

The Fastening

Jude was scared. *Truly* scared. He had only known the kind of fear from the frightfulness of wakeful nights due to the monster in his closet, or the panic that accompanied the pain of a bee sting. This was different. He couldn't stop the tears as the policemen led his daddy out of the house. He heard his mommy sobbing, and wrapped his arms around her a little tighter, burying his face in the folds of her skirt. He heard the door shut and his mother's sobs became louder, crescendoing into piercing shrieks on anguish. It did all the more to upset Jude, who crouched down and held his stuffed rabbit tight against his chest, just wanting it all to stop, wanting his daddy to come back through the door. He wasn't entirely sure what was happening, but there was one word from last night that had stuck with Jude. His father was being fastened.

Jude had crept down the stairs from his bedroom, pulling his rabbit along by its long, floppy, tattered ears. His parents had been yelling, and as any child of six might do, he wandered down to see what the commotion was about. The living room light was on, but just as he was about to turn the corner into the living room when he heard his mommy say something.

"Fastened, Michael? You're really being...fastened?"

No response came from his father.

"Oh god...oh god Michael," his mom murmured, "What, what exactly are they doing to you?"

His father paused for a moment, then spoke. His tone was even, trying to be calm, but a tremor still stuck in the flow of his words. He explained that contacts would be fitted over his eyes and miniature speakers would be inserted deep into his ear canals. The reality he saw and

heard would be a living hell-scape. Jude of course, knew none of what this meant, but the way his dad was talking made him fearful.

“Michael. Michael, why did you have to go and do what you did?”

“It was an accident Roseanne!” he snapped “You know that. I didn’t see him in the road. It’s gonna be fine. It’s only 18 months. I can make it through.”

“Micheal, we’ve both seen the statistics...only 5% of people who are fastened don’t...”

Jude peeked around the corner when his Mom stopped, and saw her slowly make a gun shape with her fingers. She brought it up to her temple. Jude gasped softly, and ran back upstairs. He knew what that meant. Some of the older boys at school had done that after Scotty’s uncle was fastened. Scotty’s uncle had shot himself.

Downstairs, Michael left the living room. His wife was in near hysterics, and he just wanted to sleep. It was perhaps the last peaceful sleep he would get before they came in the morning. At the bottom of the stairs, he paused and bent down to pick up the rabbit. Micheal walked the stairs and entered his son’s room. He lay in his bed, breathing deeply and evenly. Micheal knelt by his bed and placed the rabbit in the boy’s small arms, which instinctively squeezed it against his body. He stroked his son’s hair.

“Hey bud,” he whispered,”Things are gonna be different. I’m still going to be here, it’s just going to be-well-I’m not going to know you’re there. I’m not gonna be able to talk to you. But I love you. More than anything.” And with that, Micheal stood, took one final look at his precious child, and went to bed.

The police men brought his dad back an hour later. They led him through the door, guiding him. Jude saw his eyes were all grey now, and he started to run to him, but his mommy

held him back. “Jude, I need you to wait in here. No matter what, just stay here until I come and get you, ok?” his mommy asked.

“But I wanna go see daddy...” Jude replied.

“Jude, listen to Mommy, I need you to wait here. Promise me you’ll wait here,” she pleaded. Jude slowly nodded his head. His mommy went into the living room, where the police officers had taken his father.

“Let’s activate him,” Jude heard a gruff voice say. Jude then heard a peculiar sound. It was a cross between a wheeze and a moan. It grew louder slowly, and he recognized hints of his dad’s voice in it. Jude smiled to himself. Maybe his daddy was gonna be ok. Then it got louder, and deeper. Jude felt his smile fade. He covered his ears when the sound turned to a bloodcurdling scream.