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Jim Preston
by Jay Sherman

Some people say that horror is the most fearful feeling ever. To be totally honest those people are correct. Horror is the basis of all fear. Fear of the unknown and fear of the known are all horrible. People fear everything. No one person in this world is not afraid of something. Everyone has a fear. It may be death, it may be life, it may be illness, or it may be wealth.

I was sitting in my ebony rocking chair reading my favorite book when I realized that it had suddenly become dark outside. Storm clouds rolled in from the east, blocking out the beauty of the morning sun. Gloominess and gray skies marked the day’s downfall. With a thunderous crack, a flash of light stretched through the heavens, and the rain came with the bolt. The forest around my house came alive. Swaying from side to side as a dancer would, with the harmonic motion of the wind. The wind went whistling through the weeping willows, as if the Sirens sang to awaiting sailors.

I heard the sounds of footsteps stumbling to my door. The crackle of the branches which lay on the ground, the splash of the water on the steps of my porch. Then the sounds stopped. BANG! BANG! BANG! A person was knocking on the door. To my great delight it was not my expected visitor. I shall live on.

Death stalks us all, but for some, the truly lucky, it is swift, and it strikes unknowingly upon them, as a lion attacks its prey. For the ones that can predict it, the sorrow and fear come along with that prediction. The wise will prolong it for as long as possible. For they know death is inevitable, as are many things in life.

Breathing heavily I closed the door, hoping he would not return, but I knew he would. I returned to rocking chair where I sat, again. Knowing, fearing, that my visitor was still watching me.
Trying to find my sanity, I looked to the bottom of a bottle. It took one and a half bottles to regain that one thing in life that is still precious to me, my own sanity.

Being sane once again, I began to read my book, looking beyond the print and through each page. I wondered what my brother, Jim, was doing. For some unknown reason I felt as if he were traveling some great distance, in a terrible hurry. Then I heard a thump at my door. Where I had dropped my book I had not a clue. I was overwhelmed by a sense of fear, and horror so intense I broke the glass bottle that was in my hand. I squeezed it so tightly my fingers became numb before it broke. When I finally managed to get a grip on myself, I started for the door, prepared to die. I opened it with a horrible yell of "Oh, my God!" With arms wrapping tightly around me, I clenched my teeth together and opened my eyes to see Jim. He stood as if he were absolutely exhausted. His fatigue lasted only a moment. After he had caught his breath he explained how he had been falsely accused of theft and murder. He also stated that he rushed here to request my help to prove his innocence.

He told me that proving his innocence would be a difficult task because he was at home, by himself, while the crimes were committed. While telling me this, I received the impression that he was very afraid. His hands were trembling, his face was as white as snow, and his arms were contracted as tightly as they possibly could be. His speech was a mumbled mess.

I offered him a drink. Without hesitation he accepted. After five or six glasses he began to speak clearly and comprehensively. When I figured out what he had already stated, I tried to comfort him.

We had decided to go back to his home, and wait for further news. The train ride was slow and rigorous. When we arrived at his apartment, on the top floor, we found a note tied to the handle of his door. The letter read as follows:

"Jim Preston,
This letter is to inform you that I request a meeting with
you. It would prove wise for you to come alone, and I will be 'Unarmed.' If you are puzzled, show-up and receive some answers. The Park Square. Eleven o'clock p.m."

The letter was unsigned and it left no clue to the writer. Jim was now mystified, as I was also, about the person behind the letter. I was the first to say anything. That was when I asked him if he had any enemies, or anyone who had a reason to harm him. He came up with a typical response, "I don't know?" Upon entering his place we sat in the dark, thinking each to himself of the happenings of that dreadful day. Jim spoke with a clear voice, knowing exactly what to do: he was going to the meeting. No matter its outcome. He was going to get some answers.

At 9:30 Jim woke me, to join him in the park. Without saying a word, I went with him. On the way to the park he told me that when we reached the entrance, I was to wait half a minute, then begin walking behind him, without losing sight of him. When we reached the park gate, I did as told, I waited. Then I proceeded without losing sight of him. At eleven o'clock he reached the park square. Not a soul was in view, not even a movement in the air. The trees stood as still as a high rise building. The benches were as bare as the great plains of America.

A figure appeared out of the shadows. Unable to see his face, I reasoned that he was about the same size as my brother. He had on a long brown coat, a 'Dick Tracy' hat, and dark glasses that covered his eyes. I could hear the voices of both, which I may say, sounded very alike.

Jim asked, "Are you the man that left the letter on my door?" The stranger replied, "Yes! Now you wish to know..."

"Yes, I wish to know what the hell is going on? Why do you cover your face? Why do you hide in the shadows? How do you know me?"

"Well now, that is very easy. I felt you would be more
interested in how you can get off the charges that you have been accused of."

"That too, but start from the beginning!"

"Well, you request many things. For I am a simpleton, with a simpleton’s view. You ask for me to start from the beginning…"

"Yes, the beginning. It goes like this. I was robbing a well-to-do family uptown, when a man came in and tried to stop me. As if he could really stop Me, of all the stupid motions, that was about dump. Anyhow, I shot that stupid peon. Thump, he fell dead to the floor. So I finished my job. Then I left."

"Oh, my Lord. Please, NO!"

"Oh, yes! Anyhow, I was reading the paper, and I saw that you had been accused of my crimes. You know, that made me laugh louder and harder than I have in many years… I’m getting off track again. Then I found your address and came looking for you. For the last two days, I came to this square waiting for you to show."

"Now I have showed! What do you want from me?"

"Well, I just want you to see who you are going to hang in the gallows for!"

I saw him take off his glasses and hat. He was, how do I say it? He was an exact replica of my brother Jim.

With a horrible scream Jim fell to the ground. That mysterious man vanished, like he had appeared, without a trace, never to be seen again. When I walked over to Jim, he looked pale, as if he were a ghost. With his last breath he told me.

"I’m innocent!"

The ebony clock in the square rang twelve times to mark his passing.

From his body walked a shadow, a long flowing cloak, of the same dark color as the clock. The shadow stopped and looked at me, with the tip of its finger pressed on my chest as if in signal to me.

He is waiting, now that he has my brother, he waits. Patiently he waits for me. He wants my soul. He, an angel, a dark angel, he has no mercy.