

Cold Steel

Damn! What the hell am I doing on the kitchen floor?

It's cold, and a little tacky. Smell of something a little fruity. Guess I should clean it up.

Only I can't think of that right now.

There was a dream.

Not sure about what. Not a bit.

But scary as hell.

I'm still shaking from it. Goose pimples all over both arms. Hair standing up back of my neck.

It doesn't help to look around, especially from this vantage point.

The ticking clock is ominous – time draining away. I'm behind. It's late. Maybe too late.

There's the toaster, but it doesn't look like anything I've seen before. If I had the courage to stand, what would my reflection in its polished surface show me? Something,...not good.

The knives drying on the paper towel look threatening. Even the spoons and forks do.

The fridge is humming, a buzzing hive of angry bees. No, not bees. Wasps. Or hornets. Something oversized and mean.

There's a faint odor coming from the dishwasher. When did lavender soap get this scary?

The stove. The pots and pans. All this metal is cold, heartless, thankless, angry.

Wait! There's some wood. The pantry door. But, a little ajar. Who knows what's peeking out at me from the darkness.

Click!

Aaagh. The clock again. Another minute. I've got to get up.

And I have to remember that dream. And what it was telling me.

Like why I'm shaking in terror at kitchen appliances that I see every day.

And what I need to do.

The fridge. There's something about the fridge. I crawl toward it.

It used to be my friend. It held my food and drink, my sustenance. Everything that kept me going.

It's a little dinged up, but I know all the dents.

I reach out and touch it.

Not friendly at all.

It's cold, but it's supposed to be cold.

Beyond cold though.

Distant. Secretive.

What's it hiding?

I'm usually thrilled to open the door and figure out what I'm having for dinner. Or a snack.

That's the last thing I want to do now.

Is that what I'm so worried about – whatever's inside?

A head of lettuce? Or just a head?

I wish I could remember that dream!

My shaking is worse, as if I'm on the other side of the refrigerator door and not standing outside it.

The shiny surface, it reminds me of something.

Not the dream, and whatever was in it.

No. It's the Dodge Charger that I wanted so much to buy from my grandma when I graduated college. Dented, like the fridge. More Bondo than metal, but once I had it, I could stop riding the bus and drive myself.

Could come out to the parking lot and see the crowd around it.

People asking me for a ride.

Asking me how I bought it. Where it came from.

Riding through town burning a gallon of gas every block, or idling at the Sonic, waiting for my burger.

Independent at last.

In control.

King.

I'm surprised, but the fridge and the Charger make me think of something not metal at all. The first house.

It had its equivalents of dents.

Chipped paint, and what wasn't chipped was a faded yellow.

The smell of mold in the basement, something that reeks of 100-year-old mystery and tragedy.

The relentless drip that kept you wondering if all that water was pooling inside a pipe, or inside a wall where it would build up and burst through in the middle of the night.

At night. Another sound. The scurry of mice, that you can't get to because they're in the walls, and when you do finally get one, there are another ten behind it.

But it was mine.

Ours.

How would it be to have a house like that again, full of things to fix and make better by my own hand? Problems small enough that I could still solve them with a hand-me-down hammer or a little bit of superglue. Mice I could catch and dispose of in the woods out back. Drips that I could get rid of with a 50-cent gasket and a little elbow grease.

I want that back so bad.

I'm going to do it.

It's time I moved.

I need out of this relationship.

I'll talk with her tonight.

We're not helping each other. We're just making ourselves angrier. Meaner. Sadder. More desperate.

Then I'll find a new relationship, maybe not perfect, maybe with a few dents and scratches.

But dents and scratches I can fix. A little psychic Bondo. A caress. A hug. An apology.

And maybe she'll fix me too, instead of taking the sledge hammer out and denting me beyond repair.

I'm going to do it.

Tonight.

I look at the fridge at the end of my finger tips.

It's not so bad after all.

Sure, it's not perfect.

But it does have my food in it.

And my beer.

It stores my leftover pizza.

It even dispenses ice when it's hot outside.

I've made a lot of great meals out of it.

Not all of them were perfect, but it got me through some tough times.

What was there to be afraid of?

I open the door, no longer trembling.

Everything is in its place, as it should be.

And there's a nice slice of pepperoni sitting right on top.

I take it out, heat it in the microwave, and feel strengthened.

I untwist the cord on the phone, pick up the headset, and dial.