

THE NIGHT TERROR

Written by

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ACT I

INT. AVERY'S OFFICE - DAY

DOCTOR AVERY PEMBROOK (40's) walks Army CAPTAIN REESE JOHNSON (40's) through a regression therapy session.

AVERY

Try to remember the water without remembering that day...

Captain lays down with his eyes closed.

AVERY (CONT'D)

The water isn't associated with anything. It was there before that day, and it's still there.

POV SHOT: IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SEA, THE WAVES ARE PEACEFUL.

AVERY (CONT'D)

That day was only one day.

A powerful wave knocks the perspective underwater. The darkness grows closer and closer.

Captain GASPS or BREATHES UNEVENLY. The shadowy, amorphous figure of THE NIGHT TERROR watches from the corner.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Don't forget your breathing.

CAPTAIN

It's getting darker, Dr. Pembrook. The pressure is building!

AVERY

Reese, take a breath.

CAPTAIN

This is what she saw -- My baby girl -- I

He wakes up, shaking his head and gasping.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

-- I can't do this. I-I don't --

AVERY

It's okay, Reese. You did well.

Captain Reese puts his head between his legs and covers his head. The Night Terror dissipates as he controls his breath.

Avery glances at the clock.

AVERY (CONT'D)

It was just a relaxation technique.

CAPTAIN

Then why am I shaking? It's like the nightmares. This is...

He looks at his quivering arms.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

This is how I wake up.

AVERY

Take a deep breath, Reese.

Captain does.

AVERY (CONT'D)

This isn't like the dreams. You feel the same, but it's not like the dreams. You're in control.

CAPTAIN

I wasn't, though. I can still feel that darkness pulling on me. Dropping me, letting me fill with water... And the whole time, I just think: My baby girl felt this. It was real for her. She can't wake up, and I can't --

AVERY

Reese, stop. This is why we go through the visualization. Bella's death was an accident. You are not to blame for your daughter's death.

Out of shame, Captain refuses to look at Avery.

AVERY (CONT'D)

You're not responsible.

She looks at the clock again.

AVERY (CONT'D)

I expect you to fill out that Challenging Beliefs worksheet I sent you for our next session.

Captain nods.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Focus on this moment, figure out how to break that association that leads you to guilt.

CAPTAIN

It's not an association, it's darkness. Pressure. It's there. Always there.

AVERY

But it's there because YOU keep it there. YOU harbor the darkness. And we're going to break the ties.

CAPTAIN

I've tried.

AVERY

No, you haven't. But we're going to. Just fill out that worksheet.

CAPTAIN

(scoffs)
Yes, ma'am.

AVERY

It may seem redundant, but seeing your thoughts in black and white --

CAPTAIN

I haven't had homework since I was 17.

AVERY

You have a lot of work ahead of you, Reese.

CAPTAIN

(nods)
That makes sense.

AVERY

You're not afraid of hard work, Reese. I know you aren't.

CAPTAIN

I guess not.

Avery looks at the clock again.

AVERY
Have you spoken to your wife
lately?

CAPTAIN
No.

AVERY
Okay. Well, that's our time for
today.

She grabs her iPad.

AVERY (CONT'D)
Same time next week?

CAPTAIN
Yeah...

He gathers his jacket and leaves. Avery feels a chill and
glances at the corner The Night Terror had been.

INT. SET - DAY

Co-stars BRADY ARTON (20's) and LINA ST. CHARLES (20's) sit
beside each other, facing an INTERVIEWER (30's) about their
ongoing project: Holocene.

INTERVIEWER
So, Brady, I know your character
goes through a bit of a
metamorphosis throughout the
film... How much of that can you
give away for us?

BRADY
Well, not much. The real arc of it
is, you know, the build. When we
were filming, there was this
palpable build --

LINA
-- And a switch in you --

BRADY
Yeah, it was very distinct and very
outspoken.

INTERVIEWER
Kind of like you're playing two
characters?

BRADY

Almost -- which I loved!

He laughs nervously.

LINA

I remember we filmed the earlier scenes, and then the last half, which was... Difficult to get through. Challenging.

BRADY

A heavy pressure feeling.

INTERVIEWER

For you personally?

BRADY

Well, for the character... And I guess whatever part of me is that character feels it too.

LINA

But I think that's the best thing about the horror genre. And I'm not even sure how visible it's going to be -- and that's why I'm really excited for other people to see it -- but there's something there. Something, like, left over and indistinct.

BRADY

Like a shadow, something else.

INTERVIEWER

Not a man with a hatchet?

LINA

(laughs)

Well, sometimes that.

LINA (CONT'D)

No, it was that pull. It felt it too. A little dangerous, which is so much fun to work off with Brady, but... Yeah, something really pulled us into the shadows with it.

Brady looks at Lina.

INTERVIEWER

Well, I'm ready to see it! Ms. St. Charles, Mr. Arton, thank you for sitting down with me!

They reciprocate thank you's and the Interviewer gets up.

ASSISTANT

You have 20 minutes.

Lina slumps over into Brady's chair. He kisses her head and checks his phone.

BUZZ. A message from his Dr. Pembroke's office confirming his appointment for tomorrow.

EXT. CAPTAIN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Captain lives in a cheap apartment by the ocean. He unpacks his groceries.

INT. DAN'S ROOM - DAY

Captain's roommate DAN CHAMBERS (20's) -- good looking but shabby -- smokes weed and plays video games.

He suffers from dysthymic depression with bouts of depressive episodes, all self-diagnosed.

KNOCK, KNOCK!

DAN

It's open.

Captain opens the door.

DAN (CONT'D)

What's up, Cap'n?

CAPTAIN

Help me with my groceries.

DAN

What?

CAPTAIN

Help me.

DAN

No.

CAPTAIN
You've been in here all morning.

DAN
Actually, I haven't --

CAPTAIN
Are you going to help me?

DAN
No. I'm not unpacking your
groceries.

CAPTAIN
You eat them.

DAN
I buy my own groceries.

The Captain isn't impressed.

CAPTAIN
Fine.

He leaves.

INTERCUT: A memory of Captain, his wife CRYSTAL (34), and his daughter BELLA (8) unpacking groceries. He had a nice house, and an amazing family.

EXT. CAPTAIN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Captain stands in front of the same car in his memory, only now it's older, scratched, and dirty.

And he's alone. In front of some crummy apartment complex.

The sound of OCEAN WAVES.

INT. AVERYS OFFICE - DAY

Hannah sits on the couch, Dr. Pembroke's treatment plan and thought mapping worksheets on her lap.

AVERY
So, Hannah, what made you decide to
come to therapy now?

HANNAH
Well, I mean...

She doesn't even really understand why.

AVERY

You mentioned that compulsive behaviors were interfering with your social life.

HANNAH

Yeah, well, "compulsive?" I don't think so. But, like, I didn't...

She laughs at herself, out of nerves.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I mean, I didn't know.... Hah! Um, yeah, I didn't know. You know, I just did things I've always done. Just tap it to make sure it's there, you know? Just check it. I don't -- I didn't...

(shame)

I didn't know it was weird. I mean, I knew but...

AVERY

It's okay, Hannah.

HANNAH

My roommates made comments, but I mean... Everyone has quirks. Like, at least I don't get drunk and rip toilet lids off the seat. But, um, I'm apparently worse than that!

AVERY

You didn't know it was something you needed to control.

Hannah laughs.

HANNAH

I guess not.

(vulnerable)

I mean, it's just really fucking embarrassing. Like, I'm not trying to bother anyone! And I don't know why I have to do these things, it's just, like, somethings you HAVE to get done before bed! Like, you just have to! Like, like, like, I don't care if I'm drunk or whatever, you know? But most nights I care.

AVERY

Why do you care?

HANNAH

It just brings me peace. I need to know things are there, that I touched it and I made sure it was there, you know? I kept it there, I did something. I mean, there are some light switches in the apartment I only touch when I'm tapping because... I mean, they're always there! Just want to keep them there.

She buries her head. The shadow of The Night Terror lingers over her, weighing her down.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I feel like a total psycho.

AVERY

That's completely untrue.

HANNAH

Is it? I tried to do it quietly, tried to wait until everyone was asleep but it's, "Hannah, are you out there?" Just called me out! And I wasn't doing anything! Just --

Avery looks at the clock.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

-- It's just... so humiliating. Like, I don't know what to do to fix it. Nothing fixes it. I keep getting trapped.

AVERY

Trapped?

HANNAH

In my dreams. I usually don't remember my dreams. Yeah, that's what the tapping is for, I guess, to keep away bad dreams.

AVERY

Dreams of being trapped?

HANNAH

Trapped, yeah. In a world that's all wrong. And the people are monsters and the floorboards have gaps in them and you can fall through!

AVERY

What's on the other side?

HANNAH

Darkness. Just darkness. And it's one of those dreams where I wake up and I'm still asleep, and I can't breathe. That's why I feel trapped.

AVERY

How long have you been having these dreams, Hannah?

HANNAH

A couple months? They've always come and gone.

AVERY

The dreams started.

HANNAH

It was just a straight loop, at first. And I never knew if I was awake and I had no way of knowing. I could feel my arms, though, and it felt like pins and needles. For so many nights, I couldn't move.

Avery writes notes. She checks her phone and has a text saying Mrs. Howell can't make her appointment.

She is insulted and fails to hide it, but luckily Hannah's not paying attention.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I have this Zen garden, a little sand pit with rake, and I make these straight lines. In my dreams, nothing is as it should be, so the lines aren't straight. I can never make them straight. I focus on that and, if I can fix it, I know I'm awake... Does that sound crazy?

Avery digests the sermon.

AVERY

No, Hannah. The logic is a flawed, but I think you'll appreciate what the worksheets show you.

INT. HOWELL MANOR, BEDROOM - DAY

MRS. DENISE HOWELL (50's) lies in bed when HER PHONE RINGS. She takes a deep, labored breath.

The Night Terror stands beside her. She stares into the blackness and hears her husband's voice.

HARRY (V.O.)

I thought you told Sara to cancel that appointment.

Denise works up the energy to answer.

DENISE

Hello?

AVERY

Mrs. Howell? Did you remember our appointment today?

HARRY (V.O.)

She'll charge us for that session now, I bet.

DENISE

I didn't want to go.

HARRY (V.O.)

She doesn't even take our insurance, Denise.

AVERY

This is the second time you've canceled.

DENISE

I'm aware of your cancellation policy, Dr. Pembroke.

AVERY

Well, consistency is crucial to the success of treatment, Mrs. Howell. I expect to see you tomorrow for a make up session.

DENISE

That sounds nice.

HARRY (V.O.)

I guess you're not the one paying for it, are you?

AVERY

Is everything alright, Mrs. Howell?
Have you been taking your
medication?

DENISE

Of course.

Denise hangs up.

INT. AVERY'S OFFICE - DAY

Avery hangs up, frustrated with Denise's refusal to work on herself. Behind her, The Night Terror emerges from shadow.

AVERY

Fucking unbelievable.

She turns to her computer and clicks on the interview with Brady and Lina. The Night Terror moves directly behind her, but she remains focused on Brady's nervous tells.