

Swinging Trees by Tristan Smith

My eyes crawled open as I reunited with my conscience. Looking around I saw unfamiliar paintings on the walls and furniture I didn't remember purchasing. *Of course, we are in my brother's home.*

In front of me was what seemed to be the finale of a movie I hadn't recalled starting. One of my slippers had fallen off my feet and onto the wooden floor. *That must have woken me up.*

Pulling my head up from the crevice in the brown leather couch, I felt the grip of my wife's hand untangle with mine. I remember now, it was her I was watching a movie with. It seemed our Friday night lasted longer than expected. Across the room was my brother and his wife. They too fell asleep holding each other.

I gently repositioned myself to get my wife's attention. She was sound asleep. The lights from the movie reflected onto her as she rested there. As beautiful as the day we met, she sleepily reached back for my hand but couldn't find it.

"Darling where did you go?" She said, forming a smile. Her eyes awoke and sparkled.

"We really must be on our way, love," I returned sincerely. She sat up and ruffled her hair. Half awake, she pushed her head towards the clock on the wall.

"Babe, it's 3:15 in the morning. We should just stay here." She looked at me with wider eyes.

"We can't just fall asleep on their couch. We can make it back to the house. It's not that far of a ride." I reached for her and gestured for her to get up with me. I put my other slipper back on and carefully assisted her from the couch.

"You have to promise me that you can make it home safely-you sure you aren't too tired?" Worry grew on her face. Concerned, she softly tried to keep me from the door.

I looked her in the eyes and said, "I promise." She nodded her head in acceptance and made her way to the door. We breached the cold outdoors and trotted to the car. Once I closed the door, I turned the keys in the ignition and the engine made a dull roar. Smoothly, we rolled past my brother's mailbox and started our way back home.

The road was dark and empty. Trees stood tall and motionless like street lights. My high beams illuminated the path in front of me displaying the windy back roads. My eyes switched from window to window as I cautiously took in my surroundings. Tapping my hands frantically, I felt the urge to rest stretch across my mind.

Bright lights grew in front of me. Brighter and brighter it seemed. *Blinding.* Swiftly I swerved back into my lane. My heart pounded and blood raced through my chest. In my rearview I watched a car skid off the side of the road. My wife didn't seem to notice. She was too concentrated on me. Her hand clenched my shoulder and heavy breathing filled the car.

“No I won't stand for this! We won't make it home with you driving this way.” She urged and pleaded but I wouldn't listen.

“I'm perfectly fine! Don't worry about me while I'm driving.” I shot back through my teeth. She didn't say another word. Her fingers lifted from my shoulder and she sank deep into her seat. Hesitantly, I fixated my eyes back on the road.

The car was quieter than before, even though it was always silent. I shifted my focus from the street to the pin straight trees. They stood proudly in the dark reaching up at the night sky. Slowly the yellow line began to blend with the white. The road seemed to grow foggy as the trees swung back and forth. A constant honk rang out as my head fell flat against the steering wheel. The loud blaring drowned out the sound of my wife screaming. My grip on the wheel started to loosen and the sounds around me began to blur.

Then through the fog I saw the swinging trees. Swinging and swinging. Eerily everything joined together. Colors and sounds molded. One last time I saw the trees. Getting closer. And closer. My eyes closed heavily.

They couldn't help but stay shut.