

## My Closest Friend

I was fascinated as I looked up at the man. The man who had been hiding in my house for the past five years.

Sometimes, in the dead of night, I would hear his soft footsteps around the house, traversing my home, searching for food. Other nights, I would hear him come home drunk, stumbling through the living room, cursing as he stubbed his toe. Throughout the day, he was mostly quiet, not daring to leave the safety of his hiding spot.

The first year living with him was petrifying. I knew I wasn't alone, however, every time I ran out of my room, screaming into the darkness of the night after having heard a cough or a footstep, I would only be met by a front door, ajar, the house's light seeping onto the porch. I would call the police, and they would take me for unstable. I talked to my friends, and they thought I was joking.

After locking the door, I would crawl back into bed, shivering with panic, and try to fall asleep once again. Still, he kept coming back. He never spoke to me, but he also didn't hurt me. I didn't know where he hid in my house, or *how* he got into my house, but after a while, I stopped thinking about it, beginning to find comfort in his presence.

I would talk to "myself" a lot, telling him about the day's worries and anxieties. Sometimes, I would leave leftovers in the fridge, making sure it was enough food for him.

The leftovers would be gone the next day.

In the end, my talks with him were the highlight of my day. I would rush home from work, giddy with joy, excited to be able to tell him everything. When my friends offered to get a coffee with me, wanting to catch up on our lives, I would hastily make an excuse as to why I had

to go home, just to spend hours chatting with him. Of course, I did all of the talking. He just listened.

I imagined what he would look like. Was it a man or a woman? Were they civilized, or rough and untamed? I slowly began to build a person in my imagination, thinking of them as a lively, close friend.

So, as I looked at the man standing in front of me, I was surprised by just how empty he seemed. His eyes were hollow, and his cheekbones drooped with tiredness. His face was laden with pain, and he seemed to be angry about something, even though no discernable expression could be seen on him.

A faint voice could be heard in the background, a news reporter's voice emitting from the TV. Her words slurred out in a bored drawl, and the silence of the house was broken by her words.

*"Six years....murder spree....serial killer....Greenfields....watch out...."*

He stood very still, clutching onto an apple. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead, and his eyes darted around, nervous, and slightly scared. I had caught him grabbing food.

"I thought you were asleep." He mumbled.

Not knowing how to respond, I listened to the newscast in the background.

*"Blond....dark eyes....6 feet..."*

"So, that's what you look like." I was astounded by him. We had been living together for five years, *five years!* Yet, today was the first time I saw him.

He brushed his light hair to the side, embarrassed. "I'm sorry. I needed somewhere to hide. I was too afraid to talk to you. If you want, I can leave. Right now. You'll never have to see

me again. I'm sorry if I broke your trust, Olivia." He gazed at my face, his black eyes drilling into me.

A chill slithered down my spine. He knew my name. Of course he did. He knew my secrets, my deepest thoughts. But I didn't know a single thing about him. "No. Please stay. I need to talk to you."

He nodded, grinning charmingly. Reaching out his hand, he told me with a new confidence, "My name's Charlie. Charlie Gree-," He cleared his throat, stopping for a second. "Greener."

"I don't know where to begin." I confessed, sitting down on a chair.

He sat down in front of me, sighing profusely. "That's understandable. I'm not sure where to start either." He chuckled faintly, shaking his head.

"For starters, let me turn off the TV. It's so obnoxious, right?" I stand up, and he reaches out, clasping onto my wrist aggressively.

"Don't." His voice loses its tender tone, turning hostile. "Let me."

Astounded by his sudden turn of temper, I fall into my seat, and watch him tread to the living room.

*"He has....history....alcohol....unknown hiding spot....scar on-"*

The woman's voice is cut short as Charlie turns the TV off, grunting gruffly. I'm not sure why, but small prickles of panic start to gather in my head, telling me one thing; run.

As he walks back, his subtle charm seems to have worn off. I try to smile at him, but my fear passes through my masquerade of joy.

So, as I look at his arm, catching his scar with my eye, I can't help but gasp. He looks down at his arm, and snarls at me. He knows what I'm thinking.

"I thought you trusted me. I thought we were friends!" He growls, jumping up from his chair. "Everything you've told me! I can't believe you think I'm a *murderer!* I'm not *him!* I'm a good person."

I nod my head, knowing that to survive I have to play along.

"Say it." He gets close to me. His breath is rancid, and his teeth are crooked and yellowed. "*Say it!*"

Tears fly from my eyes, and small sobs escape my mouth. "You're not him! You're—" He pushes me off the chair, fury pumping through his blood. "You don't believe me. You're just like them."

"Please don't kill me." I curl up into a small ball, coughing up mucus. I shut my eyes tight, and can only hear him stomping to the kitchen.

I can hear a metal knife banging against the kitchen counter. I can hear his weeping. I can hear his footsteps, loud. So loud.

He's standing next to me, and adrenaline pumps to my head. I can feel myself blacking out with fear. My cries mix in with his, and as my vision goes dark, he's yelling.

"I hate him. I hate that man. I hate him! I would never kill someone!"

My thoughts slowly start to slip away from my grasp, and as I take my last breath of consciousness, I only know one thing.

Maybe Charlie isn't the man on the news. Maybe he is.

But either way, he's my closest friend.

And my worst nightmare.