

Meg Mondelis

The rain began to hit the window softly and leave streak drops against the dirty glass. Meg lay down on her makeshift bed of multiple stacked blankets and stared out the window at the remaining light in the grey evening sky. She was done from another day's work and did not have the strength to get up to find something to eat.

She was a youthful teenager, but signs of physical strain and stress made her look older. She knew she was working too hard, and she wondered what would happen to her by burning her life's candle at both ends. Worn out from the double shift that she had just completed, she felt her blond hair all matted down around her and a loose hair tie that no longer held her hair in place.

Exhaustion had mesmerized her and as she listened to the rhythm of the rain hitting her window, she felt the first signs of sleep creeping into her eyes and body that were acceptable by her consciousness. She thought about the strength she did not want to exert to take off her coat and shoes, and just wanted to find peace in falling asleep as she was.

The sky was completely dark now and the only light that illuminated the room was coming from her closet that was open a sliver. It was the only light in her apartment that still worked. She did not remember leaving the light on when she left for work early in the morning. It was a waste of precious power and the cost of which she pushed from her mind. She knew that she would have to turn off the light before going to sleep.

Rolling over and pushing herself up she stood up and quickly wondered how fast she could get undressed and switch the light off so she could just go to sleep. Her stomach growled and she

thought what she might have to eat, that would be fast, while she was taking off her coat and shoes.

Checking a bread box on the counter opened a choice of rye bread with 5 slices left. She grabbed two from the bag and put them in the toaster on the counter. Having no fridge had made it hard to eat fresh food but then she could not remember when she even had enough food points for fresh food. These days it is all dry goods, cans, cheap vendor food and an occasional micro-box meal.

A little jelly between the two slices pressed together was all she wanted to deal with tonight and she walked three steps to the shower room that had a full-length mirror.

She looked terrible. It was worse than she had thought. She was down to her work clothes of a very dirty, open long sleeve, white blouse and a plain, dark blue, suede looking material, bell pants. She was fair skinned and had a tone that looked as though she had never seen the sun.

While she ate her dinner, she held out her left arm. She pushed up slowly on the edge of her shirt sleeve and revealed an ugly sight. On the left side from wrist to elbow was dark colored bruising both old and new that she got from one of the large material machines that she worked with. She was a skinny girl due to not having enough to eat and living this way for too long. She was also extraordinarily strong. Toned muscles revealed themselves even under her petite arms. She stared in the mirror at her face and moved her hair by pulling it back to the place of the loosened tie that still managed to somehow stay in her long red hair. Both eyes were bloodshot with reddish streaks from strained use. She had naturally, light green eyes that were hard to see as beautiful under these conditions and she was very displeased at her appearance. She let her hair go and it returned to partially cover her face again. She stared a moment longer, finishing her food, then turned off the closet light, walking to her bed on the floor.

It was just as she was lying down that she heard a familiar noise. It was in the wall. The sound of noises in the wall had always bothered her. She remembered when she had heard it the first time 3 days after she moved in. She despised both mice and rats. But only a few weeks ago she discovered who the culprit noise maker was in the inner wall. It turned out that the noise was a cute brown and white animal called a ferret. It was clearly a long-lost pet and now it came to visit Meg Mondelis at least once a week and always at night.

She was already on her back ready to end this day and she knew what was next. Anything small enough for the creature to carry would disappear into a hidden lair somewhere, never to be seen again, in addition to hours of rustling noises during the night. She knew there was nothing for the animal to take but it would still try.

She sighed audibly then got back up and turned the closet light back on. She had named the creature Cracker because crackers were the only food that she had frequently on hand, and it only took two or three to satisfy the new friend so it would be quiet through the night.

She laid down three crackers by the small hole in the corner at the base of the counter. She almost did not notice the small wisp of smoke that was coming out of the hole. Suddenly Cracker darted out of the opening and scurried somewhere in Meg's closet. Meg caught a glimpse of Crackers fur, and it did not look right. It looked dirty.

Looking back at the hole there was clearly smoke coming from the opening. It began to smell like a burning oil odor in her room and Meg realized. Fire!

She straightened and went wide eyed. She just held still not moving. She looked at the closet and then around her room. She could still hear the rain outside, and it had increased in noise on

her window. She darted to the apartment door and opened it. She was hit with a wave of heated smoke that was thick and that immediately darkened the visibility of her room to a yellow gloom.

One step back and catching her off guard, her next breath caught in her throat. Coughing and burning eyes brought her to the floor. Panic set in. She could hear distant yelling down the hall and in several rooms close to hers. She knew not to panic but she could not help it. What was she to do and right now! As soon as she gained some control over the heavy coughing, she dared to open her watering eyes just a little. As long as she only squinted the sting to her eyes was not too bad. Still coughing she decided to get out of there. No time to look for anything. The heat from the smoke was getting hotter as smoke continued to fill her room.

She crawled low toward the door and as she crossed through the entrance, she heard a pop and the yellow gloom of light that she was relying on to see suddenly was out.

It took only moments for her eyes to see that there were other faint lights that sporadically flickered from down the hall. It was the flames. The fire was on her floor in the apartment building. The only way out was to the two flights of stairs going down which was to the right from where she was only several doors down.

Hearing screaming in one of the rooms and other faint yelling far down the other side scared her. The smoke was getting worse. She put her head all the way down on the floor and she could see only a few inches when the flames of the fire flickered bright enough to cut through the smoke. She began to crawl in the right direction toward the stair's location.

Where she thought she would run into the stairs never came and she was now so frightened that her muscles were shaking. Her knees ached from crawling, and she pressed forward against the wall knowing that at any moment the opening to the stairs would be revealed.

The opening never came. Did she somehow pass it, or did she not go far enough down the hall? She lost her remaining composure and cried out. She cried out again and then lost her dinner to the floor.

She did not want to die, and she did not want to be burned up in a fire. She was now drenched with sweat. She just wanted to get out. She felt very dizzy, and her ears were ringing a high-pitched sound with the sound of what must be the fire burning up the building.

She needed to see. If she could see she could get out of here. As she lay on the floor, she saw a familiar friend approach just inches away from her face. It was Cracker. Cracker was moving slowly down to the corner of the hall and Meg followed instinctively, not wanting to lose sight of the animal. It seemed like minutes when all of a sudden she slipped down to the first stair of the way out. As she slid headfirst down the first level of the stairs the visibility increased, and she gasped in clean fresh air. She was tired and now she was still not safe. Three more fast deep breaths and she began to crawl again down the next set of stairs. She knew she could get out now and a level of relief strengthened her to hurry. Seeing Cracker several stairs ahead of her she raced and snatched the creature up.

When she left the entrance to her building it was raining hard, and it felt good against her skin. It was cold. She ran past several unknown people and past into the dark night in the pouring rain. Those she passed by called out to her, but she did not hear them.