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Tressa Graves

THE HORROR

1

As Tom sat in the driveway of his late parent's house, horrid screams clouded his mind. Tables being thrown to the side, blood splattered throughout the house as well as two mutilated bodies burned through him like an out of control fire. It was safe to say, Tom Diggins was definitely at his breaking point in life. In being a doctor he knew what being on the verge of a

nervous breakdown meant and he was tipping the scale. The only thing pushing him, willing to carry on, was his wife, Ann, whom he cherished. Tom ran his fingers through his hair as if to calm himself. It was his choice of OCD and he never understood why it helped, but it did. Well, at least sometimes, and it was good enough for Tom Diggins, MD. Tom slowly released his seatbelt which made him feel relief as he hated wearing it, even though he had seen the effects of what happened by not wearing it. Tom had tried to save many lives the years he worked in the ER and saw the gruesome effects of what not wearing it caused, usually trauma to the head or internal organs.

Before attempting to get out of the vehicle, Tom rested his head against the steering wheel of the car as he took in a deep breath trying to compose himself.

“Stop being a procrastinator and just get the fuck out of the car,” he told himself as he opened the car door. As he stepped out, a gust of wind blew through him which was refreshing. Tom closed his eyes as his pitch black hair blew back over his forehead exposing his deep dark eyebrows the girls since high school went crazy over. Tom reopened his eyes and began the dreadful trek towards the front door.

2

Once at the front door, the brutal murder of how his parents died haunted him. No matter how hard he tried to escape what happened to his mother and father he couldn't. It was why selling his parent's house was so crucial. Tom knew he needed to distance himself from what happened as much as he could. He knew the longer he held onto the house the harder it would be to overcome the horrors that happened within. He knew this final trip to the house he grew up in would be his last and he was, oddly enough, okay with it. Tom was tired of fighting with the lurking inner demons having hold over his life. It would be a sad good-bye but nevertheless a good-bye, desperately needing to transpire. As he stood at the front door he saw the window the intruder broke in through and visualized what the assailant must have looked like. For some reason he pictured a Richard Ramirez look alike. The crimes were after all just as sadistic and sick as his were. It took the papers to tell him how both his parents were bludgeoned to death with a hammer. Oddly enough that was not what threw him over edge as it was what he found out about his mother, explaining why there was no open casket at the funeral. He knew about one of his mother's breasts was almost severed from her chest, but the fact she was missing her eyes was too much to take. All Tom knew was he wanted five minutes alone with the sick, demented fucker who brutally tortured and murdered his parents. As he thought back on the day he walked through the house and saw the aftermath of what happened, an explosive rage coursed through him like an uncontrollable conflagration. Tom would love to put an end to the intruder's life. He would show the assailant no compassion, just as the man (Tom used the word man lightly, as the animal was more like it) had shown his parents. Tom lowered his head in what looked like a prayer and whispered through a clinched fist showing the white of his knuckles, “No Mercy!” He took in a deep breath, “You can do this,” he assured himself, “This will be your last and final goodbye,” he said as he composed himself. Tom looked up and stared hypnotically at the front door with the key gripped firmly in his hands. As he slid the key into its hole, he heard a voice behind him.

“Tom I haven't heard from you for a while now, how have you been?”

Tom turned around and saw his lifelong neighbor Trevor Benson, an ex-military Vietnam sniper standing behind him.

“Hello Mr. Benson, how are you sir,” Tom said genially, pleased to see the man standing there.

“Tom you’re a grown man now and although I do realize I am over the hill, but please, call me Trevor,” he said with a smile as he held out his hand.

Tom managed a smile as he extended out his hand.

“It’s just habit Mr....,” Tom began to say but caught himself and smiled as he held his head down almost embarrassed but continued, “So Trevor how have you been?”

“That’s more like it. It’s good to see the smile on your face. I mean when I first walked up on you, you looked rather disturbed.”

“Well yeah, considering what happened,” Tom said as he turned around and looked up at the house, “There is not too much to smile at here.”

“Understood, I just wanted to come over and let you know we were thinking of you. Me and the Mrs. have spoken of you quite frequently, mainly out of concern. The old for sale sign has been up for a while. I have to say I think it is probably the best thing for you. Selling the house will wipe a lot clean for you, at least I have prayed for just that.”

“Thank you,” Tom smiled somberly. “I think it is for the best as well. I am just here to say one last good bye to the old girl I grew up in and make sure everything I want is out of here.”

“You think she will sell easy?”

“So far it doesn’t look very promising. Not many people want a house where a brutal murder took place, well unless you’re in the Cali area where they thrive on that sort of thing. Always hoping the next writer or Hollywood producer will show up at your door and pay top dollar for access. You know they all want cheap thrills and real life death sells. I have even gotten letters from a few writers who want to do a book on what happened here. I have always turned them down though and for damn good reason. Making money off my parents death would be blood money and I would do just fine if I stayed away from that.”

“Well, on that note, I will let you get back to it. If you feel up to it, stop by the house and have a beer and say hello to the Mrs. if you’d like.”

“I would love to but Ann is waiting for me and I still have a few appointments coming in today. A few old timers who refuse to see any other doctor in town due to the trust and respect they have...” Tom said then paused as he corrected himself, “Had for my father. Well anyway, you know the story, I think the entire town does.”

“Here, here,” Trevor said with a steadfast tone as he held up his hand in a military salute to show his own respect for Tom’s late father. “On that note I will get outta yer hair. Just remember me and the Mrs. are here for you if you ever need us. Hell boy, we watched you grow up even wiped your ass as a baby a time or two,” Trevor said with a fat man’s chuckle.

“Nice,” Tom exclaimed as his face turned a beet red.

Trevor turned around and headed back towards his own yard.

“Retribution is a bitch,” Tom mumbled, “Vengeance can be a motherfucker.”

Hearing what Tom said, Trevor turned around and smiled, “In the military we take care of our own. So yes, retribution is a bitch and although vengeance can be a motherfucker it is usually only a motherfucker for the one receiving it, not the one giving it. Take care of your own boy, take care of your own. A 9mm is a fine instrument for home protection loaded with a magazine of full metal jackets.” Trevor said with a wink, turning back around and walked away.

As the door slowly swung open, Tom could smell his mother's cooking. "Meatloaf," he whispered with closed eyes as he imagined the aroma wafting through him like a mother's tender touch. He opened his eyes and slowly placed one foot over the threshold. He paused as he shivered with fear, only silence hung over him. "The worst part is over now," he assured himself, as he stepped inside and shut the door behind him. Tom gradually made his way through the living room as he stared at the frescoed walls around. He remembered the day his father took on the project of painting the interior of the house. Tom chuckled, "How he bitched." He gently rubbed at the wall before making his way into the kitchen. As he opened the two saloon style doors leading into the kitchen, more memories festered inside making his eyes water. Once through the swinging doors, Tom immediately noticed a box sitting on the island. He laid his keys on the counter and walked towards it. An envelope perched on top of the box read, "Things left behind" from Sufi, his real estate agent. Disregarding the envelope, he slowly opened the box and looked inside. He saw two jade elephants he bought for his mother on her birthday along with various family photos of all sizes. Tom picked up the stack of pictures and began going through each one. A smile crossed his face as he saw one of him and his parents taken on his tenth birthday. A stray tear from one eye made its way down his cheek. In a moment of pure solemn he sat the pictures down as more tears began to well up. Tom lowered his head as if to say a silent prayer but never did. He believed in God but never went to church and hardly ever prayed. He has lost a little faith in the good Lord above the day his parents were exterminated. He took in a deep breath picking up the envelope as he read aloud, "Hi Tom, I thought you would want these. I found them hidden in the kitchen pantry and I hope they bring joy in your hour of pain. Take care, your friend Sufi". A heartfelt smile spread across his face as he finished the letter, "Good ol' Sufi, thank God she likes to snoop."

Tom put the letter back in the envelope and moved the box closer to the door as to not forget it. Hands flat, he leaned over the counter as he rested. Tom sat in deep thought as his mind raced once again. He hit the counter top in discouragement as he wailed out loud.

"I need this day to be over and with a stiff fucking' drink to boot," he said as he turned and looked down the hallway leading to what was now referred to as the infamous bedroom. He was on the verge of hurling as his stomach whirled in what felt like a sack of puss. Tom closed his eyes as he rested his head against the wall, the bedroom hijacked his mind. It was he who was responsible for the clean-up. The blood soaked carpet, bed, and walls were his responsibility to clean...all his. As the horrid memories raced through his mind, he felt flustered. Tom stood motionless until uncertainty broke him away from the visions. Uncertainty, on whether or not he was making the right decision by staying the course, selling and moving away. Disillusioned with morbid flashbacks, Tom grabbed for his stomach, "If there is a God, why did he let this happen," he questioned as he held back the inevitable tears. Tom immediately turned around and headed for the door. All he could now think about was how bad he wanted out of the same house he once sought solace as a child.

4

Tom locked the house up for what would be the last time. He put the key to the front door in the lockbox hung over the outside door handle and securely locked the device. He took in a deep breath as he tenderly rested his hand flat on the face of the door before he turned around and walked back towards his car. As he cranked the car his cell phone rang. When he looked at the

caller ID he saw it was his wife Ann.

“Hey honey,” Tom said as he attempted to composed his tone.

“The office called looking for you,” Ann said, “You have an appointment in twenty minutes. Is everything all right sweetie,” she asked with a worried tone.

“Yeah, I’m fine....” Tom said but paused; he knew Ann could always tell when something was wrong. He tried to overcome the sense of ambivalence everyone finds themselves in when they face a major disaster or crisis in their life.

“I just left the house for what would be the last time. When I went inside, Sufi had a little surprise for me. There were some photos I guess my mom had stashed away and forgot about, but Sufi found them tucked in the pantry.”

“You know I would have gone with you. Tom, you know I don’t like you going there by yourself. It’s just too much.”

“Ann, Ann, Ann, listen honey, I’m a big boy, besides, I needed to say my final goodbye alone. It brought back a lot of memories, good and bad. A few I could have certainly done without but other than that, I am fine,” Tom assured her in what he thought was a believable tone.

“I know baby. Ok. Just try and make it home on time, I miss you when you’re not here.”

“You know I will.” Tom said as he pulled the phone away from his ear to look at it. “Damn babe, I have to go it’s the office calling. I’ll call you around lunch, love you bye.”

“Love yo...,” Ann began to say but Tom had already hung up.

LAST DAY

1

As Tom pulled into the parking lot of his office; he saw three cars parked in front. He recognized two being patients of his late father, but the black Cadillac parked next to his reserved spot stood out. As he pulled around the back of the car, he saw license plates which read Wisconsin. He realized it was the new doctor who would be taking his place. “If he wants to survive here he better lose those tags,” Tom chuckled as he rolled his eyes taking a cheap shot, “Fuuuckin’ cheese heads!” He had forgotten about the meeting they had scheduled for today. He quickly pulled into his reserve spot which read, Dr. Thomas A Diggins. Knowing he was late, he promptly grabbed his briefcase along with his white jacket from the backseat of the car. He rushed inside where his nurse immediately met him with three charts in her hand.

“Is everything all right, Dr. Diggins,” his nurse Trish questioned with concern. “Everything is fine thank you,” he assured her as he slipped on his white jacket. “Where would our new doctor be?”

“He took the liberty of making rounds for you while he waited. He said he wanted to get to know some of the locals. Made it sound like the word ‘locals’ was some form of bird flu.”

“Yeah well wait until some of the locals get a taste of the Yankee accent he has going on. How do you reckon THAT will go over,” Tom asked as a weak giggle escaped him. Trish just smirked, “Well, I am one of those locals who will have to deal with the unwanted Northerner, thank you very much.”

“I guess so,” Tom said with contrite as he took the charts into his office to quickly look them over. As he sat at his desk, he rubbed his head as he assured himself it was going to be a very

long day. He was well aware the media would be calling as it was the one-year anniversary of his parent's murders. He had tried to prepare himself as well as he could for the media frenzy soon to follow. Tom knew death sold especially well in a little town like his. Frost Proof, up until last year, was considered one of the safest towns in the entire state of Virginia.

"Just make it through today, besides you already knew this was going to happen. Death sells books, movies, collectibles, and even clothing," Tom murmured, as he knew the day would bring cheap scary thrills for the sick minded.

Although he tried to distance himself from his sorrows by packing away any sentimental memorabilia of his childhood and late parents, he found it to be futile. Sitting on his desk was a photo of his parents. He kept it there as an attempt to remember them alive and happy. Tom hoped the memory of their mutilated bodies would soon dissipate from his mind, even though he knew it to be futile as well.

He leaned his chair back and cupped his hands over his face as he took in a deep breath. Before he could get the grip on reality he had hoped for, there was a knock at the door. He was unable to ask who it was before his nurse Trish poked her head inside the door. She immediately saw he was troubled.

"Dr. Diggins are you ok?"

Tom looked at her with what she thought were festering eyes.

"Yes Trish, I am fine," he began to say, being very curt about it. But back-peddled when he took note of the genuine concern in Trish's eyes. "I am sorry I snapped. Today as you probably know is the one year anniversary."

"Yes sir, I know. I just didn't want to say anything as I figured the press would remind you enough. There have already been calls coming in asking for you. A few local papers as well, even one out of New York. Can you imagine a paper in New York wanting a story from what they call backwater hicks..." Trish snarled but stopped short as she felt bad. She looked at Tom troubled, with her own eyes welling up and apologized.

"Trish, it's ok. I understand what you were trying to say. Yankees are like that. You don't exist until they need you for something. They believe the South is racist and over patriotic in their warped minds. They live in never land, a world outside this one. I drove up north a few years ago never saw one America flag hanging anywhere."

Trish just smiled a crooked grin as she gathered up the charts. "I will put these on the outside of the doors for you. I think you better hurry, the new doc is starting to give out cheese recipes," she chuckled as she rolled her eyes and quietly walked from the room to give Dr. Diggins a few minutes before he faced the patients of the day.

"Oh well, the sooner I finish the quicker I can get home, then its goodbye old Frost Proof, Virginia forever," Tom assured himself under a muttered tone only he could hear.

As he walked from his office he saw Trish standing in the corner staring at him with deep concern. He walked over to where she was standing and rested his hand on her shoulder. "I am fine, Trish, really! I've had a year to prepare for this day. Besides I think it's you I should be worried about. Cheese, really," he questioned with a grin Trish didn't entirely believe.

Tom lowered his head as he stood outside his first patient's room. He shook it slowly from side to side as he gripped the doorknob in his hand. He could hear the old yankee just as Trish had said, talking about cheese curds and beer.

When Tom walked into the room of his first patient, the first words he heard were about cheese. He clutched the door as he cringed. Old Bill Hawksway looked at Tom with eyes that said, help. The good ole' yank turned around and in his thick northern Yankee accent asked Tom how he was doing. Tom smiled as best he could and stepped further into the room. A mummer of, help me God, escaped his smiling face.

"So, I see you are becoming acquainted with Mr. Hawksway, one of our respected ol' timers," Tom said with a smile. Dr. Hayloft just looked at Tom with bewilderment.

"How the hell ya doin' Bill? Long time, no see, how's the ol' ticker," Tom said with a wink, "I see you're still here so I guess the patch up job you had worked?" Bill chuckled at Tom's remark as the yankee just stared in amazement.

"Excuse me, but I don't recall ever hearing a professional speaking to his patient in such a manner," the old yank said as he turned towards Bill Hawksway to see his reaction, "Are you referring to the triple by-pass of his heart?"

"Weellll, I reckon we have something in common as I've never walked in on a professional talking to his patient about cheese and beer. I mean, in all reality, aren't those the exact things we as doctors try to discourage our patients from doing," Tom asked with a smirk as he looked at Bill. Bill gave Tom two big thumbs up before the old yank had a chance to see him.

"Well it was just idle chat, innocent enough."

"Well, that is all we do is idle chit chat." Tom declared as he rested a hand on the old Yankee's shoulder and walked him to the side of the room.

"Listen, I realize you ain't no good ol' boy, but my patients are and if you intend on fittin' in here, I suggest you lose the yank side of you. I lived in your old state for seven months and I have to be perfectly honest with you," Tom said with a grin as he lowered his voice, "I absolutely hated it. No I'm sorry, that was too tame, let me rephrase that, I fuuuckin' haaated it! The people there are what I call from Mars. That doesn't fly here in the south. If you want to be a successful doctor, that is at least around here, I suggest you first become a human being. I mean that is what we are here for after all. Just hillbillies, but hillbillies with a human side to us," Tom finished as he winked at the old man. Bill sat as silent as he could as he attempted to hold back the laughter. He felt as if he were fixing to explode. He was glad Dr. Diggins took that old fart to the side and set his Yankee ass straight.

"Well then, on that note I think I will excuse myself and just come back tomorrow when I will be the one in charge. Good day there feller," the yank said, dripping with sarcasm.

"Now see, that is what I'za talking about. If'n you don't get wif the program, you will by all means fail here. We aren't asking ya to change, we're just asking that you act semi human is all. Now good day to you as well," Tom said but paused with one word, "feller."

"That was amazing! Thanks fer the save," Bill said. Tom smiled as he began to listen to Bill's chest. "Deep breath," he told Bill. As he removed the stethoscope from his ears, he wrote Bill his usual heart medication and suggested a close colleague of his who was a respected doctor. Bill smiled as he took the prescription. "I wish you and your wife all the best. I have to say though I hate to see ya leave but at the same time I understand all too well. You have a safe trip and let Trish know when you have settled in. I hear she will be leaving soon and I can't say I blame her one bit. This northern yank is a fucking asshole if I've ever seen one. Besides he talks wif a funny ascent, but then again, I reckon they all do. They just ain't right," Bill said. Tom patted Bill on the shoulder as he chuckled. "Don'tcha worry, I bet he won't last a month before the locals bring out the crosses and run him back to 'Wiscaansin,'" being all facetious, "Good riddance I say! "

Bill laughed as he slipped on his shirt.

“I went to Wisconsin once before about twenty years ago. I figured out right quick it was hell on earth. The people there just don’t get it. Damn liberals, every one of ‘em, rather they think so or not, believing themselves to be the smartest people in the room. Just ask ‘em; they’ll tell ya. I went to a business meetin’ there and they served something called ‘are dorves,’” Tom laughed and quickly corrected him. “I think it is pronounced Hors Dourves,” Tom said chuckling as he held his head down.

“Well, whatever they called it. It was a dead fish on a cracker with cheese and had somethin’ red on top’n it. I passed, thank ya just the same. I couldn’t believe it, felt like I was on Mars or somethin’, ya know what I’m sayin’?”

Tom just shook his head. “I understand all too well, been to yankville a time or two m’self. I have to agree, Mars sums it up just fine. No charge for this visit Bill, you just take care of yerself old partner,” Tom said as he shook Bill’s hand.

“You as well my good friend, I pray Florida welcomes you, providin’ many years of joy for you and yer woman. At least they are southern folk there. Maybe a few yanks thrown in, but where y’all movin’ to, I think y’all be safe.”

“Thanks Bill, now take my advice and do what I said. I don’t think you’re gonna be able to handle anymore cheese stories.”

“Ya got that one down doc, and I will spread the word. Maybe wif no patients the ol’ yank will be forced to get right the hell outta here!” Bill said.

3

As Tom finished with the last of his charts, his cell rang. He picked it up without looking at the caller ID as he just assumed it would be his wife Ann, wondering how much longer he would be.

“Hey fixin’ to walk out now,” he said in a relaxed but almost excited tone.

“Excuse me Dr. Diggins, my name is Rachel Klein, I’m a reporter with the Local Insider and was wondering if you would mind answering a few questions for me?”

“How did you get my number,” Tom asked, immediately drilling her with a harsh tone.

“Everything is available Dr. Diggins, for the right price that is. Welcome to my corrupt world although all lines of business has its corruptions, wouldn’t you say Dr?”

“No I wouldn’t and furthermore I don’t want to talk to any of you disgusting vultures. You people were the ones who exploited and published the crime scene photos online for the world to see. You made sure you told the gory details of the murders. There were things in your report I didn’t even know. I think you and your thugs were the reason the killer got away. What is the matter with you have you not quenched your blood thirst yet? Besides my answer is unequivocally no,” Tom rudely blasting the woman, “Oh, and if you call me again at this number, I will sue you and the company you work for, do I make myself clear,” Tom threatened as he waited for the woman’s reply.

“Yes Dr. Diggins...very,” Rachel said, falling silent but only briefly. “I do understand, but sir, you also have to understand, I am the press. I have rights and with my sincerest condolences to you and your horrid loss, I am just doing a job. I have to eat, putting food on my table and a roof over my head, just as you do, sir. I will assure you I am nowhere as corrupt as your local police department, you know, the one the locals depend on for protection. I think it is them you should direct your anger, not me. They are the ones, I understand, who botched the entire investigation sir, not me. Besides, if it isn’t me who gets the story, someone else will. I am coming to you for

you to tell your story, of what you've had to endure. I am not your typical reporter. Yes, hungry for a story but also hungry for the truth. I was upfront admitting my line of work has issues but trust me, I am not one of....," she paused and said with a stern tone, "THEM,"

"Sincere you say? Don't make me laugh. You are cut-throat if I've ever seen it. True, you don't actually put the knife in, but emotionally you do. What the press does sometimes hurts just as much as what the actual killer does, except my torture does not end, Miss Klein, as I continue to live. The hurt lingers and cuts every second of every day. Certainly there is still a human being inside you. Put yourself in my shoes see and how it feels. Now with that said, lose my fucking' number, ya bunch of sorry bastards," Tom raged while infuriatingly rubbing his hair back before ending the call.

3

When Tom got into his car he turned the car radio on Q105 news. As he did, he heard the reporter he had hung up on no more than ten minutes ago broadcasting live. "You have gaaahhht to be fuckin' kidding me," he stormed as he turned the volume up. "First the yank and now this SHIT!"

"Today is the one-year anniversary of Frost Proof's most notorious murder ever. One year ago the grisly scene was discovered of prominent Dr. Marty Diggins and his wife Susan. The couple was brutally murdered in their home while asleep. The murders occurred around 3:00 am, on October 31st, Hallows Eve last year. Police said there seemed to be no signs of forced entry. Detectives determined Dr. Diggins was killed first. He had been hit in the head with a baseball bat, crushing his skull instantly.

Found in the hallway lying in his own puddle of blood, Dr. Diggins was bludgeoned to death. The viciousness of the crime made for a horrific scene. His wife Susan of 42 years was found dead in their bed. Her eyes had been gouged out of their sockets. She had been stabbed over 30 times in her head, neck, and chest area. Some are calling the murders a ritualistic killing as the murders took place at 3:00 am, which is considered the witching hour. Our own little version of Richard Ramirez, some have said. Locals put Halloween in with the mix and conspiracy theories rampantly fly about. However the police have denied any such allegations. We have tried to speak with Detective Strove but he has denied all of our requests thus far. The house has sat empty with its morbid past up until now. A local couple purchased the home today. The community will never forget what they call, 'the night hell struck,' I am Rachel Klein reporting for News Insider."

Tom immediately turned off the radio. "Unfuckin' believable," he bellowed. When he reached the interstate his cell rang again. Tom answered the call, except this time with the rage of animosity in his tone.

"Yeah," he blared into the telephone.

"Honey, is everything all right," Ann questioned.

Tom hesitated briefly, "Sorry," as he rubbed his left temple, "I just got a call from a reporter wanting to talk with me. Can you believe these leeches," Tom asked with amazement.

"Well then, you may not want to come home right away."

"Why?"

“There are four media trucks parked out front. Two reporters have already walked up to the door. Don’t worry, I didn’t answer it,” Ann quickly assured him.

“Why don’t you leave the house and meet me at the park where we were married. I’ll pick up a pizza and some sodas and we’ll have dinner there. I think the fresh air will do me good. Just make sure no one follows you.”

“Well mister, it sounds as if you are asking me out on a date,” Ann said in a playful tone, “How ‘bout I bring the old blanket we’ve used numerous times to see if it still brings the joy?”

“You read my mind. Be careful and I will see you in about a half hour. Love you bye,” Tom said as he hung up the phone.