spin, and I throw up. That day I stay in bed, mom made me. I wanted to go to school, to get my mind off my inevitable death, but my mother did the only logical thing a mother could do. She made me chicken soup and gave me Tylenol, though nothing could cure my ailment: a certain fate. As not to worry her, I know I will die no matter what, I don't tell reveal to her the threat. There was only one thing that *wasn't* certain, and that was the killer. As I've said, in the dream, the bullet fired before I could see the face. I don't have any mortal enemies. Have I ever done anything *that* cruel? I don't think so. I rack my memory, thinking so hard I get a headache, and the Tylenol finally has a purpose other than sitting bleakly on my bedside table. Does it even matter? I'm going to die anyway, so who cares? Still, my weary mind won't let me rest until I figure this out.

Johnny: She *threw up!* I almost choked suppressing laughter as I watched from the bushes. Finally, after two weeks of brooding, some happiness! I can't wait for my next move. I've decided to throw a rock with another threat written in fake blood attached to it. Risky, I know, but worth it, and who would suspect me? No one in that house, formerly known as *mine*, has a clue where I went. I'll strike at midnight, waiting for a scream to pierce the icy night air, to warm my soul with more satisfaction.

Rhiannon: My eyes snap open to the sound of shattering glass, and before I even see glints of it flying across my room, I release a bloodcurdling scream that could shatter more glass than whatever got my window. Oh god, oh god, oh god, no. I bury myself under the tie-dyed down comforter like a child afraid of a thunder storm, and cry. I hear dad yelling as he stomps up the stairs. Suddenly, he bursts in, wildly swinging a baseball bat and bellowing threats.

“WHO’S IN HERE?! I’LL KILL YA, I’LL KILL YA!” he shouts, but the only other sound, almost inaudible over Dad’s heavy, maniacal breathing, is my whimpering and sniffing. He begins to bombard me with neurotic questions,

“Sweetheart, what happened? Who did this? Are you okay?” I try to answer, but I choke on the words, and all that comes out is,

“Don’t know...okay.” Eyesight blurred by hot tears with my mousy brown hair pasted to it, and head spinning from the lack of oxygen under my comforter, I stumble over to the black-grey object on my floor. It’s a rock, tennis ball sized, and something’s attached to it- a message; written in *blood*. I am standing long enough to read two words: “I’M COMING,” and I black out.

Johnny: As far as I could tell, this is what went down: I threw the rock, she screamed, Dad came up to see what happened, and then she fainted. It is a relatively large window, so it was like watching a horror movie. Boy, did I laugh, I couldn’t believe they didn’t hear me, but fear blocks out many things, even the laughter of a brother, a son, at the pain of his own family; the pain that he himself inflicted. The cops arrive about 10 minutes later, and I crouched back in my hiding bush to listen. In this suburban town, gossip is like a sport. If the whole town didn’t already know I moved out, dad wasn’t going to spread it. He omitted me from the conversation, telling the officer there were no immediate suspects, and no evidence except the rock and note. I was totally safe, and my next move had to be even crazier.

Rhiannon: As blank as my mind was the ceiling. Ivory and plain, so emotionless, and yet it has the ability to make me cry. Silently I weep, the drops as delicate as a dragonfly’s wing, and the ivory turns sallow. My heart sinks and the dam of indifferent exception leaks, never bursting only trickling out of my eyes, for what lay behind doesn’t want to come out, it doesn’t want to uncap and explode. It prefers to hide in the shadows of memories, cold and numb. I have lost the will to live, for my fate is sealed, and so be my taciturnity forever more.

Johnny: What to do now? I need something else to do, something besides a threat.

Hmm...Being her *brother* I have certain advantages over any regular criminal. I know the places she goes, her friends, where everything in her room is. *Her room!* It's vulnerable, and I still have my key, it was in my back pocket when I left. Some crimson spray paint and a knife is all I need. A delicious plan, pictures of my destruction running down my spine with a chill of sadistic desire, and I'm hungry for more. Her pain is my pleasure, and pleasure is an addictive drug. Unfortunately, I have to pace myself, or else it won't torture her as much. After every strike, she must be a total wreck, waiting for the next terror. So on Tuesday, I'll sneak in and vandalize, look forward to another shriek to bring me bliss.

Today's the day. Mom and Dad are at work and Rhiannon is finally back in school, after a long break from "shock." Not knowing how many neighbors are aware I moved out, I keep it cool, as if I came back. My supplies are in a backpack, so I casually walk in, feeling a pang of painful nostalgia at the smell, vanilla votive candles and salt, but I remember my goal, and stomp up the stairs. Rhiannon's room was unnervingly bare, everything she owned she gave to charity or her friends, as she was sure she was to be murdered soon. I had less to slash, but I start with the mattress, slicing and stabbing. I hash at the walls, the floral wallpaper peeling like the backing of an old sticker. I write all sorts of threatening messages like 'I'm coming,' 'prepare to die,' and such. Then I get an idea. Out of the rumors I've heard, Rhiannon's gone almost catatonic and has "lost the will to live." So maybe I should end this with the final thrill. I write the letter, put it on her mangled bed, and strolled out, looking as if I had just gone to the bathroom, or brushed my teeth. My fraudulent innocence beams out as I walk through the neighborhood, backpack slung over one shoulder, and man, I cannot wait until tomorrow night.

Rhiannon: Oh god, not again. Just kill me now. The walls, they're covered in deep cerise, spray painted threats. My bed and the wall paper have been slashed, but the most frightening thing is the letter. Sitting neatly on the middle of my hacked-up mattress is an envelope, so out of place. I'm all alone, and although it can't harm me, I cringe as I open it. It reads:

Rhiannon,

I leave you with an ultimatum. I have tortured your mind, taken your will to live, and made you wait for death. So here's the choice: come to your fate now, or let the torture continue.

Eventually, I'll have to murder you, but you decide, I'm patient. The address is 49B Sunnyside Avenue, arrive tomorrow at midnight, and tell no one, or there'll be a worse fate for you. Hope to see you there, so I can finally get my revenge.

See you,

XXX

I give up. I can't take it anymore. I have to end this once and for all. No death is worse than the constant peril of knowing that a mutinous, horrible doom is lurking behind you, for what is life with a future, a goal to watch. I have decided to commit suicide, a straight shot through the head with my dad's shotgun he keeps in the basement. For dignity? To save my parents from the trouble of finding the killer? No, simply for the selfish reason of ending my suffering. I'm just a dying animal, waiting for eternal peace to sweep me into the wind. I write a quick, comforting note (not that it will provide comfort) of farewell to my parents. The gun is pressed against my head, I absorb the coolness of the metal, one last earthly touch. Goodbye world, goodbye Mom and Dad, goodbye pain, bang.

Johnny: What have I done? *She shot herself in the head.* No, this can't be happening. *She shot herself in the head because of me.* I am just a horrible idiot. Where was it going to go if she *had* come? Did I think I'd say "gotcha" and she'd just laugh? I was so blinded by this primal, masculine rage that I only cared about getting even. *She shot herself in the head because I tortured her.* And, what am I to do now, roll on with my Ramen noodle life like it was nothing? *She shot herself in the head and I can't take it.* They'll look for me, or whoever they think drove her to this. *She shot herself in the head because she thought I was going to.* I'll never see her face again, and I'll never see the face of Mom and Dad again without grief in the back of their eyes, burning like cold ice, because of me. *She shot herself in the head and everyone pays because of me.* I have nothing except consuming guilt, remorse and a longing to correct something I will never be able to. I. Killed. My sister. It's simple and strange, so clear but so complex. *She shot herself in the head, and now I'll do the same.* Wherever I go, I'm sure I won't meet her there. She was so pure, always taking the blame, always getting my scolding. So I hope this makes it up. My life for hers, the ultimate sacrifice, and yet it doesn't see like enough. I know she's watching now, maybe crying, maybe laughing. I go to my old home;

while my parents are at Rhiannon's funeral, I get a gun from Dad's safe in the basement and go to the living room. The gun is on my temple, my finger is itching for the trigger, but before I shoot, I gently murmur,

“So Rhiannon, if wherever I go, I'm too far away for you to hear this, hear it now. I took your life and I will never be able to change that or repay you, but just know, I'm doing this for you, for what I did, and I am sorry.” Goodbye world, goodbye Mom and Dad, goodbye pain, bang.