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NIGHTMARE ISLAND

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TAKE 1—WHAT'S BEHIND THE DOOR?

For as long as I can remember, I've had the same nightmare.

It opens in a blinding-white room with nothing but silence. No birds, no crickets, no breeze.

It's the sort of atmosphere my parents love so much, they named me Serenity.

A team of doctors rush into the lobby with my heavily pregnant mother on a gurney. You may have seen a chaotic scene like this on one of those medical TV shows, but in my nightmare someone has muted the sound.

My mother grimaces and clutches her belly. But even in pain, she checks to make sure her black, straightened hair is still in place.

Then the chaos arrives. Enter six-year-old me, in my pajamas, screeching and twisting in my father's arms, and grabbing at his perfectly identical locs. He puts me down on a hard, gray couch.

A shadowed person appears above me. Their blurry face twists in shades of black, looking at me with such disgust my scream becomes a choking gurgle in my throat.

And then I'm alone.

My throat is raw but I don't stop bawling. Not until a silver butterfly appears out of nowhere and flutters onto my wet cheek.

Its wings tremble as it drinks my tears. I reach for the butterfly, but it moves away like a beam of light.

I follow the butterfly down an empty tunnel while whistling my favorite tune, "The Ants Go Marching." The butterfly floats to the floor and slips underneath a metal door with a NO ENTRY sign.

A red dot blinks twice on a shiny black panel and then I hear two quiet beeps, like a bird's chirp. The door opens with a soft hiss, and the whistle dies on my lips as I take in the sight in front of me.

And then everything fades to black . . .

I wake up covered in cold sweat. My brain screams for me to relax. *It's just a nightmare*, it chants. I feel like I'm about to throw up, so I reach for the metal bowl under my bed. Once, after the nightmare, I got dizzy on my way to the bathroom and hit my head on the bed frame, so I keep the bowl there for emergencies.

Luckily the nausea passes and the sweet potato pie I had for dinner stays in my belly. I'm never able to get back to

sleep after the nightmare, so there's only one thing to do.

Create a monster.

I turn on the light and reach for my sketch pad on the dresser.

I once watched a kung fu movie where the master told his student they had to face their fear because "avoiding fear increases the fear itself." That made sense to me.

But how can I confront my fear if I have no idea what I am afraid of? I need to see the face of the monster that haunts me. I've watched every horror movie about blood-sucking vampires, flesh-eating zombies, haunted houses, you name it, but none of them have ever made my heart leap out of my chest like it does in my nightmare.

So I decided to create my own monsters, and now I'm obsessed with making the scariest horror movie of all time.

I want to know what's behind that door . . .