

Tales of Terror

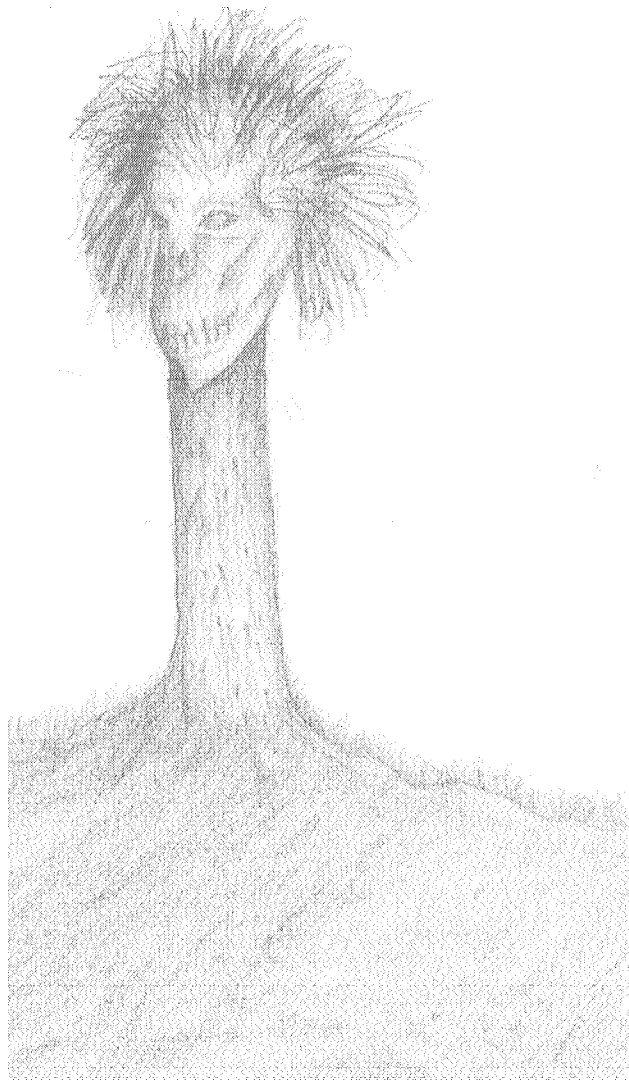
by

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Drip-Drop

My head hit the pillow at the stroke of midnight for the second night in a row. I shut my eyes, turned sunken and wiggled my body to conform to the living room couch. I was sleeping downstairs again tonight. The air upstairs was unusually cold, damn near freezing; the air here was cool and comforting.

Massive drops of rain pelted the pane-glass as I lay there, trying to sleep. But slumber wasn't coming easily; my restless mind wouldn't stop dwelling on my jerk boss, Leo Parker—the man for whom I'd worked tirelessly after eight long years—the man who'd told me time and time again that I was his *Number One Salesman*—the man who'd promised to give me a substantial raise next month—whom had fired me on the spot not three days ago. 'Oh, I'm sorry, there was a pay-cut. I'm gonna have to let you go'—all twisted lies, for I've learned from one somewhat reliable source that he'd replaced me for his lazy-ass teenage bum nephew who needed a job because he was getting into too much trouble. Lucky for him, I guess. But now I was a jobless, penniless, bitter ex-employee.

I tossed and turned aggressively, striving to remove Leo's fat-bastard face from my inner-vision. I sighed, then twisted some more. Finally I found a cozy spot right on my side, slumped between the cushion and the couch wall, and soon fought with overactive mind to forget about the worry of now being unemployed. Then . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

The sound was faint and lost, but I paid no attention to it. I entirely disregarded it and threw some covers over my exposed legs.

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Louder this time. I lifted my head from the pillow, listening, thinking it was the constant pulsing in my ear. The noise suddenly ceased. I changed position from my side to my back and shut my eyes once more.

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Sighing, I reopened my eyes and extended my ear to the sound . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Like my neighbors noise-polluting Harley, it quickly grew on my nerves, replacing my comfort with uneasiness, impatience.

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

The room suddenly grew colder. A draft was blowing in from somewhere I could not pinpoint. I pulled more covers over myself, but somehow they didn't keep me very warm. For one brief second I felt the strangest feeling of *deja-vu*, like maybe I was stuck in some sort of loop. Something about tonight seemed familiar—too familiar, and not necessarily pleasant; maybe even surreal. Or it could be that I was just overly tired.

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

I sighed, threw the quilt off my body, and stood, determined to end that annoying sound.

I stomped into the hallway and stopped. As I did, the sound stopped dead in its tracks, as if it knew I was coming.

Then . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip . . . Drop

Though I could not put an origin from whence it came, I rushed into the kitchen and flicked the light switch. There the sound grew louder, more obnoxious. Almost instinctively, I went to the fridge and yanked the door open. Again, the sound ceased. I examined the contents: the half-empty gallon of milk, the two-liter bottle of cola, and the carton of orange juice, but nothing was leaking.

Quickly thinking, I swung around and fixed on the faucet, expecting to find it broken (again). It, neither, was the culprit of which was seeping that maddening dripping sound. I stood there a moment with open ears, but heard nothing except the ravage torrent of rain bombarding the window.

I went back into the living room and slumped back into the cushions of the couch and lay on my stomach, closing my eyes once again.

A few long, soothing deep breaths later, and—

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Solemnly I rolled my eyes and tried to ignore it, to pretend it was not there, but it wouldn't take no for an answer. That's when it grew even louder—

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

It was coming from somewhere above.

Biting my lip, I jumped to my feet and dashed into the hallway. I looked upstairs, sensing it was coming from up there. Maybe the roof was leaking . . .

As I ascended each step, the sound became rhythmic and more irritating . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

I searched the hallway ceiling tiles for a damp spot, but found nothing.

Drip-Drop . . .

I examined the bedroom ceiling—nothing.

Drip-Drop . . .

Lastly I checked the spare bedroom but found no evidence of a leaky roof.

Once again it stopped. I listened for just a moment, expecting its return, but heard only peace.

I passed the bathroom door, but strangely it was closed. I rarely left that door closed unless I was inside. Though I hadn't used the bathroom for a couple of days due to a suppressed hunger

and I just spawned from stress, I could not recall closing it. Oddly enough, the idea of taking my usual bath made me uneasy. I was not only overwhelmed from being fired: not three days ago I'd caught my fiancé, Nikki Thompson, the woman for whom I had fallen in love two years ago and the woman who'd promised she'd never leave me—straddling and screwing my best friend in my own bed. I couldn't get that horrible up and down image and that terrible moan of pleasure from my two favorite people, out of my head. They certainly screwed me behind my back, and I caught them. Both, the bitch and my ex-best asshole friend, I cut out of my life for good. To hell with them . . .

For what I hoped would be the last time until morning, I crawled back onto the couch, lay my head on the pillow, drew a deep, cleansing breath, and tried helplessly to forget the problems that were arising in my pitiful little life.

I lay there for a few moments, just became cozy, and then . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

Drip-Drop . . .

I fought to ignore it, to cover it with sleep,

but the more I tried to block it out, the louder it became . . .

Drip-Drop!

Drip-Drop!

I scratched my head in aggravation and kept my eyes shut—tried to also shut my ears.

Drip . . . Drop!

A thumping *drip!* Like a sledgehammer *slamming* into soil.

It was now so loud that I heard it over my own breathing, so loud that I believed it was *becoming* a part of me. I felt like something was terribly wrong for a moment, but replaced that idea with the more comforting thought that I have been under a lot of pressure lately.

Drip-Drop!

It pounded all through my *veins!*

Drip-Drop!

I covered my ears with the pillow as tightly as I could. Still, the sound continued, digging into my brain like giant fingernails scraping across a chalk board.

Drip-Drop!

I couldn't take it anymore! I knew what I had to do—there was still one room left to investigate that horrible sound: the bathroom.

I jumped to my feet, padded into the hallway, and creaked up those steps.

Drip-Drop!

Drip-Drop!

What in the hell was it?

I reached the top of the stairs, took a deep breath, and clutched the bathroom door knob. I ripped open the door and stepped inside. The dripping sound was excruciating!—so loud now that I literally felt it *throbbing* throughout my body.

DRIP-DROP!

DRIP-DROP!

That's when I saw the horrifying sight—a sight I could not believe—a sight that sent me into madness! Dangling over the lip of the tub was an arm with a *self-inflicted* slit wrist—blood was *drip-dropping* onto the floor. A razor blade was stuck in a puddle almost covering the whole bathroom linoleum. But it wasn't till I stepped closer to look at the face of whom the arm belonged to when I became engulfed by true horror and disbelief—it was *MY pale, glassy-eyed, unbreathing face!*



At the End of the Universe

Since I was an infant in diapers I have gazed happily upon the sky and admired the oceans of darkness we call outer-space. I cannot remember one single night when I didn't look into my telescope, fascinated by the heavens, and longing for an answer to one of the greatest questions: *What is out there?* And now that I'm fifty years young, I am in no way deterred from my love of the universe. I have always believed it was my destiny to venture beyond the cosmos to bring back every answer man has ever asked about it.

I held degrees in both Quantum Mechanics and Physics from Harvard University. Supported and funded by NASA, I have designed a spacecraft that can outperform any that has come before. Though my ideas were not distinctly new in theory, they were phenomenal in practice. My team and I have built something that can move as fast as light, if not much faster than it.

According to scientists, the speed of light travels between one-hundred and two-hundred thousand miles per second, but I believed that this is *not* a static thing. I believed that there is no cer-

tain speed at what light travels, for it's possible that velocity of light speed *changes* due to time, space, gravity, and environment. Since these four elements can affect speed, there can be no exact measurement on "speed of light". Things simply travel as fast as *they are designed* to. Well, I have proven it. I have created a ship that can perform this dueling task, and it uses no fuel. It is basically an anti-matter device that is propelled by many complex, spinning magnets that overlap or underlay each other at different intervals. Strangely enough, the entire craft looks something like a true saucer-shaped U.F.O.

Next, I had to find a way that would allow man to be able to withstand the excessive speed without self-destructing. Since man can barely travel at merely the speed of sound without some serious side-effects, one would obviously have to *change* him so that he can bare the stress of leaping through space. For this, I have designed a custom suit that is equipped with unique reflectors and various electrodes, which help (hopefully) to keep the *little pieces* of the human body in tact.

Years—decades of sweat, headaches, blood, and trial and error finally came to an end. My ba-

by was finally born. And as I glared up at it—that big shiny piece of aerospace history—I realized that the child inside me had finally grown up and my lifelong dream was almost a reality. In moments I was about to explore the macrocosms until I discovered other living things, new plant life, even organisms that may or may not have evolved from air, earth, or water.

I walked through the hangar and toward my ship. My colleagues were standing in the downpour of the early-evening sunshine near the open hangar door, clapping and shouting, waiting for me to board my creation and journey into forgotten—and up until now—unreachable areas of the universe man has never seen before. I had all the recognition since no one else was willing to risk a trip in my ship. And by choice, or by error, I was unsure if I would ever return.

As they bid me farewell, I approached my spaceship like some organic electromagnet drawn to a refrigerator. And, gazing up at it, I thought it somehow communicated with me, or returned my gaze the way a child looks at his/her mother. I was so caught up in the moment, I almost forgot about my colleagues, who were causing all sorts of commotion in the background.

I reached the hallow steel steps, stopped, turned, and waved at them one last time. I could see their excitement; but theirs could in no way, measure up to mine. The highest previous points of my life could not compare to the euphoria I was feeling then as I clanked up those steps and entered the ship, sealing the door behind me. I stepped into the cockpit, sat down in the chair, and strapped myself into place.

I looked through the window at the people who were cheering me on, and realized I might never see them again, but even that momentary thought of failure couldn't dampen my spirits. Beyond them I saw the horizon where the sun was slowly putting itself to bed, and beyond that was where I intended to go.

I took a deep breath and clicked the buttons necessary to bring my beautiful creation to life. The engine revved up, and suddenly the craft jolted violently. I was startled at first, but quickly realized it was O.K. The sound of rotating metal entered my ears as I clicked the remainder of the buttons to the ON position. The sound of the engines grew louder, but there were no more sudden jerks. My heart was pounding so hard I could literally feel it throughout my body. My veins

tingled; my hands trembled like an old man with Parkinson's Disease.

I took a deep breath, closed my eyes and said to myself: "This is it. This is it."

I reopened them, swallowed hard, and yanked back on the stick shift. Suddenly, me and my ship levitated off the ground, then flew toward the open hangar door smoothly and graciously. I watched as my friends jumped and hollered while I passed above them and soared into the sky.

I reached the clouds quicker than any other spacecraft ever has before (manmade anyway), realizing that I was no longer fifty years old, but a child again. And not once did I look back at earth, which I quickly realized was, in some weird way, my confinement from freedom. I was leaving all my inner-demons behind me once and for all.

I watched as crimson-colored, omnipresent, diffuse-like flames violently licked and ravaged the windshield of my quivering ship, not intent on letting me go past the earth's gravitational boundary line. My torso felt like it was about to shatter, for the harsh trembling shook my bones like a rag-doll. The intense pressure waves flapped my cheeks with the consistency of jell-o and

my feet bounced off the steel floor like a child jumping on some electrified pogo stick.

My eyes were almost glued open when my ship finally liberated from the earth's attachment. I touched the dial and turned it clock-wise, slowing down and calming my agitated ship. I now hovered—glided toward the twinkling stars which seemed so bright and magnificent I could almost reach out and touch them.

I witnessed the various interminable colors of our wondrous galaxy, now far more vivid and beautiful than ever before from my poor, meaningless telescope. The moon and its smaller friends lit up the void well, giving much depth to the darkness, shining through years and time with their grace in a way similar to the lights in a giant city, giving me the illusion of interstellar daylight.

The ship's pressure eased once I adjusted the speed. But I knew I wasn't going to stick around for long, cruising, sight-seeing; my goal wasn't to explore planets or little green men, but to explore the outskirts of our solar system and beyond. To witness beyond the confines of earth's strongest telescope, to find out every secret that our anthropological brains have been yearning to

know for eons now—how the universe was created.

I stared at the dial on the instrument panel, knowing I had to move to its limit, but I was afraid. Afraid maybe I would totally disintegrate, or possibly run into a black hole or a huge asteroid, despite my ship's electromagnetic force-field.

Still, I turned up the dial for maximum speed. Super-light speed.

Then I smiled innocently, remembering when I was little, looking up to the heavens for comfort in my imagination, and telling myself that this was what I was here for. Why turn back when I made it this far? Why, after all the sweat and blood and tears, should I turn around and give up now?

Tears filled my eyes as I squeezed them shut, and put all my fears behind me and repeated to myself once more, "This is it. This is it!"

I took a deep breath, looked ahead toward the sparkling lights that filled oblivion, and with a trembling hand, turned the knob that would decide my fate. This *was* it. There's no turning back now. Everything I had lived for my entire life was out before me, within my grasp, and waiting to be discovered by me, the first, and possibly