

EMILY

Emily pushed a few strands of soft red hair away from her face and tucked it neatly behind her ear. She smiled awkwardly and held her hands behind her back. Her long, gorgeous hair fell about her shoulders, covering her small cute ears. Emily was the girl everyone wanted to be from her soft pale skin to her perfectly shaped lips shining in the light from the thick lip-gloss. Her smile broke the strongest of hearts, making them crumble in their chests. She reached up and nervously pushed her hair behind her ear again as Mr. Browning finished talking and turned to face her.

“Ok so if anything happens, you have our mobile number and you can have your pay when we return, okay?” Emily nodded and stepped sideways to let Mr. Browning and his wife leave through the open door. The door shut loudly, leaving her standing alone in the large hallway of the house.

A large chandelier hung from the high ceiling, emitting light through small glass bulbs shaped like candles. Silver and gold tassels hung from the circular rim, swaying ever so slightly in the breeze from the open window in the roof. Thin lines of cobweb arched from the chandelier to the ceiling and back. Despite the wealth of the house’s owners and the obvious expense of the house, it had a very old, spooky feel about it that made Emily feel uncomfortable. She stepped forward, her right foot pressing on the wooden floorboard and making it creak slowly. She ignored the shiver it gave her and walked forward toward the open living room door.

She stepped into the room, a little faster than she had set off, determined to leave the intimidating, looming hallway as quickly as she could. She shut the door quickly, her beating slightly faster than usual. Emily turned and confronted the warm, comforting living room. A large two-part sofa took up most of the room, the light beige covers complimenting the rest of the room. There was also a dark wooden desk that took up most of the far wall. A long fish tank took up over half of the desk; goldfish and other light tropical fish swimming peacefully in the clear water. Emily crossed the room and perched herself on the edge of one of two armchairs accompanying the sofa. A large iron fireplace sat on the opposite wall, glowing logs blazing inside the grates. A long metal chimney spurted up from the fireplace, disappearing into the tall ceiling above. A few feet from the fireplace was a small wooden coffee table that ran the course of the first sofa part, the second part running perpendicular to it. In the center of the coffee table sat a small white baby monitor with in-built speaker sitting neatly in a stand that was plugged discretely into the mains.

Over the muffled crackling of the flames engulfing the chopped logs, there was a gentle breathing coming from the baby monitor. The room was comfortably warm from the fire and Emily slid slowly down the chair so that her head hung slightly over the back of the armchair. Her skinny hand reached down to her handbag and she pulled the poppers apart, reaching her hand inside. It emerged from the leather bag, clutching her mobile phone that she gripped with two hands, letting her bag slip off the edge of the chair and fall to the ground. The open bag landed sideways, spilling its content over the fur rug. Emily sighed and sat up, again stroking the hair out of her face. She leaned over and started returning each of the items to her bag. She returned her hand mirror, lipstick, hairbrush, notepad and pen, and earphones. She buttoned the leather handbag, propped it up against the coffee table leg and sat back in the soft cushions of the armchair.

She pressed the middle button on her mobile and the screen’s backlight was reborn, shining intrudingly into the peaceful room. She had two new messages. Smiling, Emily tapped on the button and brought them up. Then her smile faded; one new message from

'dad' and one from 'Robbie'. She scoffed a little and flicked her hair back from her face. That boy, always running after her at the end of class. You'd think he'd have got the hint by now; she simply was not interested. She shrugged and brought up the message. She slowly read the message out loud to herself, she didn't have particularly good reading skills but she was literate enough to read books of her age, not that she would ever want to. "Hey, babe. What you up to tonight?" Jesus Christ, did he not understand that he was a dork and she was popular? She thought for a second and then pressed 'reply'. She quickly tapped in a message. "Nt much. Dnt reli wanna hang out tbh." Was it too harsh? Well at least he would get the message; he didn't seem to catch the subtle hints, or the obvious hints for that matter. She hesitated for a second then pressed send. An envelope soared across the screen and a green tick met it at the top of the page.

Emily returned to the inbox and opened up her dad's message. It read: "Hey Ems, we've gone out, left key in usual place just in case ☺" She nodded to herself and closed the message. Emily placed her mobile on the coffee table, straightened her silky purple dress and surveyed the room. It was dark, too dark and her throat tickled from thirst. She slowly stood and crossed the room. The fire was still lively, burning tall, orange flames. She touched the cold door handle and turned in, swinging the door open.

She crossed the creaking hallway, the walls coated in olive paint and the walls covered with wooden framed artwork. Emily couldn't help admire the paintings although she personally never cared much for art. Her heels clapped echoingly on the wooden floor. She looked down at her skinny legs and long black leather boots that climbed up to her knees. She strode quickly down the long hallway, passing many wooden doors as she walked. She knew the house fairly well; she had been about six times in total over the last two years. She knew where the bathroom, kitchen, second lounge and some of the bedrooms were but she had never been in any more of the rooms than that. Emily hadn't been to the house to babysit in about three and a half months and she wondered if that could be the reason that she felt so insecure in the house. Her spine chilled slightly despite the warm inside air and she ran her hand along the back of her smooth, tight dress to itch her back.

At the very end of the hallway was a large wooden door that lead to the kitchen. Emily opened the door and opened it and stepped inside. Already decided what she was going to drink, she checked the kettle volume and after noticing it was nearly full, flicked the kettle on. A bright red L.E.D embedded in the handle glowed to life and a gentle hissing could be heard. Emily reached up, opened a cupboard door and searched for a mug. After finding none, she opened the next cupboard across and took a tall, red mug from the topmost shelf and rest it down on the granite surface next to the kettle. Emily took cocoa powder from beside the coffee and a spoon from the draw at her stomach. Lastly she opened the fridge and retrieved a glass bottle of milk.

Then Emily remembered she had left the baby monitor in the living room and turned to get it, then stopped. There was a gentle creaking on the floorboards above her. She froze, her hand outstretched for the door handle. She waited, her eyes rolled up to stare at the ceiling above her. Again there was a gentle creaking, further away this time. She shook her head quickly, dismissing it. The water inside the kettle began bubbling and the kettle shook violently. Emily dashed over to it and pressed the button to stop it boiling.

"Shit," She muttered under her breath as bubbling water splashed from the spout of the kettle and onto the surface. She quickly spooned two spoonfuls of cocoa into the mug and poured the water on top. She mixed in some milk and picked up the mug. Carrying it into the hallway with two hands, Emily heard the creaking again. It was on the stairs. What could it be though; they didn't have a cat, did they? Assuming it was just the age of the

house, Emily walked on and into the living room. She sat down, picking up the plastic baby monitor from the coffee table and resting the mug of cocoa in exchange. She pressed the speaker to her ear and listened closely. The baby's gentle breathing was still present. Relieved, Emily placed it back on the table and took her phone from the table.

She rested it in her lap, the silver of the phone contrasting the silky purple of her dress. She leaned forward and picked up the mug. Emily tipped the mug back, taking a deep gulp of chocolate. Her stomach rumbled in satisfaction but she felt something in the back of her mind telling her that feeling was wrong. Emily shivered and placed the mug back on the table. Maybe chocolate wasn't so great at keeping a figure.

Her hands desperate for something to do in the awkwardness reached down and opened her leather handbag. They came out holding her mirror and lipstick. Emily unfolded the mirror and observed her reflection. After a second she unscrewed the cap off her lipstick with her free hand and the free fingers on her hand holding the mirror. She looked at herself in the mirror and slid the tip of the lipstick over her wet lips. After a few seconds they were covered and she put the lipstick on the table with its lid. She gently bit her lip, watching her lips fold together then kissed the air in front of the mirror. Satisfied, Emily returned the mirror and lipstick to her handbag. She took out her earphones from her bag and plugged them into the earphone jack in the top of her phone.

Selecting music, Emily stuffed the earphones into her earlobes and turned on some Jason Derulo. With the music blaring in her ears, she began to hum to herself quietly. After two songs, the music started to grow on her and she began to sing under her breath. Then she stopped suddenly. Emily swore she had felt air on the back of her neck. The hairs on her spine and neck shot up sending a cold shiver down her back. Emily waited, not daring to move a muscle, the music still blaring in her ears. A deep warm breath on the back of her neck made Emily spin round in the armchair. As her hips turned in the chair, her outstretched foot collided with the mug of chocolate and it tipped, spilling hot liquid onto the table and carpet. Turning around, Emily saw that there was nothing, just the open door blowing a gentle breeze into the room.

She quickly turned back, taking a deep sigh of relief but trying to stop the spilling mug. The hot liquid had spilt onto the table and flowed over the edge onto the clean carpet, sinking into it. "Crap," Emily muttered. She knew she wasn't meant to have drinks anywhere apart from the kitchen. This would definitely come out of her wage. She stood and hurried out of the room. Her high heels made loud reverberating clacks on the floor as she half ran to the kitchen. She reached the room and glanced around desperately for a cloth. Spotting a roll of paper towels on a wooden holder, Emily grabbed them and ran back to the living room, ignoring the creaking floorboards above her.

When she reached the living room and knelt down to address the problem, the faint sound of a baby crying was broadcasting from the baby monitor. Emily's eyes rolled to the ceiling and her mouth opened in annoyance. Her lips parted after a slight stick and she licked her lips, getting back to her feet and heading up stairs. The landing light was shining peacefully against the more powerful darkness as they competed for light. Emily crossed the first landing and up the second set of stairs. At the top on the left the baby's door was slightly open, the light from the landing making a triangle of light on the floor across the doorway.

Emily stepped into the room to see the baby standing up in her cot, her arms outstretched and tears falling from her eyes. "Mummy!" She cried out.

"Mummy's just gone out for a bit okay? It's all right it's me, you know Emily," She said taking the baby from the cot and holding her on her left arm, cuddling her close. Emily

turned and flicked the light on. She nearly jumped when the room was exposed. In the corner of the room, in-between the cupboard and toy box stood a large five-foot-eight clown. Emily blinked, not quite believing its presence. The clown had long baggy trousers striped in pink and white. It had dungarees over a shirt buttoned with a comically large bow tie. Above the shirt was a face that seemed to be made of cotton like the clothes. There was a large red smile painted on the material under a big pom-pom nose and crosses on its cheeks. On its head that hung slightly over its neck sat a poker dotted hat, the one any clown would wear.

Emily's heart beat fast as she stared longer at the giant plush doll. After a half minute her common sense told her that it was indeed inanimate. She wiped the tears from the baby's face and smiled. The baby reached a small chubby hand and pointed at the window before bursting into tears again. The heavy rain outside fell fast, droplets splashing into the cot through the open window. "Let me shut that for you," Emily said walking forward with the baby and quickly shut the window before returning to her position across the room from the clown. She waited for a second then hit the light, took a deep breath and crossed the room to the cot. She was careful to walk past the cot so that it was between her and the clown in the corner. Emily gently laid the baby down in the cot and pulled the covers up to the baby's chin. Its mouth remained gaping open as if it wanted to say something. She reached out in the darkness and, using the light from the hallway, located the baby's dummy. She popped it into the baby's mouth, which instantly started sucking on it, a relaxed smile appearing on its face. Emily nodded and backed out of the room, leaving the baby peacefully lying in its cot and the freaky doll towering over the cot, seemingly not scaring her. Emily guessed that her parents wouldn't have bought it if it had scared her, but it sure scared Emily. Correction, it terrified her. Mind you, she had never really liked clowns especially big ones.

She descended the first set of stairs, her heart racing but relieved to be away. She finally reached the living room and shut the door, throwing herself onto the neatly positioned sofa where she lay with her hands over her face. Why had it scared her so much, probably because it looked so life like? Or was it because the house had freaked her out enough already and seeing it in the dark room like that had just topped it. Her fingers were trembling, sending shivers down her hands and arms.

After a few minutes, Emily pulled herself together and brought herself to a sitting position. Then she noticed the hot chocolate spilt all over the floor. Emily sighed in frustration and stood. They were going to be so pissed at her. She rushed to the floor and began to flatten the paper towels onto the soaked carpet. The paper instantly began to absorb the liquid, the dampness spreading to the edges faster than fire spreads across petrol. She ripped off another bunch of paper and pushed it down hard onto the carpet. Then she winced, the hot liquid soaking into the paper and onto her hand. She quickly withdrew her hand, brining it up to her face. The palm was a sore red. She let out a little yelp and pushed the hand into her dress, the soft fabric cushioning her hand. She abandoned the attempt to soak the spillage up; she'd just have to take her punishment, and slumped back into the armchair.

The baby monitor was emitting a low breathing from the bedroom upstairs, or was it two sets of breathing? Emily snatched the monitor out of the stand and pressed it to her ear. No, she was just paranoid. It was just the baby's gentle breathing. Emily rested it back on the table and took her hairbrush from her brown leather handbag. Her hair was falling out of shape from panicking and moving around. She took her mirror and observed herself. God, it looked worse than it felt. Strands of hair were sticking out statically to the sides and there were several overlaps of hair where it should hang dead straight about her

shoulders. She brought the brush up above her head and pulled it down frantically through her hair. After a few minutes of pampering, her looks were as good as they were an hour ago. "There," Emily said returning everything to her bag and regretfully looking down at the stained floor.

"I am in such shit," She said taking her phone and checking the messages. None. Emily slumped backward in disappointment. Even a text from the stalker Robbie would please her now. Or the sound of a friend's familiar voice telling her to not be so desperate about everything and to just play it cool. She wasn't exactly the smartest girl and she knew it. She was constantly upsetting herself; she knew she didn't impress her parents or any adults for that matter but she just wanted to be liked so much even if it meant acting like a total slag all the time just to feel loved for short periods of time before she was slammed back down to reality and left alone. Still, her job wasn't too badly paid. It was fairly irregular work, in fact her original plans were to be at a party tonight and instead she ended up babysitting for what she considered to be a pretty reasonable pay.

Then she heard it, the creak above her head and Emily thought, no she *knew* that it came from the baby's room. Her heart hammered fast as there was another creak. This time it came from the baby monitor. The baby girl whimpered in her sleep. "Oh shit," Emily muttered, slotting her fingers together in a ball and holding her breath. The baby screamed. Wining through trembling lips and Emily jumped to her feet. Snatching her mobile from the handbag at her feet, Emily dashed out of the door and down the hallway.

On the way up the stairs, Emily dialed three nines into her keypad. Not intent on using it, having the emergency services just one button push away made her feel safer. Although in reality, if there was anything in the house, she would be long dead by the time the police reached her. The baby's cries of terror filled the house as Emily sprinted up the well lit staircase and past more abstract artwork hung all over the walls. She made it to the top of the second staircase and burst into the bedroom, her phone still clutched in her sweaty grasp.

The baby was lying on the floor, its feet in the air and screaming in terror. Thank God was the only thing going through Emily's head as she told herself the baby must've jumped out. But her hammering heartbeat told her otherwise. Emily flicked on the light, revealing the clown standing in the corner as it had. Emily wasn't any less freaked out the second time she saw it and even as she walked across the room to pick up the screaming infant, she felt the sensation in her pants that she needed to pee.

Emily reached down and took the child into her arms, holding it close to her chest. The baby screamed and screamed, its arm outstretched behind her head. Emily turned with fear to see that the baby was pointing directly at the smiling clown in the corner of the room. Emily nearly peed her pants she was so terrified. Her eyes widened rapidly, her pupils becoming black holes, absorbing every tiny detail of the doll.

"It's okay," Said Emily more to herself than to the screaming child. "Hey, don't worry it's just a silly old clown." She tried to pull herself together, like she had said, just a silly old clown. Emily took a deep breath and stepped towards the clown. She exhaled, not able to hold her breath any longer. Again Emily took a step closer and reached out a trembling hand to touch the clown's face. The baby's screaming had dulled to a whimper as it watched Emily touch the material that made up the clown's face. She quickly withdrew her hand and stepped back. A deep sigh of relief was let out through her pursed lips.

"Hey, it's okay," She said patting the sniffing baby on the back. The infant again reached up and pointed at the clown with growing fear in its eyes.

"Sssshhh," Emily muttered rubbing the baby's back. After a minute or two, the baby's eyelids began to close of their own accord, dropping down and snapping open again as the

baby tried to maintain consciousness. Emily gently laid the baby in the cot, pulled the covers up to its chin and hurried out of the room.

Emily literally ran down the two lots of stairs until she made it to the living room where she threw herself to her knees and searched for her phone in her handbag. As she frantically rummaged in the bag, she could hear footsteps above her and her fast-pacing heartbeat again increased.

“Shit, shit, shit!” Emily said out loud, desperately pushing objects around her bag. After a few seconds, Emily shook her head and tipped the bag upside down. The nails on her left hand were slightly chipped and there were scratches of showing nail through her bright red nail varnish. She snatched her phone from the floor and desperately pressed buttons trying to find the contact details of Mr. Browning. Finding it, Emily pressed call and held the phone to her ear.

A soft scratching sound in the hallway outside the door. Emily spun around to face the open door. The gentle scratching intensified but no shadows were present in the hallway.

“Emily?” She struggled to answer but at last found the words. “There’s something in the house,” She breathed not taking her fixed eyes from the hallway from which gentle scratching could still be heard. “What do you mean. Emily, tell me what’s happening. Is Nadia safe?” Emily blinked slowly, her eyes shut for a fraction of a second but it was enough. When she opened her eyes, a long cockroach sat on her elbow, crawling its way up to the phone slowly. How had she not felt it before? Was it even there? Her mind had become a paranoid daze and she couldn’t even remember the day of the week. “I know this sounds crazy but the clown is totally freaking me out and Nadia has been up twice scared and...”

“Clown?” Emily didn’t acknowledge his question, she was talking quickly, barely understandable with terror. “... I keep hearing footsteps, I don’t know if it’s just the wind or what, I’m just so scared.” Mr. Browning suddenly cut her off, nearly shouting. **“Emily. What fucking clown?”**

“The clown in the bedroom, you know the big figure in Nadia’s room.”

“Emily. What. The. Fuck. Are you talking about?” She could tell he was terrified. In all the time she had known their family, none of them had ever sworn or used any even remotely rude or offensive words.

“Her doll. For God’s sake the life sized giant fucking doll in the room!” Emily actually shouted down the telephone, her eyes staring widely at the cockroach that had now reached her wrist. “Emily listen to me. I want you to get Nadia and get the hell out of that house NOW. We’re goi-” He was cut off as the signal died, simultaneously as the cockroach’s first leg touched the mobile.

The phone slid from her grasp and fell to the floor. Her heart pounded in her chest, the adrenaline kicking in and making her feel suddenly awake and ready to run hard and get the hell out of there. But the baby... Her veins furiously pumped blood back and fourth from her head as she contemplated going into the dark room and confronting it.

Emily closed her eyes tight; wishing everything would go away, wishing someone would jump out and say, “Boo! Joke over” In fact, as she knelt in the glowing warmth of the fire and the ice cold shivers that ran down her spine, Emily wished that Robbie was there with her. She didn’t know why, hell she pretty much hated him but she wanted the safety that he imposed on her, that strange ex- boyfriend feel that no one knows you better than him and although you don’t love him anymore, you would still feel comfortable dying in his arms. Emily slowly reached down and took the phone from the floor. The cockroach had long since crawled away. It had scarpered as soon as the plastic had hit the ground and toppled over. She returned to her contacts and dialed Robbie.

The phone rang for a few seconds and then was cut off just as her previous call had been. No time for anything else, Emily needed to get a weapon then she needed to get the baby then she needed to get the hell out of there. Emily crawled on all fours to the end of the room; her dress was pulled gradually down her shoulders so that with every thrust forward, her straps dug into her shoulders. Emily reached the doorway and leaned out to scan the hallway. It was empty.

She reached down and unbuckled her leather boots. Tossing the second shoe to the floor beside her, Emily stood; her feet were bare apart from the stockings running up her legs. She took one last look down the dark hallway and ran fast. She nearly lost her balance as the tights on her feet slipped on the polished wooden floor. After a few seconds, Emily reached the kitchen and threw herself inside. Light was emitting from the blue lamp outside the window. Emily slammed her finger into the wall switch. The lights were dead. "Shit!" Emily spat to herself, reaching around her for draws. After pulling one open and reaching inside, her hand closed around a long butchers knife. Her tight, pursed lips parted as she gave a wide smile. Pulling open the draw underneath and the one underneath that, Emily found a powerful torch and batteries. She slotted the batteries in like shotgun shells into a barrel and screwed the top on firmly. Turning around, the light from Emily's hand scanned the room and found nothing. She took a deep breath and headed out of the room.

Holding the large butchers knife at her side and the torch in her outstretched arm, Emily reached the first landing and looked around, heart hammering, for shadows. Rounding the corner and placing her left foot on the first stair, Emily heard it. Was that music? A slow guitar was heard from speakers, the bass humming through the floor. Then the singer started.

"Bury all your secrets in my skin, come away with innocence and leave me with my sins. A sharp knife was slid down the back of her back, cutting her soul open to leave coldness washed over her. She knew that song. Emily's previous boyfriend had played it to her standing outside her house with an acoustic guitar amped up to a speaker system. She had told him in fewer words to leave her alone and never talk to her again. Well, that's what she told herself she had said. Really, she had told him to fuck off and go kill himself. The next morning he was found dead with a noose around his neck lying on his bedroom floor with open cuts covering his thighs.

The image of his body burnt into her mind like she was seeing it again and she took one more step up. *"My smile was taken long ago. If I can change I hope I never know"* Tears streamed down her face and she wiped them away with her cold hand clutching the knife. Emily hurried up the stairs, ready to embrace the sins that she had laid down time after time. She reached the top of the stairs and continued down the upstairs corridor. The drums blasted from the speakers as the chorus built up and again Emily's eyes clouded with tears of guilt. *"So save your breath I will not hear. I think I made it very clear. You couldn't hate enough to love. Is that supposed to be enough?"* The music was clearly blasting from somewhere above on a fourth floor. Emily wasn't even aware there was a fourth floor. She stepped towards the baby's bedroom; the door hung open, more blue light shining in through a streetlight. *"It took the death of hope to let you go"* The bass and synth blasted emotionally through the floorboards making a buzzing vibration as the sound waves ricochet of the floor.

Emily leveled the knife and stepped into the bedroom. She noticed two things the second the light was shone into the dark bedroom. The first was that despite the blasting Ballard of Slipknot coming through the ceiling, the baby Nadia could be heard screaming in terror from her cot. The second thing Emily noticed was that the clown had gone. On the floor where the clown had stood in the corner lay a soft cotton mask with wide red smile and

nose. A large bucket of chills was tipped onto Emily's head as the realization washed over her.

She ran over to the baby and snatched her from the cot. Emily swung the torch sideways, lighting up the whole room in sequence. It was empty. The screaming baby buried its face in Emily's shoulder wetting her exposed neck with salty tears. She squinted in the darkness before taking off out of the room and plastering the floor with her heavy footsteps. She hammered down the clean steps ignoring the reverberating music from the floor above.

Ten seconds after her feet had begun descending the stairs she was at the bottom. She sprinted to the door, her arms aching with the weight of Nadia, her hand dropping the butcher's knife and reaching for the door handle. It was locked. Emily spun around wildly to face said clown. She looked up from his over sized shoes up past the stripy trousers to his bow tie and eventually to his mask-less face. Emily gasped seeing the ginger bristly beard covering the man's chin and mouth. A large scar covered slit across his face as a memory of Emily's past. Her eyes closed shut as he raised the butcher's knife...