

Hyperion and the Devil

You think you've heard weird?

I saw the Devil on a rooftop. No, not *that* Devil, not the Tarot card Devil of self-delusion and willful blindness, and submitting yourself to what's not true. That's the Devil inside us all. I'm talking about The Devil. Capital letters. Red skin. Naked and... Well, you wouldn't believe the size of his...

Stop looking at me that way.

You *know* what way. And I was going to say *horns*.

Anyway, I was sixteen when he appeared, leering beside the chimney. I laughed so hard at the full-tilt weirdness I choked on my stolen cigarette. And no, that's not what made me see the Devil. He was real. He was there, IRL. Besides, I read somewhere that laughter is a normal reaction when you see the Devil, so that just proves it was real. And how else was I *supposed* to react?

I definitely was *not* supposed to be on the roof, avoiding my parents' dinner party. Or smoking. But, you know, they're scientists, so you can imagine how boring those parties were. And... sixteen. Of course I'd escaped to the roof. Can you blame me?

Okay, that's not the point. The point is, I was close enough to reach out and touch him. I nearly fell off the roof. But then he was gone, and I was choking and trying not to make too much noise because... Parents. Dinner party. Sixteen. Got it?

Plus, the Devil. You don't see *him* every day. I remember trying to slow my breathing, one hand pressing into a shingle so hard it left slivers in my palm. I remember looking around, trying to tell myself that there was a reality and I was in it, and there was the moon, and there the weak stars—there weren't many, too many city lights—and there our detached garage where my father kept his makeshift lab with all its computers and chemicals.

And then Dr. Stapleton walked out of the house alone. My parents' colleagues insisted we use their titles, even though Stapleton was a doctor of physics and not a medical doctor. I found that more than a little precious then. I still do. Titles. Like we're in regency England or something.

His wife was a doctor too, astrophysics, I think. I liked her. She looked me in the eyes like I was a person and not a potentiality or a probability like my parents' other friends did. She even tried to make conversation with me, poor woman. At sixteen, I was in my moody, tragic teen phase. I regret that now. Not being as friendly as I could have, I mean. The moody tragic teen phase was inevitable.

So Dr. Stapleton had escaped the party too. I smiled at that. But then he speedwalked to the garage, and something made the hair go up on the back of my neck. There was no reason for him to *not* walk to the garage or not to hurry. It was a cold night. But there

was something... furtive in the way Stapleton moved. He stopped beside the door and stared at the lit windows below me. And then he nodded to himself and walked inside. About ten minutes later, he walked out, looked around, and returned to the party.

That should have been it, but it bugged me. I didn't say anything to my parents. Smoking. Roof. Dinner party. Sixteen. But it bugged me.

I should have said something.

A week later, the other Dr. Stapleton, the wife, was dead. Poisoned. The police arrested him of course. He'd been cheating on her. And like an idiot, he'd left fingerprints all over my father's garage. The doctor might have been a genius at physics, but he was useless at getting away with murder.

No, I *know* I was only sixteen. I'm not seeking absolution. I'm only trying to explain. If I had said something, she would have lived. Because deep down, even then, I *knew*.

I played a part in her death.

And I've always wondered...

No, *not* if that's why I do what I do.

Okay, maybe a little.

But I wonder, well, was the Devil a warning about him? Or was it about me?



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