

Things
By Andy Medina
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Dear friends and relatives,

You know me. My name is Sarah Crawford. I'm writing this to you because I trust you. No one who has heard this story believed what I said. Maybe if I write it, someone will listen. They will hear my plea in the words on the page. The words will say it more convincingly than my voice. Just listen to the words.

It was dark. It was late. I was supposed to be home by one and it was now twelve. I still had some time.

"Have you ever been off-roading before?" Jimmy asked me in front of the group of my friends in the SUV. He glanced over.

"No, I haven't," I said. I had wanted to go, it seemed like fun. I had occasionally seen dirty cars on the streets with caked mud on the tires and exterior. I even saw entire cars caked in mud, only the windshield was clear. They went to a place called "Off-Roading." Of course I wanted to go.

Jimmy smiled. He was satisfied with the answer and the gleam in my eyes. "Well, it's about time you went." A grin grew on his face.

Everyone else in the Ford Explorer cheered. I looked back to see Katie raising her beer bottle in the air. She wooed and brought the beer bottle back to her mouth and made up for the lost time it spent away. Joey, who sat next to her, pushed the bottle up as she drank. Meghan was in the left corner, directly behind me, chuckling as Katie's eyes widened because Joey didn't let up.

I turned back around and looked at Jimmy. He'd found a new mission, that of taking me on my first off-roading trip. The windows will be caked with mud like we went through a car wash with it. I could see the excitement in his face.

We turned right on a road most people simply went straight on. The streetlights ended. Jimmy turned on his high-beams. I could barely see the road in front of us. There was an occasional mound of dirt in the road, bumps that were only felt, not seen. I violently bounced around; it felt like we were hitting stone. The screams of joy and laughter were made by everyone else. I was a little scared.

The darkness enveloped us. I looked behind us and couldn't see the streetlights that marked the entrance. All I could see was darkness. I turned back around. I was looking out the passenger side window. There was a cliff down there. Not a very steep or tall one, but it would definitely wreck the car and leave us stranded if we fell down there. I watched nervously as the turn in the cliff would come and the car would turn the correct way. All it would take is for one slight mishap, one slight delay in the turn and we would go over.

Some mud splashed up on my window. I looked up at it.

An old lady with torn up clothes appeared outside the window. She was just close enough to the edge of the road, maybe she wasn't even standing there at all. Maybe, she was just floating. I saw her and it snapped me out of my fear of falling off the edge. Jimmy negotiated the turn and we missed her, only by an inch. I sat frozen in fear for a couple of seconds. I looked around and realized everyone was still cheering, it was even louder now.

No one else saw her.

Well she was definitely there, that's for sure. I was shivering. I rubbed my arms and felt goose bumps. I looked out the window again.

She was there. As I saw her, screams followed. They all saw her.

"What the hell was that?" Jimmy yelled. He turned his head as the woman passed. I looked over and saw the woman's white hair and her curled finger in it. She looked right at me and her eyes began to glow in the dark. Her eyes glowed green. She was staying right outside my window, right next to me.

She was floating alongside us, easily keeping up with the pace. My eyes were locked with hers, I couldn't move.

I heard a voice say, "Come on, step on it Jimmy! She's right there!" Jimmy stepped on it but she kept with me, kept staring at me with those glowing green eyes. She took her eyes off me and shifted her stare left--past me, towards Jimmy. Freed from her stare, I looked over at Jimmy. He was looking ahead at the oncoming road. In a split second, his head jerked in my direction and his face went limp. He began to convulse violently, hands still on the wheel, making the car shake as well. After a few seconds, his eyes moved away from the old lady and forward towards the road. Then, his eyes snapped shut and he fell forward, no seatbelt, and landed on the middle console. The car continued going straight and I looked back at the girl. She was gone.

I grabbed the steering wheel, hunched over Jimmy's dead body. The turn was going to be sharp. The speedometer read 40 mph. The left turn came and I turned the wheel as hard as I could.

I could feel the upward force as the wheels of the Explorer lifted. The turn was over and I returned the wheel back to center. The wheels slammed back down on the dirt. The whole car shook in response. I dared not push on the gas anymore; I couldn't even reach the pedal if I tried—Jimmy's dead body was in the way.

I looked back out the passenger window and the woman was gone. The mud on the window was building. More than half the window was covered, maybe she was still outside.

We continued like this for maybe five minutes. The road was slightly downhill so that kept us going. After those five minutes, we hit a hill. The car slowed and eventually came to a stop. I took this opportunity to put the car in park and move Jimmy's body so I could sit there and drive. Everyone in the car was beyond scared. They didn't protest any of my requests. They just did what they were told, like they turned off their minds to deal with the situation.

So, I got in the driver's seat and turned the car around so we could get out of there. I went as fast as I could, as if I could somehow outrun that no longer seen ghost lady outside. Sometimes, we barely made the turns.

I looked to my left and she was there again, her head just above the line of mud. I screamed, missed the turn, and went off the main road into the flat dirt below. The road was instantly rockier, the shocks felt like they would snap any minute. In fear of running into something up the road, I slammed on my brakes. The car swerved and ran straight into a mountain. The loud crash was heard and my head was thrown against the airbags. The wreck barely even registered in my mind when I heard someone struggling with the door. A few seconds later, my door was opened from the outside.

I had no time to think, but I was sure that I had locked it before. A hand reached in and grabbed my arm from the steering wheel. His strength overcame mine and I flew

out of the car, head-first. The ground and jagged rocks slammed against my face. Then my face was dragged, stinging more and more. I dared not open my eyes. I didn't want them to be sliced to pieces by the jagged rocks. The pain was too much to bear and I couldn't do anything but muffle a scream every now and then.

After a minute or so of dragging, I came to some of my senses. I could hear the man laughing and his footsteps against the shards of rock. Then, I heard no footsteps and the pain from my face was gone. I opened my eyes but only saw black. I felt the cold wind against the cuts on my face. Then, we landed with a loud stomp. I looked around and saw nothing but black. I saw a faint light--a set of lights--below in the distance. They were the headlights of the Explorer. I screamed. The man--that Thing--put a hand over my mouth and created an airtight seal. His hand was crushing my cheekbones, his long, sharp nails digging into my cheeks. My blood was getting on his hand, he seemed not to care. After a while, I stopped screaming and he pulled his hand away. He was still using his other hand to secure my arm.

I had to get away.

But how? I felt on the ground for sharp pieces of rock. I grabbed one with my free hand and jammed it into the hand that was holding me. I heard him yell. Actually it was more like a squeal—definitely not human. I got up and ran into the pitch black.

I kept running into nothing. The squeals of the Man were growing faint. From the looks of it, I must have been on a mountain and at least a half mile away from the car.

I stopped and looked up at the sky, wishing to see a full moon and to look back down and see everything illuminated. The moon was barely visible next to the stars. There were clouds blocking the light from the sky. Then I thought if I really wanted to see what everything looked like here. With all the lurking, slithering *things* that might be present. As I was standing there, I realized the ghoulish squeals had stopped. All was quiet. Not even my friends in the car were making noise. I heard a twitching in what sounded like a bush beside me. It sounded like a snake or a rodent. Then, the bush shook one last time and the sound was gone. I could feel the presence of something much larger than the rodent beside me. I ran.

I didn't look back. It didn't matter where I looked. There was black everywhere. There were rocks in the ground and bushes that didn't seem to care if I ran into them. I could feel thorns in my socks tearing at my ankles. I kept going through, barely thinking about anything but the thing that ate that rodent. That *thing*...

Then I fell.

I hit a web. It felt like a giant, large spider web except it felt like someone had put glue all over it. I tried hard to move my limbs but they barely moved. I could feel something below me. In another layer of liquid, there was resistance. I reached over with as much strength as possible and pulled my arm partially free from the slime. My left wrist was free. I reached out next to me, to see if there was anything to grab onto. I felt something firm. It had a point in the middle of a circular region.

It was a face.

I pulled my hand back in terror and screamed. After screaming, I could feel the thing below me move. My body shook and I felt the pressure push up. A hand, a fist, pushed into my back. Then, the body beside me started to move as well. Slimy sounds of bodies being peeled off the paste were heard. I could see nothing but blackness. The sounds surrounded me. A hand from below grabbed my leg and pulled. Another grabbed

me around my waist. I sank deeper. I could feel the slime going into my ears, drowning out the sound. It was the only way for me to know what was going on, other than the hands that were on me, all over me. Some were pushing me down, others were pulling me down. My ears were completely submerged now. I could no longer hear but I imagined the bodies, hundreds of them, thousands of them, all emerging from the slime to take me in. I could feel as the slime reached my mouth and nose, the smell was terrible. I began to close my eyes, feeling the slime getting closer. I closed them and my nose began to fill.

I experienced only the hands pulling me deeper and deeper. Then, I experienced nothing at all.

My eyes were barely open. The sun was shining through the windshield. I moved my hand to my wet face. I covered my eyes from the sun and opened them a little more. I was lying in the back of an SUV. There was caked mud all over the windows. There was someone in the driver's seat. Its right hand was hanging at its side, dripping. I could see a puddle forming. Whatever it was, it was not moving. It was definitely dead—or sleeping. I began to panic and tried to move. My arms moved, but there was someone below me, holding on to my waist. I looked down and saw a black line across my waist. I unclipped the greasy seatbelt and it retracted into its slot. As I did this, the Thing began to move. The dripping hand began to move and the head turned around. I looked away and at the locked door. I pulled up the lock and opened it. I heard the slither get closer and closer but I dared not look into its face. I jumped, fell out of the car, and rolled on the ground. I could hear the door close above me though I thought it hardly possible. I was on the blacktop. I could hear cars zooming not too far away. I got up and tried to stand on my feet, I slipped as soon as I attempted to walk. My hip slammed right into the jagged ground. Once the pain subsided, I looked beside me at the car.

It was a white SUV with mud all over the windows. The mud covered the entire car, it looked as if the hood was painted brown. The hood had a large dent. It looked like someone hit a wall with that thing, *or a mountain*. Then it hit me. This was Jimmy's car. At that moment, the car started and the engine roared. I couldn't see inside the car and I didn't want to either. The tires squealed and the car went ahead full speed despite the fact that another car was turning into the driveway. The other car slammed on its brakes and honked its horn. The Explorer, which probably looked to the driver like the messiest car he had ever seen, kept going despite him and passed right by. I couldn't tell, but I think the guy got a look at the driver's face. All I saw was the driver's face in horror and he began to convulse. I turned back to the Explorer because I knew what was next. The Explorer sped away and went threw a red light, magically avoiding more accidents and went out of sight.

I turned around and saw that I was at a gas station. A man started walking up towards me. I was still sitting on the ground. His jaw was wide open, trying to say something.

“Ar-ar-are you okay?” He extended his hand. He touched mine and felt the slime. He took his hand away in disgust. “What is that? Here, I'll get some napkins. I'll be right back.”

He left to get his napkins and I could see other people looking up from the gas pumps, a concerned look on their faces.

That was how I was found.

So, they've questioned me and questioned me. Where's everyone else? I don't know. Why are you the only one we've found so far? I don't know. Tell us what happened that night.

So I told them, just as I told you right now. None of them believed me. They thought I was making up an unbelievable story to fool them. They think I murdered them and buried them out there. The cops have been looking for three days but found nothing; though they did lose a dog that wandered off. It yelped and that's the last anyone heard of it.

Where are they? Why did you do it? Why?

They ignore the fact that these people were my friends, I would never hurt them. I didn't want to kill them and bury them somewhere and concoct an entire story featuring things I didn't know existed. Things I didn't *want* to know existed. They ignore my stellar grades and academic achievement. They ignore my parents' testimony that I'm a good girl and would never lie about such a thing.

They ignore the slime the man at the gas station wiped off. How I was covered in it like I'd been in a swimming pool of it, a swimming pool with a bunch of other people who wanted me to drown.

Well, I didn't drown. For reasons I can't explain, I am here writing this to you. You have to believe me, you're my only hope. My wish is that these words convinced you of what happened that Saturday night. I can hear them, they're calling for me. My lawyer wants me to change my story. Tell them I did it and be done with it. He says the jury will never believe my story. But *you* will won't you?

I can't tell them I did it, I can't. No one who has heard my story is convinced. Hopefully you who have read it are different.

Please.

With Love,
Sarah Crawford