

"WRAITH"
a short story by Matt Saye

He awoke with a start.

He didn't know what had woken him up, but something had. He felt strange. His eyes didn't feel tired like they normally did upon awakening, he wasn't sleepy, he was awake. Like someone had shot him in the arm with ten cups of coffee or given him seven cans of Redbull in his sleep. He closed his eyes, turned over, hoping to get back to sleep. It was no good.

Opening his eyes again, he looked at the neon purple numbers of his bedside alarm clock. But he couldn't quite make them out. They were blurry for some reason. He squinted, trying to focus harder on the numbers so he could just find out what time it was. Once again, his eyes closed and re-opened. Now the clock didn't show anything. The dark grey background was all that was visible. No purple, no numbers, not even a blurry set of patterns. Nothing.

He sat upright, raised his hand and wiped the sleep dust from the corner of his right eye, then his left. Out of the corner of his eye he saw movement from the direction of the curtain. He pulled the covers off of him, shivered as a cold night air hit him, assaulting his naked abdomen. He turned, touched his feet onto the floor and quickly pulled them back. The floor was even colder than the air. Painfully cold. Unbearably cold. For a moment. Then he started becoming accustomed to the temperature and planted his feet on the wooden floorboards again.

He inched over to the moving curtains, unsure and uneasy. Suddenly, in the darkness, his equilibrium started playing a practical joke. He lost balance and fell into his bedside cabinet, knocking the clock off onto the floor. It felt like time was going in slow motion as the clock hit the floor and smashed into a thousand pieces, shooting off in every direction, narrowly missing his eyes. Silence filled the room post impact. He was about to turn his attention back to the curtains when he heard a rustling.

He looked back at the curtains, they were still.

The sound was coming from where the clock fell. He rubbed his eyes, slapped his own face, pinched himself. Tried whatever he could to wake up. This was a dream, wasn't it? It had to be a dream. Surely it was a dream. He just wanted to wake up. To be free of this surreal, vivid nightmarish hell he'd awoken to.

He inched over to the shards of clock at the epicentre of the fall. Kneeling down, he began moving pieces away. Suddenly, a creature with red eyes and a large nail where its tail should have been flew out. He fell onto his ass, he didn't even feel the cold on his flesh, and started back peddling as the creature hovered over his head. He yelled, screamed, he was scared and he had no idea what this creature was or why it had just come out of his clock. His scream started to fade out, almost like someone was turning the dial on a stereo system. He was still trying to make noise, to alert people to this surreal

macabre abyss he was trapped in. Nothing. His yells of terror had been put on silent.

Almost as quickly as it appeared, the creature vanished. It let out a deafening, high pitched scream of it's own before it flew quickly towards the wall and vanished not leaving a single trace of itself behind.

By this point, He would have been too scared to make a noise if he could have done. He tried speaking. His lips moved but no noise came out, he was completely mute. He returned to his feet and hurried to the door, the noise of creaking floorboards was still audible to him. Wait a second. He listened harder. He could hear birds chirping and cars racing outside. He could hear the world – so why could the world not hear him?

He got to the door and reached out for the handle. He grabbed it tight and twisted the knob. It crumbled, turned to a sand like substance and began dropping through his fingers and onto the floor. The paint started trickling down the door and covered the empty space where he was sure he just saw a door handle. He moved his hand up and down the door, the paint coming off on him. He turned his hands over, looked at them. They were red.

“What the fuck is happening?” He said to himself. “There was a door handle there. I'm sure there was. There had to be. I saw it. Didn't I?”

His brain had started playing tricks on him. Now he wasn't sure what was reality and what was imagined. He tried once again to wake himself up. It was futile. Was this a dream? Was it fake? Or was this reality? Did he really just see a red-eyed creature emerge from shards of his broken clock, fly into the wall and vanish as if it had never existed? Did the door knob really just crumble in his hand and fall through his fingers? Did the white paint really just turn red on his hands?

He blacked out.

When he re-awoke, he was slumped up against the door. He opened his eyes, this time they were heavy. Sleepy. As if he'd just woken up from hibernation. He looked around him, looked up – there was the door knob. Everything looked normal. He looked at his hands – no paint. Perhaps he was sleep walking. Yes, that's what it was.

(Rustle rustle.)

There it was again. He shot a glance over to the corner where the clock landed, hoping not to see another of those vile creatures. The clock wasn't on the floor. It was back on the desk, with neon purple numbers which were no longer blurry. He could read them perfectly. 4:02am. He breathed a sigh of relief, returned to his feet and crawled back into bed. He replaced the covers over him and exhaled sharply. Closed his eyes.

(Rustle rustle.)

There it was again. He bolted upright and looked at the curtains. They were moving as if being pulled and shoved by a harsh wind. He sprung out of bed and lept over to the curtains, but as he got to them his confidence began dwindling. He so wanted just to leave them alone, but couldn't. He convinced himself that the window was open, despite knowing he closed it before going to bed. He always closed the curtains.

His body felt stiff, and raising his left limb was difficult, painful even. Same with the right. He grabbed at the curtains, his hands shook violently shaking the curtains with them. He shut his eyes momentarily but opened them as he yanked the curtains apart. He saw nothing but his reflection. Not even his reflection.

He stared at the thing he saw in the panes of glass. Another creature with wiry green hair and a face which looked like it was melting. Like the flesh was rotting off it. It's nose was half complete and it's forehead was starting to erode and glimpses of his skull were visible. The bones were rotting, too. This creature had a human face but couldn't have been human.

He was frozen in fear. In shock. In terror. He just stared at this creature which remained still and silent. He tried to look away but couldn't. His head wouldn't move, as if an invisible force had clamped it. He was being forced to look at this... thing. Whatever that was. All of a sudden, the creature in the window vanished. He was free again to move. He turned.

The creature was now inches from his face. An eerie smile crept across the creature's face to reveal wooden teeth. His gums were bleeding, as if he'd stuck the bits of wooden into his gums by force. His teeth then began falling out of his mouth, onto the floor. Then, it screamed. Screamed like someone being subjected to torture in the Tower. The creature's breath was disgusting. Like a sewer filled with the entire world's shit.

He blacked out again. His heartbeat raced... slowed... stopped. Dead.