**You’ve Known This Your Whole Life**

*by Christopher Bloodworth*

You’ve known this your whole life.

Kissing my husband goodbye this morning made my stomach roll over in a way it never had.

Why?

Because early this morning something happened. Something I can’t explain.

I woke up at 3:06 AM. I remember, because when I woke up I opened my eyes to the glowing red numerals of our alarm clock. Why does that matter?

Because the alarm clock is on my husband’s night stand.

I yawned and rolled onto my back, staring at the ceiling, confused as to how I got to his side of the bed. When I looked over to my side, every muscle in my body froze.

My husband lay on his back, his mouth wide open.

My husband never sleeps that way. He says that laying on his back gives him sleep paralysis.

That doesn’t matter though, that’s not what made me freeze.

A little girl stood on my husband’s chest, bent at the hips, her long black hair hanging down from her head and just brushing his cheeks.

The girl’s knobby knees stuck out from under her dress. Her knees were covered in spider webs of tiny black veins, spreading from the front of her knees to the backs. Her dress was white, but stained black in places.

I remember biting back a scream as the girl scratched at her leg and a chunk of grey flesh fell to the mattress. It hit my husband’s right arm and rolled to a stop against my chest. I could feel the little girl’s flesh squirm with life and baking heat.

Before I could pull away, the girl’s arm shot out and grabbed the chunk. I watched as she brought the grey meat to my husband’s mouth, dropping it in as she let out a deep, gurgling giggle.

The girl brought both hands to my husband’s chin and proceeded to work his jaw, making my husband chew what she placed in his mouth.

“Swallow,” I heard the deep voice say from behind the little girl’s hair.

My husband swallowed on command for the voice.

“Open,” the voice whispered.

My husband opened his mouth and tiny black things began to fall into his mouth. The girl’s head turned towards me as she hummed a song I couldn’t place. A nursery rhyme, I think.

When she brushed her hair away from her face, I threw myself out of bed. Dark-edged creamy white pustules nested at both corners of the girl’s mouth, crisscrossed with trails of black veins.

Up until that point, I thought I was experiencing sleep paralysis, but the moment my ass hit the carpet and my feet started kicking back towards the corner of the room, I knew that I was fully awake and this was happening.

The little girl winked at me, torn lips pulling back in a smile that made me want to scream.

The girl only had one eye, but it was nothing more than a milky white orb whose surface was riddled with rotting pock marks. Where the girl’s left eye should have been was a cave.

Sharp black teeth glistened in the faint light as more of the black things fell from the girl’s mouth into my husband’s.

It was at that moment that I finally realized what the black things were.

The little girl nodded at me like she’d heard what I was thinking, before whispering, “Dead flies.”

Bile rose in my throat.

The little girl perched on my husband’s chest as she turned to face me.

“Now you know,” a deep voice whispered from within the smiling little girl, even though her mouth never moved. “Most of you can’t see us, but all can feel us. That itch on your face right before you drift off to sleep that keeps returning?”

The little girl giggled deeply and touched her long hair.

“Ever wake up in the middle of the night and feel the need to clear your throat?”

The little girl opened her gaping mouth a little wider and more of the dead flies rained down upon my husband’s face.

You’ve known this your whole life.

I found my voice and asked, “What do you want?” in a hoarse voice that didn’t sound like my own.

“Him,” the little girl said. “Car wreck.”

The little girl twisted her head sideways, folding it in toward her chest.

Then I woke up to my husband shaking me, that little smile on his face as usual.

Oh. So it was just a dream, you’re thinking to yourself. Probably sleep paralysis.

It wasn’t though. My husband woke me up this morning in that same corner of the room I’d pushed myself to earlier.

“What are you doing?” He asked. “Did you sleep on the floor last night?”

I answered something noncommittal and went to take a shower, convinced that it was a dream or that I was coming unhinged.

Downstairs, 20 minutes ago, I kissed my husband goodbye as he left for work.

When I walked upstairs, I found something on his side of the bed.

Three perfect piles containing six insects each.

6, 6, 6.

I’ve tried calling my husband, but his phone goes straight to voicemail every time so I’m sitting here with the phone next to me, waiting for it to start ringing. Waiting for someone to tell me that my husband is dead.

Cause of death: Car wreck.

I’m trying not to think of all the times I’ve had an itch on my face at the edge of sleep. I’m trying not to think of all the times I’ve woken up in the middle of the night and needed to clear my throat.

I’m trying not to think of that little girl standing on my chest as I fall asleep.

Try not to think of her when you go to bed tonight, because when you open your eyes, she might be staring down at you, her black teeth glistening through torn lips.

*I’ve known this my whole life, and so have you.*