WarZone Entertainment presents

Tales # 1

Under the Stars

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All was still on the roof of 3356 Hindrance Lane, that’s why Esau always came up here late at night. It was peaceful, in a quite sort of way. Nothing up here but himself and the stars up above, just the way he liked it. It was the only escape he had left to him since coming to live with his aunt and uncle last year, after the death of his mom.

She was the only bright spot in his life. He didn’t do well in school and didn’t have a lot of friends. He was a little big for a kid his age and middle school was hard enough anyways. He woke up every day hating life more and more. He would get bullied and mocked by all his classmates, even the ones who claimed to be his friends. It was almost unbearable, his mom saw all that and did her best to cheer him up. She would come home from work every day and make him something to eat and sit with him for hours playing games and watching movies. It was the most fun he had, he knew that if anyone found out they would mock him something fierce but he didn’t care. His mom was his best friend, his only friend.

He still didn’t think it was fair how she was taken from him. Coming home from working a double shift on Christmas Eve. He had begged her not to go, her place was at home with him. It was a holiday after all, but her boss had forced her. It was work a double or he would fire her. She had no choice, she was a single mother after all and if she lost her job they wouldn’t be able to make rent or buy groceries. The world was a cruel place he had decided. A cruel place indeed.

He remembered that he went out with some kids from school that day. He was supposed to be home by seven, he promised her but he never got invited out. He had to go, he might be able to make some real friends. He just hoped that he could make it home by eleven so his mom would never be the wiser. He hated lying to her but he hated the torture that was school so much more. He saw his opportunity to finally fit in and he jumped at it.

They took him to this park, out by the freeway. It was a cold empty park, closed off by fences. A big keep out sign hung on the front, the park was under construction, it had been for a long time. Rumor had it that funding went out on the place years back and no one bothered to finish it. Things like that happened a lot in the poorer neighborhoods. Esau tried to act like he wasn’t afraid but the other kids could tell he was just putting on a front. They led him out past the poorly constructed slide and rock wall, to where the dense, dark woods started. The sounds of animals made its way through the darkness, each and every one filling Esau with dread. He tried to back away but his ‘friends’ wouldn’t let him. The ring leader, Darrell Smith, pulled him to the front of the group with him.

“Relax Easy, nothing is going to hurt you.” Esau hated it when they called him easy. Darrell came up with it and thought he was so clever for it. Esau just nodded and followed him, he strained his ears to listen for anyone that could be coming at them from the dark. After all, his mother always told him not to go near the woods because that was where murders lived. She might have just been saying that, she was extremely overprotective after all. It wasn’t what he heard that gave him pause, it was what he didn’t hear. No one was following them. He stole a look behind them, all the other kids were standing just beyond the edge of the woods, only Darrell had entered with him.

Esau started to worry, his brows were thick with sweat as he moved closer to Darrell. “How much farther?” he tried to hide his worry as he spoke but by the look on Darrell’s face he knew he had failed. An evil grin crossed his face as he assured him it was just up the road. Every part of him wanted to turn back and run home. He could still make it home before his mom, even surprise her with some hot coco and the present he got her, he saved all his allowance for three months to buy it for her. He just knew she was going to love it.

Even to this day he wishes he had done that. Played the part of the good son, instead he acted so selfish and came here to try and make friends. He betrayed the trust his mom placed in him. The guilt had started to sink in then and there but he pushed it aside and kept going. He was too far in to turn back now. The days of him being a push over were past him and he was never going back to that. Not if he could help it.

He sat up on the roof and looked out over the deserted street below him. Tears fighting to free themselves from his eyes. He hated crying but he couldn’t help it. Whenever he thought back on that night he would start to cry, and always at the same part of the story. He was alone in the woods with Darrell, nearing the spot he was told about when he did something he would never forgive himself for. He knew that it was starting to get late and if he didn’t hurry, his mom would get home before him. It was then that he prayed, he asked for God to make his mom late, let something happen that kept her from getting home on time.

The tears started coming, stronger and stronger now. He had killed his mom, his prayers had killed his mom. He swore to the stars above that he would never forgive himself. He had killed his mom and for what? Nothing that happened that night was worth losing her. He would give anything to be able to undo it, to fix his mistakes that night. But alas the world was not that kind. At least not to him.

His mind went back to that Christmas Eve, the night his whole world came screaming to an end. Darrell had led him out past the end of the tree line. They exited out into an empty field of grass, Esau had never seen this place before. Darrell had told him that they were going to a park on the far end of the woods where they all use to hang out. Esau had been so excited to be included. This was not what he was expecting, there was nothing here, nothing at all.

“Where is the park?” he asked Darrell, turning around to face him as he spoke. He knew he should have been surprised when he found himself alone but he wasn’t. He had been expecting something like this. He knew he should have turned back when everyone else had stopped on the other side of the woods but he didn’t want to believe it. He always tried to believe the best in people. It’s what his mom had always taught him. Look where it got him now, he thought bitterly to himself as he went back into the woods. It was a lot scarier now that he was alone. He started to cry to himself as he made his way through the woods. He didn’t know how to get out, but he thought the best thing to do would be to just walk in a straight line so that’s what he did.

Straining his ears as he went for any sound that might lead him to his salvation. All he heard were the wild animals that might attack him at any moment. A loud hooting of an owl overhead sent him screaming and running as fast as he could, the darkness made it all but impossible to see where he was going and he quickly tripped over an old tree root, landing face first in the mud. His whole body was screaming out in pain from the fall but that didn’t matter, all that mattered was getting home. He didn’t want to be here anymore, he just wanted to be safe at home with his mom watching miracle on 34th street like they did every year. He slowly got up, his arm stained from the blood that was coming from his newly made cut. It stung but he didn’t have the time or energy to think about it right now. He was in a hurry.

He started to run, more carefully this time. Paying close attention to the ground under foot. From somewhere on his left a howl went out that shook the very ground he was standing on. It startled him so much that he tripped and fell once again. This time he didn’t get up. He stayed right there trying not to scream out or cry. As hard as he tried he couldn’t stop the tears from flowing out of him. He couldn’t remember how long he sat there crying to himself but it was a good long while. After a while he got to his feet and started once more towards the end of the woods.

His mom was going to be so mad him, and on Christmas no less. He was going to ruin everything because he couldn’t just stay home like he promised! Those were the only thoughts that ran through his head the rest of the journey.

After what felt like hours he finally made it out of the woods, a feat he thought he would never do. He could dimly make out the construction site just a head, Darrell and his friends were gone just as he thought they would be. It didn’t matter anymore. He knew they wouldn’t wait for him. They just wanted to pull a prank on him, he didn’t know why he ever thought that he could make himself any real friends. It just wasn’t in the cards for him.

He checked his phone, it was 11:15 and he had yet to receive a phone call or text from his mom. At the time he thought it was a good sign, maybe they kept her late. Maybe if luck was with him he could get on his bike and beat his mom home. He took off running for where he left his bike, he made it to the street and the tears started running once more. His bike was gone, he never thought they would steal from him. He thought it was enough that they made a fool of him and left him alone in the cold dark woods on Christmas Eve. They had to go one farther and steal his bike. His mom was going to be so disappointed in him when she got home. She had worked so hard to get him that bike. When she gave it to him on his birthday four months ago she had been so proud of herself. Esau had never seen her so happy, and he ruined it. Just like he ruined everything. He was a failure, just like always.

It was well after midnight before he made it home, still nothing from his mom. He was starting to get worried but at least he beat her home, he would think of something to tell her about the bike in the morning. Tonight he would just enjoy time with her, like he did every Christmas Eve. He ran inside and changed his clothes, cleaned his cut as well as he could and made two glasses of hot coco. He sat down in front of the TV with Miracle on 34th street ready to play on the DVD player. He glanced at the clock, 2:05 am. It was Christmas, she couldn’t still be working, could she? He went to the window and looked out, he couldn’t see anybody, his heart sank. This night wasn’t going how he wanted at all.

He called his mom and no answer came, she never ignored his calls. He was really starting to worry now. He prayed all night for her to come home but she never did. It seemed you only got one prayer per night, and he had wished for the wrong thing. He cried himself to sleep that night, his mom’s hot coco growing cold on the table in front of him as sleep slowly over took him. The chair wasn’t comfortable and his sleep even less so.

He didn’t know how long he slept but it wasn’t long before there was a banging on his door. It woke him with a start. He slowly walked to the door, looking around the living room for any sign that his mom had come home in the night. Her purse wasn’t there, nor was her jacket. The clock read 8:30 am, why had she never came home? He just couldn’t understand it. Why would she leave him on Christmas? She was the only one who was ever there for him and she wouldn’t ditch him on this of all days. The knock came louder, drowning out the miracle on 34th street music that was on repeat on the DVD player, still waiting for their traditional watch.

“Open up, this is the police.” Esau’s heart skipped a beat at those words, why would the police come for him? Was he in trouble for going to the construction site? Did the police find out? He couldn’t let them take him away, he needed to be here when his mom finally came home. She needed him. He looked over at her cup, her hot coco was still there, but the word hot no longer described it. The knocking wouldn’t stop, he swallowed and knew he had to answer. His mom always told him that the simple truth of the world was that you could do whatever you wanted in this life, so long as you accepted the consequences. He was a man and he knew he had to face the music.

He missed those last few seconds before he opened the door, they were the last seconds where his mom was still alive, where she was just running late and would return to him soon. She would open his gift for her and cry and pull him into a hug and proclaim that she had the best son in the world. He would receive whatever gift she managed to get for him and he would love it with all his heart, no matter what it was. They would watch their movie and be happy, then he would tell her about the bike and she would get mad but then smile and make it all better, just like always.

All of that changed when he opened the door to find two police officers there, grim looks on their faces. They sat him down and told him how they had got a call about someone screaming in an alley off of Fifth Street, it was a few blocks from where his mom worked. When they got there all they found was his mother dead on the ground. It didn’t look like a robbery, nothing was missing and the only wound they could find were two small marks on her neck. Esau didn’t believe them, he called them liars and kicked them out of his house, they wouldn’t go. They said they needed to bring him in till they could get ahold of someone else from his family.

The ride to the police station was a lot longer than he would have liked. He sat in the back of the police call looking out as the citizens of San Diego enjoyed their Christmas. The whole trip he kept coming up with story after story about how all of this was a big mistake. It was some other lady who was killed. His mom was just working a triple and still at that hell hole of a dinner. They would laugh and laugh about it tonight.

They were sweet lies that he wished would have lasted longer but once he got to the station they took him down to see the body. It was hers. He couldn’t remember what happened next all he knew was that sometime the next day his aunt and uncle came for him. They couldn’t have been bothered to pick him up on Christmas, they wanted to spend it together and alone, so he spent the night alone in the station. The cops on duty were nice enough but he didn’t care. He wanted his mom and he would never see her again. She was gone from this world forever, all because he wanted to make friends with the jerks from school and prayed for her to be late in coming home. He would never forgive himself.

His aunt and Uncle didn’t even talk to him the whole way to Hindrance Lane. They never once asked about his mom, or told him they were sorry for his loss. They just acted like he wasn’t there. They even stopped off to eat and didn’t get him anything. It was the start of his new life, his non-life as he liked to call it. They threw him into the guest room and made it clear to him, crystal clear to him that he was just a guest. They never took him back to his house to get his stuff. He had begged them, at the very least he wanted some of his mother’s stuff, to help remember her by but they couldn’t be bothered. To make matters worse they never even claimed her body. He looked it up online, if no one claims the body they cremate it. His mom always talked about being buried, her sister and her husband couldn’t be bothered to take the time out of their busy lives to do it for her.

The thought of her body being pushed into the fire sent shivers down his spin. He started to cry all over again. The past few months he all but ceased to exist. They stopped paying his phone bill and with it he lost access to the internet. They never spoke to him, just left him whatever they didn’t eat at meals and let him use some clothes that his uncle didn’t use anymore so long as he did all the laundry and dishes for the family. He had never longed for school so much in his whole life. Imagine his surprise when he asked them what school he was going to go to, they looked at him like he was the creature from the black lagoon. The next night they told him they didn’t want to deal with the schools so he would be home schooled. They still wouldn’t let him use their computers. It took up bandwidth they could use on other stuff.

He was a prisoner in this house, he knew it. They didn’t want anything to do with him and they didn’t want other people to know he was there. It could hurt their image in the community. One mistake on Christmas Eve and his life had turned to hell. No mom, no home, no life. Just a room that didn’t belong to him and this roof that he hid out on.

At least he had this roof, it had yet to be taken away from him. He looked up at the sky above him and prayed. He prayed good and long on the one thing he wanted above all at this moment. For another life changing event to happen. For a way out of the hell that his life had become. He wanted an out and he would have done or given anything for it. He didn’t think it was too much to ask, not after everything that had happened these past few months to him.

And for the second time in his life he had a wish answered. It came with a loud crack that cut through the very air itself. Esau sat upright and looked down at the spot where the sound originated from. It wasn’t hard to find, for in that very spot a blinding white light appeared as if cutting its way into our world. Esau could barely see inside it, for that was how bright it truly was, but Esau couldn’t look away. He knew in his heart that this was the answer to his wish. Whatever that light was, it would change his life. One way or another.

Slowly the light began to fade and what was inside shook Esau to his very core. Inside the light standing tall and proud was a man.