

# The Story

By Heather Westropp

Darkness. All around, darkness. Kelly's eyes were open wide, her pupils dilated to their maximum size, yet they could not perceive anything. It was pitch black all around her, and the air rushing past her face was unsettling. Worse than her utter blindness was the fact that her ears were working perfectly fine, and the noises around her funneled into them without end. Moans of pain, screams of terror, and whimpers of despair filled the air. Kelly would have joined them, if only the air had not been knocked out of her lungs a second before. The fact that she was free-falling didn't help.

After what seemed like hours of falling through this black pit of horror, she finally came to a stop. No, it was more of a slam than a stop. She burst through what felt like a floor of Styrofoam. In fact, she burst through a series of floors, the first one fairly soft and the following ones progressively harder, until finally she slammed into the hard-packed dirt ground. Stars exploded behind her eyes, and she blacked out, sprawled at on the floor like a rag doll.

As soon as they were sure that she was unconscious, they went in.

The half-rotted wooden door in the side of the cavern creaked open, and a man stepped out. He walked over to the young woman, carefully pulling something out of his pocket. It was sharp, and glinted in the faint light that was cast from the doorway. He knelt over Kelly's body, reaching toward her with his deformed hand. His yellowed nails were long and pointy, and his hand quivered as it drew closer to his victim, the sinister object in his grasp.

"Honey, did you take the trash out yet?" mom hollered from the other room. Jackson dropped the book he'd been reading on the couch and sat up. He felt annoyed that his mom had chosen this exact moment to nag him about the trash. What was going to happen to the girl in the book? It was just going to have to wait.

"Umm... yea, I did," he lied, quickly jumping up and dashing into the kitchen. He hauled the trash bag out of the can and carried it out to the garage, roughly tossing it into the bin. He strode back to the door and turned the handle—but nothing happened. His sweaty palm just slid on the doorknob, which refused to turn.

He swore and turned on the light. It wasn't the first time somebody had been "locked" in the garage. The doorknob was old and had a nasty habit of sticking. The only way to get out was to unscrew the whole thing and then manually open the door. Annoyed, he went to rummage through his dad's toolbox and searched for a screwdriver.

*Now my mom's going to find out that I forgot to take the trash out, and I'll be in for an awesome lecture. Great,* Jackson thought.

Suddenly, there was a loud crash on the other side of the door. At first he thought it came from the kitchen, but then he heard voices and footsteps farther away, and he realized that the noise was coming from the foyer. He recognized the voices as male, and panicked as he heard things start to break. *Smash!* That was probably the vase next to the door, which his mom always kept filled with fresh flowers. *Crash!* He could picture the painting that hung on the wall falling to the floor. It was a country landscape at sunset, one that reminded him of his childhood. *Bang!* That one, he thought, must have been the coat rack.

He started to yell, but quickly realized that it was futile. He couldn't get out quickly, and yelling would only attract the men towards him. They seemed angry and violent, and Jackson knew that the safest place for him was probably exactly where he was. He couldn't get out, but

they couldn't get in either, and if he was quiet he could just wait until they left and then call the cops.

He heard her scream the second after he realized that his mom was still in the house. Her shrill voice cried out, "Please, just take what you want and leave! You don't have to hurt me!"

Jackson was immediately filled with both terror and rage. He needed to get out and get to his mom, and he needed to do it now. He scrambled around the garage until he found an acceptable battering ram: the lawn mower. Grasping the handle with shaky but determined hands, he pulled it back to get some distance and then ran with it, aiming it squarely at the door. The impact was jarring and loud, but the door was still—

Michelle clicked the button to change the channel. She hated horror movies, and as captivating as this one was, she was certain that something awful was about to happen. She needed to change the channel to something less sinister, before she really got scared.

Flipping through the channels, she found that nothing good was on.

"Oh well," she said to herself out loud. "I'm bored of the TV anyway." The screen went dead and she lazily strode into the bathroom.

She despised hotel rooms. They were usually small and left little room for entertainment. In the end, they became just a place to sleep and shower. Unfortunately for Michelle, she was forced to spend the day in the room with Tammy. She had promised her sister that she would watch the baby so that she and her husband could enjoy a nice day out. Of course Michelle loved her niece; she just didn't find babies very entertaining. She would much rather be home, or at the studio, choreographing and practicing a new dance piece...

But she would just have to wait until tomorrow. For now, she had a job to do.

At the moment, however, that job was to do pretty much nothing because Tammy was sleeping. All she could do was wait around for the baby to wake up so she could feed her dinner.

She stared at herself in the mirror until her face looked weird, the way that words start to sound weird if you say them over and over again for a few minutes. Finally, she shut the light off and drifted back into the small living area, collapsing on the couch with a sigh.

Suddenly, she felt tired. Deciding that she had nothing better to do anyway, she closed her eyes and fell into a light sleep.

Little did she know, there was something amiss in the other room. The baby was awake, and waiting quietly in her crib for the right moment. Hearing the noise from the other room cease, she slowly sat up. Michelle was taking a nap, and now was the time to act. Tammy stood up, a slow smile spreading across her tiny face. She grasped the bars of the crib and easily crushed the wood with her chubby baby hands. A quiet, evil laugh escaped her lips, and she continued working on the crib until there was a hole in the bars big enough for her to slip through. She leapt through the opening with the grace of a veteran acrobat, and landed deftly in a crouch next to the crib.

Seconds later, she was out of the hotel room and making her way stealthily down the hallway. She came upon an air vent near the floor and tried to find a way to open it. Quickly, she realized that it was screwed onto the wall. With a sly smirk, she held her hand up in front of her face. Her finger nails extended into razor sharp tips, and she used her index finger to unscrew the vent from the wall. She silently climbed into the air duct and leaned the cover against the opening, leaving the small screws laying on the floor. Although it would most likely attract attention from anybody passing by, she knew that she would be long gone by the time that happened.

Crawling through the air ducts with inhuman speed and deadly silence, she made it to the vent on the roof within minutes. There, she nailed a flawless side kick into the cover and it flew off with a crash. She jumped out of the air duct and stood on the roof, overlooking the city. Her evil grin was filled with the promise of destruction to come. Nobody would expect it.

Elizabeth woke up with a start. *What a strange dream!* she thought. Her mind was still a bit foggy, but she sat in her warm bed for a few moments as bits and pieces of her dream came back to her.

She realized with surprise that she had dreamed of a dream within a dream within a dream. It made it harder for her to sort out the different pieces, but she was fascinated by the new phenomenon. She reached over to her bedside table and pulled a notebook and a pen out of the drawer. Quickly scrawling down the details that she could remember, she eventually pieced the dream (or dreams) back together.

With a frown, she realized that she didn't know the end of any of the stories. Frustrated, she tried as hard as she could to remember the endings. Unfortunately, none of them came back to her and she eventually gave up. *Oh well, I guess that's just the way dreams are. You don't always get to remember them completely,* she thought to herself.

With that, she left her strange dreams behind and stretched out on the bed, thinking about the day to come. Her smile was content and peaceful as she waited for her body and mind to fully wake up.

That was when she realized that something wasn't quite right. No, actually, nothing was right. *Where am I?!* she panicked.

She was in her own bed with her own sheets, blankets, and pillows. Her bedside table was there, with its little white lamp sitting on top. Her journal and pen had been in the drawer. But everything else about the room was completely, 100% wrong. She was *not* in her bedroom.

She looked around, quickly assessing her location. She was in a square room with plain, brown walls and a worn wood floor. Besides her bed and her bedside table, the room was empty. There was a window at the head of her bed, just like there was in her actual bedroom. Outside the window, there was view of... nothing. All she could see was pale, sunny whiteness. It wasn't blindingly white, and it seemed to have a natural daylight tone to it.

Confusion washed over her, and then terror as she realized that there was no door to this room. She had no idea where she was, and worse, she didn't know how to get out. She pulled her sheets tight around her face and huddled in the bed, at a loss for what to do. She tried to remember how to breathe properly.

A moment later, a door appeared in the wall across from her. One second, there was nothing there and then the next, she looked up and there it was. Shocked and even more bewildered than before, she sat frozen on the bed and stared at the impossible door.

After several minutes, she finally found herself able to move again. She slowly inched the sheets lower and then began scooting towards the edge of the bed. Eventually, she was standing on the cool floor of the mysterious room. The door stared at her from across the room, and she stared back. Gathering her courage, she walked to the door and after a moment's hesitation, reached out and turned the handle.

The door swung open easily on its hinges, and Elizabeth stared out in disbelief at the sight beyond.

*Click, tap, click, click, tap,* went the keyboard.

Heather sat at her computer and typed out the short story. The idea had come into her head about an hour ago, as a very simple concept: write a story within a story that keeps on going and changes every time something really interesting is about to happen. Hopefully, some readers would find it funny.

She decided to write it just for kicks, and went to work. After about an hour of writing, editing, and rewriting, she was satisfied with the results. With a feeling of accomplishment at finishing her little project, she came up with a title, typed it in, and clicked the save button.