

**ARE THESE EYEBALLS?**

**THE CUBICLE**

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## ARE THESE EYEBALLS?

The children stood on the front porch and – as they did every year – waited eagerly with the parents who had come along to keep an eye on them. At least that was the parent’s excuse. If the truth be known they enjoyed this part of Halloween as much, if not more, than the kids.

Fair enough, they had to do the door to door trick or treating, waiting at the end of the gardens as the youngsters went up to the front doors and asked happily for candy. For the adults this was boring, but they did it with a smile. After all Halloween was for the children, not for them.

But this part, the last call of the evening, could be enjoyed by all.

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Little Lindsey McGready stepped towards the door and knocked for a second time. She’d waited years for it to be her turn at the front and she was annoyed that her summons hadn’t been answered straight away.

“Now, now, Lindsey, don’t be impatient,” her mother warned from the porch steps.

“But, Mom,” the girl made to answer back.

“No buts,” her mother cut in. “Mr and Mrs Coil will answer when they’re good and ready.”

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Every year was the same and every year the child in front would grow tired, wanting only for the door to open and for the fun to begin. Mrs McGready couldn’t blame her daughter for being like all the other children. In fact she was excited herself.

Plus it was cold outside and it would be nice to get inside, to snuggle up in the warmth of the Coil’s living room. The living room that held so many treats and scares for the guests.

Mrs McGready smiled to herself as memories of her own childhood visits to the house swam through her mind. Even back then Mr and Mrs Coil had put on the show for the neighbourhood kids.

*How old must they be now?* she thought to herself. *They were old when I was a kid.* They had to be at least eighty if they were a day and still they found the energy to decorate the house and front yard just for the fun of it.

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Young Lindsey turned and saw her mother gazing around the front yard filled with fake tombstones and skeletons. She took her chance. She stepped forward and, stretching on tip toes, grabbed the heavy looking brass knocker. She pulled it outwards as far as her height would allow and then let it fall back against the solid wood of the front door.

Mrs McGready snapped her attention back to her daughter. “What did I tell you?” She tried to keep the telling off low key but the other children giggled and some of the parents hid embarrassed smiles behind gloved hands.

“Sorry,” Lindsey replied with red cheeks.

“There’s no need to apologise,” Old Man Coil said and they all jumped.

He stood in the open doorway with a big grin on his nearly toothless face. No one had seen him open the door and this just added to the mystique that had built up in the children’s minds since the year before.

“Now. Please enter.” He invited them in as he stepped to one side. “And don’t forget to wipe your feet on the mat.”

The children entered as quickly as they could, pausing to shuffle the soles of their boots on the tattered old rug that bade them **WELCOME**.

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Stepping inside the Coil household was like passing through a gateway in time. It really was that old. Mrs McGready noticed that it hadn’t changed one jot since she had visited as a child herself. It was as if even the cobwebs were in the same place they’d always been. She walked behind the kids with the handful of

adults and she could tell from their faces that they were thinking the same as her. After all, they had been children together and they had been some of the first to take part in the Coil's yearly Halloween treat.

"Through the door at the end," Mr Coil shouted from the front door as he closed it silently. "Everything is ready, just take a seat."

The Children moved quickly, fighting to be the first into the magical room of fun filled scares. And they were somewhat disappointed to find the room was lacking in decoration. They muttered between themselves as they took their places in the chairs that had been laid out in a rough circle in the centre of the spacious dining room.

The adults filed quietly into the room and they too couldn't hide the sadness at the lack of effort put into this year's event. Mrs McGready quickly scolded herself for such selfish thoughts. The Coil's were old and didn't have the energy they once had. She shouldn't judge them so harshly. It was just that her expectations had been so high.

"I hope you are all sat comfortably." Old Man Coil entered the room and looked around. "I know it doesn't look much." He tried to apologise. "We have trouble getting into town nowadays and so this year I'm trying something new."

The children giggled, realising that things could still get exciting. Old Man Coil wouldn't let them down.

"OK, before I start I need the parents to take a seat as well." He smiled at the grown ups. "This is for everyone."

He waited in silence as the few adults found chairs and were seated comfortably.

"Let us begin," he shouted and the children jumped as the lights flickered and died. "I have a story to tell you." His old voice took on a strange strength in the darkness and everyone listened.

"Long before I married Mrs Coil and we moved into this house the land was owned by another. He wasn't a nice man like me, oh no, he was the most evil of

evil people who has ever lived. Some say he had signed his soul over to the devil, others say he just enjoyed doing the things he did.

The things he did were unspeakable, but I am here, tonight, to tell you what happened on that last, fateful night.

The night of the party.

The night of the fire.”

The children had stopped giggling and listened nervously as he spoke.

“His name was Joseph Freeman and he was the richest man in the town. No one knew how he’d made his money and no one ever asked questions. He brought prosperity to the town and that was all that mattered. And so, when he invited everyone to a party they accepted. It would be the most lavish Halloween party in the history of the town and everyone would be there.”

Old Man Coil paused and listened to the scared breathing coming from the children and adults alike. He smiled to himself, happy that it was working as he’d planned.

“On the night of the party everyone arrived in costume expecting a banquet of great proportions, so imagine their feelings when he led them into an empty ballroom. Empty that is apart from the huge circle of chairs that formed a ring in its centre. Much like where you are sat now.”

One of the younger children yelped in fright and others giggled.

“Please remain silent until the story is over,” Old Man Coil snapped.

Mrs McGready sat still and listened. She heard a door knob turn and the door to the hallway creak open. She was hoping for some light to filter in but the lights had been turned off all around the house. She tried to squint against the enveloping blackness and get a hint as to the old man’s plan, but try as she might she could make out no more than blurred silhouettes that shifted in and out of focus. She decided to stop trying so hard and just enjoy the act. She leant back in the chair and relaxed just as the squeak of poorly oiled wheels filled the room.

Old Man Coil continued.

“Once all of Freeman’s guests were seated his servants went around the room and blindfolded them one at a time. Once this was done he ordered them to be tied to the chairs. Some complained, but they allowed themselves to be bound securely. They had no wish to upset their benefactor.

The servants worked quickly and, once finished, Freeman shouted at them to leave, that this part of the game had to be played out in private.

As they left he wheeled in a trolley covered with a sheet of blood red satin. He removed the sheet and glanced at the tools he’d had made especially for the night’s event. He dragged the trolley into the centre of the room and took a moment to look at each of his guests.

*‘Tonight, dear friends, you will give me the key to ultimate power,’* Freeman shouted at his bound guests. *‘You have all benefited from my work here and now it is time to pay the price.’*

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The children began to fidget nervously in their seats as the evening began to grow scary. Old Man Coil had stopped talking and a strange sound filled the room. He didn’t start talking again until the sound finished with a wet, snapping noise.

Only then did Old Man Coil restart the tale.

“From the tray Freeman took a pair of forceps and approached the first of his guests.

*‘I need from each of you a special gift to offer the master.’* As he spoke he grasped the hair of a female guest and pulled her head back. *‘The master has spoken and I must obey.’* He forced the woman’s mouth open and grabbed her tongue firmly with the forceps.

He pulled at the tongue as she tried to scream, but her mouth filled with blood as he yanked the fleshy muscle free.”

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Mrs McGready felt her pulse increase. This was rather harsh for the children, but they seemed to be giggling still. She watched as the shadow that could have

been Old Man Coil moved around the room. She flinched as he rested a hand on her shoulder.

“And this is that tongue,” he said, placing the wet thing in her hands.

She yelped in surprise and then smiled to herself. She remembered this game from years ago. The old bastard had just changed the story that went with it. She held the object and the grin grew wider as she tried to figure out what he’d really given her.

Old Man Coil moved on, the sound of cutting and sawing filling the room. He had out surpassed himself this year. The story continued.

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“Freeman went through the quests one at a time and took what he needed. A kidney from one.”

A child screamed as Old Man Coil dropped a heavy lump on her lap.

“Intestine from another.”

Young Timmy Johnson gagged as the wet loops were draped around his neck.

“Body parts were taken from each and added to a pile in the middle of the circle of chairs.”

Young Lindsey cringed as two soft, damp orbs were dropped in her hands. She rolled them around in her palm as she too realised what game was being played. She knew that when the lights came on they would be all holding sweet treats especially made to scare them. She stopped listening to the tale and focused on the balls in her hand. She should wait for the others. She should be patient, but she wanted to know what secret treat she’d been handed.

Very slowly she raised one of the sweets to her lips. Without thinking she tossed it in her mouth and bit down. As it popped between her teeth the vomit rose in her throat to meet the salty fluid that had already filled her mouth. She tried to cry out but all she could do was retch as bilious fluid poured from her gut.

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Mrs McGready recognised the sound as that of her daughter just as the fetid smell of something worse than vomit assailed her nasal passages. She fought her way out of her seat and stumbled through the darkness, tripping over a panicked child.

She fell forward. Her arms flailed and her head sank into something warm, moist and foul smelling. She forced herself upright just as the lights came back to life, her arms sinking into the jelly like mass below her.

And she screamed.

A scream that was joined by the others as they saw what had been taking place in the darkness. The children were covered in thick, red gore and each held fresh body parts, it was a nightmare scene painted in crimson.

Mrs McGready was knelt in the centre of the room and standing over her was a blood drenched Old Man Coil, his face stretched by a manic grin that more than hinted at insanity.

The children saw her and the screaming intensified, some of the youngster's spewing up candy bars eaten earlier in the night. A few even fainted before the howl of terror in their lungs could be freed.

*'Why are they screaming at me?'* Mrs McGready asked herself before looking down to find her arms buried up to the elbows in the butchered remains of Old Man Coil's darling wife.

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## THE CUBICLE

"Fucking Shithole." He drives along the near empty streets and is disgusted at how time has eroded them, turning them into a dull distortion of memories long gone.

Entire streets of terraced houses boarded up, the wooden sheets covered in sprayed obscenities and tags. Here and there the doors have been pried opened and



in the shadowed hallways he can see squatters and addicts shielding themselves from the relentless sun that has shone down for two weeks now.

For English weather this is a lifetime and he is thankful of the air conditioning that cools the interior of the car.

He slows to a stop at the house he remembers so well and is disappointed that - like everything else in the old neighbourhood - it hasn't faced up well to the ravages of the passing years. The downstairs windows have been replaced with steel plated shutters and the brickwork at the edges is scorched from fire. The front bedroom looks black from the street and swallows the withered ivy that has over run the house before intruding inside, only to die. He shakes his head in sadness, closing his eyes as pictures of better days play out behind his eye lids.

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*His father sits on the door step and smiles down at the boys, happy to watch them play together. From indoors the radio plays a jolly tune and his mother sings along. She is out of tune, but nobody cares. Everything is as it should be.*

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“Shit.” He shakes his head, dislodging the memories that threaten to bring tears. “I’m not here for this.” He has returned for a reason, but this isn’t it.

He puts the car into gear and pulls away from what had once been home. He knows his destination well, but subconsciously he’s unwilling to face it yet. He allows his uncertainties to take him on a detour. It won’t hurt to revisit friendlier places first.

Where there used to be shops there is now only foundations. The old brickwork rises from the earth and hints at an era that is no more. He pictures what used to be there, ghostly outlines forming in his mind.

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*He can see Mr Parsons - the butcher - at his block in the window. He swings the cleaver with precision into the loin of pork.*

*Kids gather outside the newsagent, chewing gum and swapping stickers for their latest album.*

*He can see himself with his mother, holding her hand as they enter the post office.*

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And once again he has to drag himself back to the here and now. He pushes down on the accelerator as he forces the images fade.

“Shit.” He quickly slams on the brakes as his vision returns to the present and he looks into the old eyes that glare back at him from the wrinkled face.

The old man is halfway across the road, his body supported by the walking frame and he stares at the driver with annoyance. He inches forward and pauses in front of the car. He raises a shaky hand.

“Show some fucking respect.” He slams the hand down on the bonnet.

The voice is familiar.

The driver looks passed the wrinkles and the saggy skin that hangs below the old man’s chin and the shock almost takes his breath away. Can it truly be that long since he left?

“Mr Parsons?” He already has the car door open and is climbing out.

“I might be,” he replies, eyeing the younger man with suspicion. “What’s it to you?” Once again he has the walking frame in both hands and shuffles the rest of the way to the pavement.

“I doubt you remember, Sir.” He holds out a hand, but the pensioner makes no move to reciprocate. “Wayne Mason, you used to know my mother, Olivia.” The aged eyes come alive with ancient recognition.

“Well I’ll be a monkey’s uncle.” A smile cracks the haggard face. “You’ve been gone too long my boy.” They shake hands like old friends. “You really should visit your mother more often.”

“I Will.” Although she died some years back, he sees no point in upsetting Mr Parsons with the news. “And I’m sorry for startling you. I just came to see the old place and got lost in the memories.”

The old man waves a hand as if to say ‘forget about it’.

“Memories is all some of us have.” The twinkle in his eyes fades and the face darkens. “Look at me, what am I but a memory?” He gazes over at the remnants of what had once been his livelihood. “You take care, young Wayne.” He turns away and continues on down the street. “Some memories aren’t as nice as me.” His words are only half heard, a whisper on the breeze.

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He climbs into the idling car, still unready for the task ahead, pinning his hopes on what he remembers as the best part of his childhood being enough to carry him through the worst.

He turns off the ignition and locks the car, setting the alarm and decides to walk. He turns to follow old Mr Parsons, but he’s gone, swallowed up by the streets like a ghost.

“Grow up,” he scolds himself for thinking of such things. Ghosts are for children and he’s not been one of those for years now.

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He arrives at the park, or what used to be the park. Like everything else it has died over time, nothing more than an overgrown graveyard of rusted and paint flecked metal. He crosses the grass and sits on what remains of the roundabout. It groans in protest at the unwanted invasion of privacy.

He’s not sure what he expected, after all, why should this haven for children have faired any better than the town that surrounds it like a dank shroud. He leans back with outstretched arms and inadvertently runs his finger over the lettering carved into the wood. He remembers when the markings were made and doesn’t have to look at them to know what they say.

**P.W**

**W.M**

Pamela Wade; nine months his senior, but his none the less. His first love and his first broken heart.

They say that the first is always the hardest, but he will never know. He's yet to meet the second. Not that he has spent his life alone; there have been numerous women, but none that could ever be called his love.

Pamela.

She'd had hair of the faintest blonde and eyes of the clearest blue. Her skin had been so pale as if to be white and unblemished, but this is not how he remembers her. In his memory her hair has been darkened with blood and her eyes are staring at him lifelessly. In the flickering light her skin had looked blue.

Tears roll down his cheeks as he continues to trace out the **P** and the **W**. This is the memory he has come to confront, but it's not to be done here.

He wipes away the tears on his bare arm and transfers them to his jeans. Pushing himself up and looking across the field at the building that fills him with dread.

The grass underfoot is brown, burnt dead by the sun and starved of water. It crunches underfoot as he makes his way cautiously towards the small brick structure.

Deep down he knows that his fears are unfounded, the shrink has been paid well to convince him of this, but still he feels the fourteen year old boy inside shiver in terror. Despite the heat he is cold on the inside, a chill that has no cure but to face what he has run from for so long.

He stops in the shadow of his destination, frozen by the harmless five letter word that looks down at him from above the door.

**Gents**

As he stands trapped in the gaze of that single, harmless word things begin to change. In his minds eye the old bulk head light above the sign flickers to life with

a faint buzzing sound and the sky moves from mid afternoon to late evening. The windows repair themselves and it is no longer summer. It is twenty five years ago.

It's time to face his demons.

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He hears laughter and turns to see himself - albeit younger - walking hand in hand with his first love. She's the prettiest thing he's ever seen and he's filled with sadness that she'll never reach womanhood.

They don't see him as they approach and even if they could they would think him a ghost, an apparition suddenly appearing from the ether. He makes to move to one side, but too late. They pass through him as if he didn't exist.

"HEY MASON." He turns, but the shout isn't directed at the man he is now, but at the boy he used to be.

"Oh God." He wants to leave this place, but he knows he must see it through. No matter how painful; the past must be reconciled.

"Hey, Mason, you shithead. I'm talking to you." James Kiddy and his friends appear from the dark and head directly for the lovebirds. "What're you up to?" The mischief in their voices hints at malice.

James Kiddy - the town bully and a coward - full of bravado when surrounded by his lackeys. But a quivering baby when suffering the blows that come from his father every other night.

The young Wayne stops walking and Pamela pulls herself close to him. She is older and feels the need to protect him.

"What do you want James?" She keeps her back straight and eyes forward.

"I'm not talking to you bitch." James dismisses her with a sneer, turning his attention quickly back to Wayne. "Ain't you a little young to be courting?" The tone is one of derision and the boy shrivels under the bully's hard stare. "You should fuck off home and leave her with us."

"Leave him alone James," Pamela snaps, stepping between the bully and her love.

“Didn’t I tell you to shut the fuck up?” She flinches as James feigns to slap her.

Instead he swings a fist into Wayne’s stomach, forcing the boy to his knees.

“You bastard.” Pamela makes to lunge, but James freezes her with a sideways look.

“Don’t make me hit a lady,” he threatens.

She overcomes her fear and lashes out, finger nails cutting four bloody gashes along the side of his cheek.

“Cunt.” The backhanded slap rocks her head and she falls at her boyfriend’s side. “You’ve upset me now.”

“You know we’ll tell.” Between deep breaths Wayne uses the only defence he has.

I’m gonna tell, I’m gonna tell.” James dances around them, kicking his victim in the chest. “Only if they find you.”

He instructs his friends to pick them up.

“Don’t be stupid, James.” Pamela spits blood as she’s dragged passed him. “They’ll have you back in borstal.”

James laughs at the threat. “You won’t tell anyone.” He leans in close, licking the specks of blood from her chin. “Cos if you do I’ll cut you up bad.” He raises the knife in front of her and, as expected, she remains silent.

“Throw ‘em in the bog,” James orders and the boys cheer, joyful at the idea of flushing heads down the crap laden toilets. “We’ll let them think over their options.” He calls them out before the fun can begin and slams the metal gate shut.

He takes the chain and padlock, securing the entrance as he pushes his head between the bars and laughs at them.

“Have a nice night sweeties.”

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The older Wayne watches them leave, shouting and cheering as they fade back into the night. With no more substance than a morning mist he passes through the locked gate and looks down on himself and Pamela.

The night is far from over for them and he's starting to wish he'd never come back. What good is to be done by witnessing what he has suppressed for so many years? He closes his eyes.

Closure.

At least that's what the well paid shrink has told him. Closure is what he needs before he can move on. If he wishes to embrace his future he must first accept his past.

Holding onto hope he opens his eyes again and allows the images to play out their story.

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"Are you alright?" Pamela runs a hand down his back, but he shrugs her away, embarrassed that he is crying when he knows he should be strong. "Don't push me away." She sits beside him. "I love you," she says the words he has longed to hear for so long and they restart the flood of tears.

"I'm sorry Pam." He lets himself fall into her arms. "I'm so sorry."

"It's not you who should be sorry." She too is crying. "It's that wanker." The last word is shouted out.

"Don't. They might come back." Wayne has no wish for the thugs to return.

"Why not, they can't get to us." She stands and approaches the gate. "They left us locked up safe," she shouts, rattling the chain with a laugh.

Wayne dries his eyes and joins her, looking out at the sky that is now darkening into night, the stars hidden by even darker clouds. The air has turned cold.

"At least we have light." On cue the fluorescent tube flickers once, twice, three times.

“Don’t go tempting fate.” She lowers herself down and sits against the wall. “It looks like we’ll be here all night.”

In the distance he is sure he can still hear the mocking laughter of James Kiddy. He retreats into the tiled room, his nose curling at the aroma of stale piss and something worse. He’s not sure what it is. The smell is faint, but it’s enough to taint his taste buds with its foul odour.

He takes another step and the smell intensifies; a rank stench that causes his throat to close up. He wants to appear braver than he feels and manages to hide the almost vomit behind a cough. He returns to the doorway and the sanctuary of fresher air.

“Do you think they’ll find us?” He tries to make conversation, immediately wishing he’d picked another subject.

“Of course. That old fart Tally will be around first thing in the morning for cleaning duties.” She doesn’t sound as confident as she’d hoped. “And like you said, at least we have light.” This time the tube flickers twice and dies, only a faint glow at each end remains as a taunting reminder.

“And you had a go at me,” he says, nudging her and faking a laugh as a shiver threatens to rack his spine.

“I doubt we’re going to get much sleep tonight.” She slips an arm around his shoulder.

“*There’s better things to be had tonight than sleep.*” The voice is low and sings in nature. It strikes a new fear into the hearts of the lovebirds.

“*I hope you’re ready to play.*”

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For what seems an eternity they do not move, held in the grip of terror brought on by the knowledge that they aren’t alone. It feels like hours before Wayne can bring himself to move, the sound of movement in the shadows spurring him on.



“Quick!” He grabs her hand and pulls her towards the safety of the nearest cubicle.

“*Don't be shy, I won't hurt you,*” the disembodied voice giggles. “*Not much.*” The giggle becomes a manic laugh as Wayne drags her through the narrow door and closes it behind them.

He fumbles with the lock, an ancient brass affair with a stiff thumb screw. With a dull click the latch falls home and he breathes a sigh.

“What....” Pamela tries to ask but he raises a hand to her mouth and shakes his head whilst he mouths the word ‘*Quiet*’.

She nods her acknowledgement and they stand silent as the voice moves nearer. A footfall on the ceramic floor is followed by the sliding drag of the other foot and then a pause. Wayne holds his breath, releasing it as quietly as he can only upon the second foot step.

“*Come out, come out. Wherever you are.*” A door further up is swung open with a bang and Pamela has to bite back a scream.

“Sssshhhh,” Wayne whispers the warning as another door is kicked open.

“*There's no point hiding.*” Nearer than before and accompanied by the cloying stench from earlier. “*You'll only make me mad.*” The next door is torn from its hinges and thrown across the room.

“We're going to die.” Pamela has lost any courage she may have had and begins to cry.

“*Yes you are, my dear.*” The hands appear under the door, grabbing her by the ankles and pulling her backwards.

She falls forward, arms flailing in an attempt to halt the descent. She snatches at the toilet paper dispenser, but it shears from the wall and clatters to the floor.

The sound of her head impacting with porcelain edge of the bowl is hollow and sickening. Her scream is cut short as her eyes flicker for a second and then roll up to show the whites.

Her legs have vanished under the door and still Wayne hasn't moved. He watches her head slide from the toilet and hits the floor. He steps further back as blood splashes towards his shoes.

"Help me." Her eyes come back into focus and she pleads with him, her words bringing him out of the trance like state.

He kneels down and takes her arm in his hand, his feet slipping in the water puddled around the base of the toilet. He tries to pull her back, but falls on his rump.

"Please," she whimpers and is gone, under the door and into the arms of the unseen monster.

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As an adult he can only watch, as scared as the boy he once was. He has no memory of what happened to Pamela because he never saw it, but now he is forced to see her anguish.

"No," the word hangs on his lips and the beast pauses.

"*Stay out of this.*" The beast from his past looks straight at him. "*She's mine, not yours.*" Behind matted hair the left eye twitches in madness.

"Can he see me?" He thinks to himself, but that isn't possible. "It's my mind playing tricks." He backs away.

He has no wish to see any more, but he must. That is why he's here.

"*You see my dear, no one here to save you,*" the beast croons.

Wayne sees a glint of blade in the beast's hand and turns away in horror, but still he hears her strangled scream.

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On either side of the cubicle door sits a different Wayne. One is fourteen and terrified, the other is an adult and in a state of shock. He knows what his younger self is going through and he holds a hand to the door and cries with him.

*“Shut up you simpering scamp.”* Both Wayne’s jump in response to the snapped order. *“She’s in a better place now.”* They hear the sound of tearing fabric and then the monster begins to grunt.

The boy has no idea of what is happening in the dark, but the man is older and wiser. He knows the humiliation the dead girl is being made to suffer.

The grunting quickly becomes frantic, the air filled with a howl of perverse pleasure. And then a wet slap as the body is discarded, thrown to the floor. The neck is twisted and she faces the man, looking at him with eyes devoid of life.

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The boy has stayed quiet for what feels like a lifetime and has yet to hear any more noise. He has almost begun to believe that the monster has gone when the door rattles in its frame and he screams.

*“Let me in little piggy.”* Grimy hands venture under the door, searching for innocent prey. *“I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll gut you alive.”* The young Wayne backs up alongside the toilet, urine running down his leg and his stomach threatens to lurch.

He knows that he’ll never see his parents again, never play with his brother and never again will he go to school. He’s going to miss out on so much and Pamela is gone. These thoughts snap something in his mind and he’s filled with anger towards the unseen hunter.

“FUCK YOU!” He jumps forward and crushes three enquiring fingers and feels a small triumph at the resulting yelp of pain.

*“Fuck me?”* The hands retreat and the monster shouts. *“I’ll fuck you, just like I did your pretty girl.”* The triumph is short lived. *“I’ll keep you alive though so you get to know pain.”*

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“Leave me alone.” The older Wayne steps up to the screaming beast and yells at him.

*“I told you to stay out of this.”* It turns on him and he feels the fetid breath and warm spittle on his face.

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The boy is confused. The monster has stopped taunting him and he'd swear it's shouting at someone else. It sounds like a one sided conversation and it scares him more than anything.

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*“I'll kill you just like I did the girl.”* It glares at the uninvited guest. *“Just go away.”*

“No.” The older Wayne is defiant; he knows that none of this is real. It's just his memory facing the past.

*“You'll soon change your mind.”* It charges at him with arms outstretched, passing through the man that's not really there and colliding with the wall.

The impact breaks its nose and stars dance before its eyes. It staggers on the spot and then collapses.

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Sat on the toilet, his feet curled up under him the boy has slept. He can't remember letting his eyes shut, but he's surprised at the dull light that has awakened him.

The monster had fallen silent after its argument with no one and the young Wayne now sits and listens intently for any sign that it's still there.

He looks up at the source of light and sees the morning sky through the open skylight. For the first time in long hours he is boosted with the hope of escape.

Leaving the safety of the toilet he crouches close to the floor, lowering his head until he can see under the door. He sees the monsters feet and legs – unmoving - to the left of the cubicle.

Very slowly he stands and rests a hand on the latch. Then he turns it.

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The adult Wayne has been stood near the locked gate and is watching the sun crest the horizon when the crack of the latch brings him out of his thoughts.

He spins around, ready to face the end of the longest night of his life.

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The boy cautiously opens the door and peers out at the prostrate monster. He looks over at the skylight and is relieved to see that the sinks are indeed directly below it.

In his mind he counts to three. "One, two, three." He breaks from the cover of the cubicle and runs.

*"Not so fast, piggy."* The hand grabs his leg and he tumbles forward. *"You don't smell so fresh, pig boy."* The monster crawls up his body and leers down at him.

He looks sideways to avoid the mad eyes and sees Pamela how he will always remember her.

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"This isn't how it ends." The older Wayne's voice screams out as he watches the beast raise the knife, ready to strike with deadly precision.

"Help me Mister." The boy sees him and begs to be saved.

"NO!" He'd not died that night, the stranger had saved him. "NO!" He screams again and throws himself at the beast.

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Suddenly the boy is free and the monster is rolling around on the floor with the man. He does not hesitate to consider the arrival of his rescuer, climbing onto the sink and jumping as hard as his legs can push him. He grabs the lip of the window and pulls himself up and out into the cleansing air of the morning.

"I'll get help," he shouts down to his saviour before leaping to the ground and running as fast as he can towards the houses on the edge of the park.

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The beast fights back with an unexpected ferocity and Wayne struggles to focus as his mind spins out of control. He can't believe what's happening. But he can't deny the heat of the blade as it cuts a swathe along his arm, slicing through and bearing the bone.

Light is finally flooding the room and for the first time he gets to see the true beast.

The beast is no more than a man. Long haired, ferrety faced and dirty as hell.

“You bastard,” he yells, batting the knife away and sending it skittling across the floor. “You ruined my fucking life.” He punches a fist into the contorted face, overcome with rage.

Again and again his fist comes down until it is coated in warm, wet red.

He looks down at the beast that is a man, hoping that it's over but knowing that it isn't. He knows from the police reports he's collected over the years that this is not how the scene was discovered.

He's not finished yet.

He takes the unconscious man by the scruff of the neck and lifts the top half of his body. He drags him over to the open cubicle, not looking forward to what he must do next.

With his free hand he lifts the seat and rests it against the back wall. He sits the beast - to him the drifter will always be the beast - in front of the toilet and it moans through bloodied lips.

“Shut up.” Closing his eyes he takes hold of the beast's hair and smashes his face into the rim of the bowl.

Not once, but four times, inwardly flinching at the sound of cracking bones and the tinkling of dislodged teeth falling into the pan.

When he finally opens his eyes he knows the beast is dead and as memory fades he knows that something is still not quite right.

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He stands alone in the derelict building and cries at what he has seen and what he has done. He realises that what he has witnessed is more than just a memory and he weeps.

“Wayne Mason, still a puffter after all these years.” The voice is unexpected and Wayne turns around with wet eyes.

“You?” He stares at the grown up James Kiddy, ravaged by years more than the estate that has been his home.

“Yeah, me.” James smiles with a mouth of yellowed teeth. “Thought I’d welcome you home.” The knife comes from nowhere.

“What do you want James?”

“I owe you.” The adult bully steps forward; the drugs in his system evident on his face. “I spent six fucking years locked up ‘cos of you.” Without warning he lunges forward and the knife sinks deep into Wayne’s stomach.

“Thank you.” Wayne places his hand over the one holding the weapon and James looks at him questioningly.

“You’re fucking crazy,” He pulls the blade free and lowers Wayne to the floor.

As the man who used to be the town thug rifles his pockets Wayne fades away, his mind returning to where he knows he should be.

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“In here, quick.” He hears the voice of his younger self and he can see the blue flashing lights reflecting off the white walls.

The chain is cut and the gate thrown open. The room fills with bodies dressed in dark blue.

He feels a hand on his chest and looks up into his own eyes and sees himself mirrored in them.

“Are you OK?” The boy is no longer crying.

“I’ll be fine,” he lies.

“Thank you.” The boy leans forward and hugs the man.

“For what? This is your fucking closure.” The words are half whispered on his dying breath and never heard.