

A Man In The Shadows by Madison Flanagan

So there I was, sitting at the kitchen table as I eavesdropped on my mom's phone conversation with my Uncle Darrell.

"But I'm tellin' you Darrell! I feel him. I know he's there! Hold on, I think someone else is listening. Carol!" I jammed my finger into the off button on the phone, and I pretended not to hear her. "Caroline!"

I played dumb. "Yeah! What do you need mom?"

"Oh nothing sweetie. Never mind!" she yelled back from the living room on the other side of the house. She went back to talking in a low voice, so I couldn't hear her from the kitchen without eavesdropping on the phone. I picked the landline back up, and went back to listening in on her conversation.

"Sorry about that, Darrell. So anyway, I swear to you, I can feel him. Almost every single night." My uncle went silent for a minute, but eventually replied.

"Kate, I really hate to break it to ya, but Anthony's been gone for 7 months. I know he was your husband and all, but there's no such thing as ghosts. Ya gotta let it go." he said, with a trace of fear in his voice. He obviously was scared for my mother's well-being. She sighed, her heart heavy.

"I guess you're right. Gotta go. Bye Darrell."

"Bye Katie."

We all hung up. Guilt churned in my stomach, and along with it, sadness. Just thinking about him made me doleful and morose, but I know I shouldn't have listened in on that conversation. My father was murdered 7 months ago, and the thought of him even existing in this lifetime again got me excited. He shouldn't have died.

We were walking home hand in hand from the theater on that cool October night, just my dad, my mom, and me. We never took the car because our house was only a block away from our local cinema. The sun had set, shops had closed, everyone had already gone home. My dad's hand tensed up. My mom let go of my hand, and held me close to her

concealing the thing once again. I felt the blood drain from my face, realizing what he had just hidden. A blade with a brown handle, slightly frayed at the bottom. He lifted his face up. He spotted me.

“Carol! Hi honey!” I didn’t say anything. “C’mon, don’t you want to say hi to me? Come here!” I didn’t want to move. I didn’t want to even look at him. “What’s wrong?” He stood up and shuffled over to me. He embraced me. He smelled like tobacco and alcohol. I didn’t hug him back. My mom walked out of the kitchen with two glasses of water and plopped down on the couch. I will tell her. I will tell her everything this man had done. He is no longer family. He is a murderer.

“Carol sweetie; why don't you go upstairs?” I didn’t say anything. I went upstairs. Should I call 911? No. They wouldn’t believe an eleven year old, never mind the fact that I had no proof to give. Then I had the idea. That night, I would go talk to my father. Maybe he knew something we didn’t.

I watched Darrell carefully from my window. He walked out of the house, into his shabby; old Hyundai Elantra and put the keys in the ignition. Turned it once. Twice. Three times. It didn’t start. He slammed his burly fist into the dashboard, and sat back into his seat, frustrated. Then his eyes lit up. He got out of the car and walked back into my house.

“Hey Kate!” he exclaimed. “Hope ya’ don’t mind, but my car just broke down. Do ya mind if I stay the night?”

“Not at all,” she called back to him.

My planning just went down the drain. The man that I was trying to confront of murder was now staying in my house. Then I had another idea. “Hey Mom! Do you want me to make up the couch downstairs for Uncle Darrell to sleep in?”

“Yes, please!” she yelled back up to me. If he was downstairs, it would make my plan so much easier. I ran downstairs and hurriedly put sheets and a pillow on the couch.

ghost one more time, rivers flowing down my cheeks. "I love you." I ran out of the room, with the genuine fear that I'd find my mom dead. I shook her awake.

"Caroline, what?" She said, her eyes still closed. But she was alive.

"Listen, I know this is going to sound crazy, but Darrell killed Dad and now he's going to kill you to get money!" She shot up, now fully awake.

"Wha- Carol what are you talking about?" Her eyes now open. I explained what I had discovered in the past few minutes. "I believe you. It all makes sense. The-" She stopped talking, and in the few moments of silence, we heard a single footfall on the stairs. He was coming. "Hide!" she hissed. I scurried under her bed, but I made sure I could see what was happening. He walked up the stairs and into the hallway. "YOU!" My mom said with a ferocity in her voice that I had never heard before. "Don't come a single step closer."

He disdainfully strided forward. All of the sudden, the entire room lit up blue. Darrell's blade clattered to the floor, and a bright blue silhouette chased him out of the room. I crawled out from under the bed and went running after him. I watched as he tripped and tumbled down the stairs, laid still at the bottom of the staircase. My mother on my heels, we ran down and checked Darrell's pulse, my father was nowhere to be seen. With Darrell unconscious, we called the police.

When my father's case finally closed, his insurance money came through, and Darrell had served his first month in jail for first degree murder, and two counts of attempted murder. The nefarious swine got what he deserved after all. My mother and I got what we wanted too. We moved, and live in our dream home on the coast of California. And ever since that fateful night, I've known that my father was watching over me, and he always would.