

In The Blood

By: Rob Curtiss

The blood was dripping from the ceiling of the rundown apartment. The drops quietly pattered onto the pillow and on James's neck and face.

That was how he awoke on the last day of his life.

After washing the blood off his skin, he decided to go upstairs to find out what was happening in the apartment above him. James wasn't sure enough that it was blood to call the police right away, although the thought had crossed his mind, and took to the stairs that led to the second floor. He hesitated momentarily as his knuckles were about to connect with the door of 213. James felt eyes on him, felt them almost burning into him. When he looked down the dim hallway he saw nothing but closed doors and dirty walls. Turning back to 213 he rapped on the door.

Thud Thud Thud

The hollow echo of his fist hitting the wooden door made him feel cold. He suddenly felt the urge to back away and go back downstairs. *No, it's probably some kid that spilled something on the floor and hasn't cleaned it up*, he thought.

"Hello?", he called. No answer on his first, second or third call. *I guess three times is not a charm*, he thought slightly annoyed. He turned to leave, then he thought of the red substance that looked an awful lot like blood dripping on his face and he decided to go into apartment 213. It was unlocked. Later, he would wish it had been locked. That the entry to this hell was closed to him and he had just called the police right away.

A man was lying face-up (what was left of the face, anyway) on the floor of the living room. The eyes had been torn out and were smashed masses across the room. The face had been shredded to ribbons. James saw strings of flesh still dangling from under the dead man's fingernails. In the right-hand James also saw a bloody chunk of some kind. He realized that it was 213's throat when he saw the gaping maw where you'd normally see an Adam's apple or beard stubble.

James staggered out of 213, barely keeping the contents of his stomach in place till he reached his apartment where he expelled last night's Burger King in the kitchen sink. He called the police with mostly digested burger meat still on his lips and chin. They came, took the body, questioned James, then left. He could tell it was not the first dead body they had found in this complex, and they did not expect it to be their last.

After everything calmed down James sat staring at nothing. All he could see was the after image of the carnage upstairs. Like the how the bright flash of a camera seems burned into your retinas for a moment after your picture is taken, so was the sight of the dead man in 213 burned into James's brain.

The blood. Oh, God, all that fucking blood. And it was on me! On my face!

He retched but nothing came out. A drink was what he needed, and a drink was what he sought out for. He found half a bottle of some cheap bourbon whiskey and proceeded to pour a quarter of the contents down his throat in a single go. The burn felt good to him, and he only coughed once. He took another, smaller drink and felt himself calm down a little.

James remembered feeling like he was being watched in the hallway. He felt like he was being watched now. *You're crazy*, he thought to himself. But he found it hard to turn around to look into the

living room. When he finally did, he found it empty. He still felt like he was being watched, though. After conducting a search of the whole apartment, and finding nothing but dirty clothes on the bathroom floor and his broken bed that had forced him to start sleeping on the couch in the first place, he went to the windows. Peering out of them, he saw no one peeping in at him.

Nothing here.

Nothing?

"No one, I mean." His own voice startled him. Why had he spoken out loud? Chocking it up to still being rattled by the day's events he decided to polish off the bottle he had and then walk down to the liquor store for more. It would be a liquid diet for him today; something he had a little practice with.

As he was bringing the bottle to his lips, he heard light tapping sounds, like long fingernails lightly tapping on a wall. He swung his head around trying to locate the source of the tapping. There was still nothing in the apartment. *No one, not nothing!* he thought to himself, angrily. *Do you expect the boogyman or some ghoul to pop out from behind the fridge?*

No, he guessed not.

Walking to the front door he heard the tapping again, this time from directly behind him, and louder. Whirling around quickly, he found nothing. The silence was heavy and thick, like something almost tangible. James had backed up to the door, his eyes rolling back and forth in their sockets scanning the room. Nothing out of the ordinary to be seen.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The tapping turned to pounding. The sound, once again, came from directly behind him. He gripped the doorknob with his free hand (he was unaware that he was still holding the liquor bottle in one hand) and turned and yanked the door open in one fluid motion.

The space in front of the door was empty. With his heart feeling like it was skipping rope in his chest, he popped his head out and looked down the rest of the hallway. The hallway was completely deserted.

"Hello?" he called in a shaking voice. "Anyone out here?"

Silence.

Slowly, he retreated into his apartment. Once he had the door closed and the deadbolt thrown, he let out a wavery breath that stunk of whiskey and, ever so faintly, vomit. With a trembling hand, he brought the bottle up to his lips and drank deep.

"hello..." A soft whisper crept up his neck like dancing frozen fingers, standing the hairs there on end. James's feet felt like concrete had been poured over them where he stood. The liquor bottle slipped from his hands and thumped on the floor. A lump had risen in his throat that he tried to swallow. It was no good. All of the moisture left his mouth and he might as well of tried swallowing a golf ball while chasing it with a cup of sand.

Mustering all the strength in his body he slowly turned to see who spoke. There was nothing.

NO ONE! Not nothing, goddammit!

He didn't want to admit it to himself but a secret part of him thought he would see the dead man from 213, looming over him with his gore covered hands outstretched to him. James let out a frustrated and scared yell that made him feel no better. "You're going crazy", he whispered to himself. When he looked up and at the couch, he noticed the blood that had dried there looked black, not a dark maroon like most dried blood. That was when it happened.

A piercing agony ripped through James's head that made him feel like he would split in two. He tried to scream but all that emerged was a pitiful whimper. Blood began pouring from his nose as he

collapsed to his knees, cradling his head. The drops pattered to the floor much like the blood from Mr. 213 pattered on his neck and face that morning.

What the fuck is happening?! What-

An inhuman gale of laughter blew his thoughts into pieces and more blood cascaded from his nose. When he looked at the puddle of crimson forming on the cheap, fake hardwood floor he was overcome with immense terror and inexorable lust. With eyes like saucers, he saw his hand dip into the puddle and come away dripping. The fingers haphazardly plunged into his mouth and he could taste his own fear.

With a cry, James flung his hand out of his mouth, vaguely aware that he narrowly avoided biting his own fingers off as his teeth crashed down. His head hurt immensely and all he could think to do was stand up and rush out of the apartment like it was on fire. He staggered, slipped on his own blood and fell flat on his back, knocking the breath from his lungs. The booming voice struck his consciousness then like a bolt of lightning.

BLOOD! DEATH! BLOOD! DEATH!

That was *not* his voice. That voice was evil. Hateful.

The echoes of that odious voice still lingered in James's head when he realized his hands were reaching up to his face, against his will. They were curled in arthritic looking claws. He tried to stop himself to no avail. His fingers raked his face and completely eviscerated the right eye. Gouts of blood poured down his face and chest, mixing with the jelly that was once his source of vision.

A scream tore from his mouth and he launched himself to his feet. He had enough thought process in him to realize something was controlling him from in his head. It was trying to kill him. Whatever *it* was, it wanted his blood and his life.

The blood he thought. It was in the blood. The man from 213. His blood.

Somehow, he knew he would not get out of this alive. This realization got his feet moving for his bedroom. For the nightstand. For the .38 revolver in the drawer. He would end it his way, if he could.

BLOOD! DEATH! BLOOD! DEATH!

The booming and implacable voice stampeded his head again. *I'll give you blood and death* he thought, viciously.

He reached the nightstand and grasped the gun in a blood covered hand. He noticed something that made him feel more manic than he already was. There were ribbons of flesh from his own face dangling from his fingernails, just like the man from 213. James felt insane laughter boiling from his chest and managed to push it back down, steeling himself to use the gun. *Committing suicide is no laughing matter* was what he thought when the laughter took him. His laughter comingled with the laughter of the thing that took up residence in his head now.

Finally, his laughter ceased and he held the gun to his head. The last thing to go through his head before the slug from the pistol did was a single word. A single word that was thought by two separate consciousnesses with a duality of intent. One was merciful, his own, and the other was malicious.

That single word was *blood*.

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Officer Jensen was the first to answer a call of a possible 246. Back-up was approximately six minutes behind him. He knew the locale enough that he did not feel the need for back-up, but knew they had to come, regardless. Jensen showed up and got ready to enter the apartment complex. Once Officer Peters arrived they went in with guns drawn, silently praying they wouldn't need to use them.

Upon entry of apartment 113 they found one dead body. Suicide. Jensen called it in and decided he wanted to get out of there. As Jensen turned to leave the bedroom he slipped on some blood and fell to one knee. He stood in a hurry and wiped blood off the leg of his pants. It soaked through quickly and made contact with the skin on his leg.

Officer Jensen lasted longer than James, but not by much.