

At Night

Paul Blake

It's time. I dragged myself out from underneath the bed; my nails gripped the fluffy pink carpet. Through the gloom, I saw the dolls and teddy bears lying misshapen on the floor looking like bloated, discarded corpses from the Soul Eater, their limbs and heads at unnatural angles. I licked my lipless mouth and smiled. *This is my favourite time.* I savoured the moment; the smell of innocence surrounding the room: that delicate perfume before the children become cynical and sullen teenagers, the perfume of dreams. I rose up from the floor; my long spindly legs placed either side of the bed. I pinched the duvet cover between stretched fingers and lifted it up with delicate care.

‘Where is she?’ I roared.

This doesn't happen. This is not right. I feel cheated, my heart torn to shreds. I need to breathe the child's slumbered breath to give me life. I need to stroke the child's straw-like hair to feel alive.

‘Blade! Rot! Come out here now!’ I shouted.

A creak from the wardrobe, a foot appeared, toes like talons. The rest followed slick and sleek like a falcon through the air. A face from hell emerged, a mouth with razor sharp teeth and piercing silver eyes. From the chest of drawers with raspberry handles the middle drawer opened an inch. A fetid smell emanated and filled the room, removing the innocence. Twisted hands clutched the drawer edge, the reddish-brown skin skewbald and oozing in places, the nails black with grime. The drawer fell to the piled floor with a muffled thump,

followed by a creature from Hades, deformed and demented, a wicked hunchback with bulbous veined eyes and long, dank, dark hair.

‘Spider, what’s up?’ Rot asked, I could smell his foul breath from across the room, as he spoke I could see the blackened remnants of his teeth. I felt my gorge rise. I held my nose with my thin fingers.

‘It’s not our time yet.’ Blade hissed his voice a rasping whisper sawing through the air.

‘Which one of you has taken her?’ I asked.

‘She’s gone?’ A screeching wail from Rot. It feels genuine, *I have a sense of these things*. We both looked at Blade.

‘Hey, don’t look at me. I haven’t taken her.’ He raised his arms and opened them wide in innocence, the sharp dagger-like fingers spread out. ‘Why would I after all these years?’

‘I know what happened.’ A small voice from above called out.

We all looked up at the lampshade, my neck creaked at the unfamiliar action.

‘Who the fuck are you?’ Rot asked. I’m sure Blade was thinking the same thing. I know I was.

‘I am Murk, the Night Terror.’ The tiny figure looked at us like we were supposed to be impressed. ‘I steal the dreams of children, feast on their fear, and ravish their hopes.’ He added.

‘I’m Spider, this is Rot and Blade.’ I said.

‘Where is she and what have you done with her?’ Blade’s voice rustled the still air with menace.

‘I didn’t take her.’ Murk protested.

I reached up with one long arm and plucked him from the rose-coloured shade. I held him between my fingers and peered at him. My eyes are not what they used to be. I squinted and could make out a six, no seven, armed creature with tiny fangs.

‘Put me down!’ He squealed.

I flicked him onto the duvet cover; he landed next to the purple pony’s mane. He scrambled to his feet and started scurrying away. Blade reached down and trapped one of Murk’s arms under a fingernail.

‘Not so fast. Little man. Where is she?’

‘I... I... don’t know where she is, but I know what happened.’ Murk stammered.

‘Tell us.’ Rot said as he leant into to look at the creature.

‘Okay, okay, back off, please. I can’t breathe. I’ll tell you.’

‘Make it the truth or Blade here will disarm you, piece by piece.’ I threatened.

‘It was a few hours ago. She had just been tucked in by her parents and I was waiting for her breathing to change. I heard some loud thumps coming from the other room and in burst two men waking her. She cried out and one of the men slapped her. The sound was awful.’ Murk started crying.

‘Keep going.’ My voice was flat and calm, even though I was boiling inside. *How fucking dare they touch her. I will rip them to shreds. I will gorge on their guts. I will bathe in their blood.*

‘They tied her up and carried her out of the room. I don’t know what happened next. I stayed up there.’ Five of his arms pointed at the lampshade in unison. ‘I didn’t know what to do.’

‘How long have you been here?’ Rot asked, his putrid breath reminded why we had banished him to the last shift. A decade of decay. *It’s just too much, brush or even bleach once a while. I’ve got to get out of here.*

‘I’ve been here coming up to five years when she was moved out of the cot into the big bed.’ Murk said.

‘How come we have never seen you?’

‘I visit her after you guys. It’s not the nicest time thanks to that guy.’ His free arms pointed to Rot. ‘But, if I used one arm to cover my mouth and another to hold my nose it’s bearable.’

‘Come on fellas, enough about our newest neighbour we have to get her back.’ I said in pain, my body ached from her absence already.

I strode to the door and turned the handle. This was new territory for me. I was born under her bed, a result of her sister’s first nightmare, ten, twelve years ago. I had never left the bedroom before. *Why would I? Her sister moved into the other room when my angel was born, since then the girl has been mine.* I pulled open the door and was immediately hit with the metallic stench of blood. The hallway was dark, through the gloom I could see three doors and stairs leading down. I went to the door closest to me and pushed it open, I saw my visage reflected in the bathroom mirror and I smiled, enjoying the view of the perfect fangs smiling back at me. No child though. Blade and Rot had followed me and they opened the other doors. The odour of blood was stronger now and had mingled with the lingering malodour emanating from Rot. I couldn’t bear it and vomited onto the tiled bathroom floor. Dark bile splattered up the side of the bath. I spat into the toilet and wiped my mouth with my arm. I closed the door.

‘Rot, get back in there.’ I pointed a long arm at the child’s bedroom. ‘I can’t be around you anymore. If we need you we’ll call.’

Rot, to his credit, did as he was told. I went over to Blade and looked past his shoulder in the room. The sister. She looked peacefully asleep in bed, only the thin red line

across her throat indicated otherwise. I felt a pang of loss. I had, after all, enjoyed many nights of terrorising her until she became too old to fear “the monsters”.

‘This shit is fucked up.’ Blade’s voice was a harsh slither. His fingers clinked together as his hands opened and closed. *I know how you’re feeling, I want to tear someone, anyone. Wrench their soul from their body, taste their tears.*

‘Yep,’ I say. *What else can I say?*

I walked over to the final doorway. The smell of blood was far stronger here. I could sense Blade follow behind. I looked around the room. *Wow, they really went to town in here, didn’t they?* Blood covered every surface. I saw what was left of Mum and Dad, their bodies split and open to the world. I thought of all the times I’ve spent with them, the nursery rhymes and the lullabies to the sister and the child. I vomited for the second time of the night. Black tar spewed from the very depths of my stomach. Blade didn’t say anything. When I was done I coughed and spat until my mouth and throat were clear.

I looked back at Blade, he raised a hand and mimed slitting his throat with his razor-edged finger. I nodded and said, ‘That, and worse.’

He shook his head, a deep frown on his face. ‘Downstairs?’

‘I can’t sense anyone down there. No movement in the air. I think whoever the men were they’ve gone and so is the child.’

Blade punched the wall beside him, again and again. He made deep grooves in the plaster that quickly filled with blood from his knuckles. I placed a hand on his shoulder.

‘I know,’ I said. ‘I know.’ My voice wavered, I removed my shaking hand.

‘Spider, what are we going to do now?’ His voice was full of anguish. ‘What are we going to do?’

I don't know how to continue without the child. My hunger for her terror is what keeps me going. Night after night I feed. The thought of not having that anymore filled me with despair. I cried out, the sound echoed through the house. I came to a decision.

I looked at Blade and pointed behind him. 'What's that?'

He turned his head to see and I closed my eyes. I pictured the child snuggled up tight in her purple cover, a gentle smile on her face. My eyes opened, and I grabbed Blade's hand, oblivious to the cuts it made in my hand. I brought the hand with its cutthroat fingers up to the side of my head. I paused for a fraction of a second. A heartbeat of time. *Goodbye my love.* Then rammed the sharpened digits into my temple. They sliced through the thin bone like a samurai's katana and I dropped to the floor in a shapeless heap.