

# NIGHT

terrors

V.A. Jeffrey

## Night Terrors

By V. A. Jeffrey

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## Night Terrors

He awoke in a cold sweat, alone in the dark with a hammering headache. He thought that he could hear screaming. The darkness was heavy and wrapped itself around him like a noose. His eyes darted furtively from side to side, unfocused. The screams grew louder. As his hearing sharpened, he realized they were coming from him. His screams died instantly as the chill of reality sank in. The sheets were soaked with sweat, his body felt bruised and very sore. Hungrily he inhaled the air, grasping his face, his chest, feeling for the beating of his heart. He squinted his eyes, trying to focus them. *The light. Just turn on the light!* He thought, his mind rising from the nebulous webs of shapes and visions of troubled sleep. Sitting up straight, he swung his legs slowly to the side of the bed. The pale light of the moon seeped in through his bedroom window, casting the objects in the room into unnatural shapes. He longed for the light of day. As his eyes adjusted to the dark it made him even more nervous. The strange shapes buzzed hideously in the shadows, almost brimming with life. He was afraid to reach his hand out into the darkness beyond the bed, imagining that something might actually touch him. He could feel the manic pumping of his heart through his chest and in his back as he curled back under the blankets, keenly listening for any movement, real or imagined. His head was throbbing. He moaned and reached under the pillow for the bottle of pills he took for his headaches. Fumbling with the top he finally got it open and took three pills, swallowing them whole. He had the distinct feeling that something was more off than usual this time and he wondered why and how. It was like having a memory right on the edge of the mind but no matter how hard you try to recall it, it never materializes. He thought he had remembered. . . . something, and then it simply vanished. *When the sun comes up*, he thought, *I'll remember. Yes*, he thought, licking his lips nervously, *When the sun rises*. He glanced over at the alarm clock. The angry red digital numbers read: 2:00 am. Nausea and anxiety wrapped around his stomach like a straight jacket. He had a very long wait.

## 2

The sunrise was brilliant when morning finally came. The sky was a pure, never ending blue. It promised to be a clear day. He sat up slowly and yawned quietly. His tired, crusted eyes carefully swept over the room. Everything was in its place, exactly as it had been the night before. He was beginning to wonder when this vicious cycle would end. It was as if he were being handled and dangled about like a marionette. Every morning was like an image captured in a tape playing in a VCR, constantly being rewound to this exact scene again and again only he couldn't remember the beginning, just the ending when he'd wake up. All he really wanted was to sleep. Deep, dreamless and peaceful sleep. Lemon yellow rays of the early morning sun sifted through the window and with it the promise of a good day. But he didn't want to forget. Why he was so afraid? Why did he wake from frightful dreams that he could not recall, and why he was frightened if he couldn't remember them? The persistence of these memories frustrated him because it was only the fragments and the wisps that persisted. No meat was provided. Heaving a sigh, He climbed out of bed and headed towards the bathroom to shower. The hot water calmed his nerves as it splashed onto his body, tiny rivulets streamed down his hair, arms, back and legs, caressing him like gentle hands. He closed his eyes and took long, deep breaths, almost drinking the steamy air around him. In the next room he could hear the phone ringing. *Creditor*. Probably the ones who kept threatening to repossess his car. He ignored it. *It's a piece of junk! Take it!* He was about to be laid off from his job, his hours had been cut and he was barely making enough money to pay his rent! His car wouldn't run, every appliance in his apartment was falling apart, the manager wouldn't fix anything, he was behind on his rent and he was expecting an eviction notice any day now.

The supervisor at work was a royal ass. Everybody in the world was picking on him. Everywhere he turned someone was screwing him over! Sometimes he just felt hollow and empty. He felt exhausted from people and was sick of life in general. So he went about his routine during the day in the same listless fashion trying to exert as little energy as possible. He turned off the water, climbed out of the shower and went to the bedroom to get dressed. As he walked passed the wall mirror, he noticed something on his neck. Dark purple and bluish bruises, finger-like in form. He touched one of the bruises gingerly. The bruised skin was bloated in some areas, where the flesh was dark purple. The gnawing sensation of nervousness and anxiety settled on him again. *What the f...?* He could not begin to fathom how they had gotten there. All he remembered was that he came home from work and went to bed early, He could feel his stomach began to tie itself in knots as he searched around the room, looking for clothes that would hide the bruises. Attempting to block these new unsettling thoughts from his mind, he tried drawing up a mental list of what he would do for the day. Nothing. It was Saturday for Christ's sake and he had no plans! Not even for the night! *Now If I had a love life that put these kinds of bruises on me, that would be something!* He put on his clothes, grabbed his coat and wallet and headed out the door to the diner down the corner, making sure to take the staircase and the back door exit to avoid the manager. Some rusted old tools were lying against the building outside by the door. With great satisfaction he kicked them over out of the way, figuring that they belonged to the ugly prick and started down the alley. The manager's wife was home. They both lived on the ground floor near the back door of the apartment building. She had her radio blasting again with her favorite Bible thumping radio show. This time the old preacher began bellowing on about something to do with Leviticus. He felt a sudden and momentary burning in his chest, as if he was under immediate stress after hearing the passage. *For the soul is in the blood....* But the feeling passed as soon as it came. The grimy and yellowed lace curtains in the window fluttered slightly from a gentle breeze blowing. He could see dust motes being lifted from them into the air. He shook the odd feeling off and started on his way.

He liked taking this path, skulking down the cruddy back streets of the city. It gave him a feeling of privacy where he could collect his thoughts without the annoying distractions of people and cars. The air was chilly and he could see slight wisps of breath as he exhaled. A film of frost covered the grasses in the backyards, the fences and the weeds that choked the pebbled ground. Broken glass, tattered clothes and gaping potholes littered the alley path as far as he could see. Strolling along, he passed by dilapidated garages, broken down cars and weather worn back fences. He neared the large brown garbage bin sitting against the pale blue concrete of the diner. The diner sat near an intersection in the alley. The narrow path leading away from the back of the building going eastward was very woody and even more run down than the paths leading towards the other directions. Mostly displaying the overgrown back yards of foreclosed homes. He walked around to the front and checked his watch. It was 10:30. He pushed open the door and slide into a booth. The waitress, eyeing him as he came in, drifted slowly over to his table. "Coffee?" She asked, staring with unreadable, unblinking eyes. "Yeah, just black coffee. No sugar." He muttered. There was something that caught his eye just below. She was wearing red shoes. He never noticed that before. Deep red. She went off to fetch the coffee. He couldn't remember if he had ever seen her wear red shoes before. They were flat and very pointy. The diner was nearly empty save for a few customers and the old TV on the wall blaring across the room. The news was on and he listened halfheartedly until he caught something that stirred him. A reporter, along with the police were at the scene of a crime somewhere in Bagdad. Twenty people had been killed by a roadside bomb. What was unusual was that they were showing the bloodied corpses on the news. Blood. Blood was everywhere. A gruesome sight that made his stomach quell. *They can actually show real butchered bodies on TV now?* He thought. *Since when did the news do that? That's getting away with an awful lot!* No one else in the place seemed to care or even notice. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the red shoes coming back with the coffee pot. He turned his head so he didn't have to look at her or her ugly shoes. She poured the coffee and left to wait on another customer. Relieved, He sipped his coffee and gazed out of the window. He still felt like things were off, like he was suppose to be doing something or remembering something. The kind of unpleasant thought that gnawed at him ruthlessly like a hungry rat. He watched the cars rattle down the street. A car, an old black Buick Monte Carlo approached, slowed down in front of the diner and then sped around the block. It had whitewall tires and the chrome shined like platinum. A beautiful, well kept car. *Looked like a '73 or a '74* he thought appreciatively. It came around the block again. He couldn't see who was inside. The windows were tinted too dark. It slowed down and then stopped in front of the diner. He admired the paint job and the body. It looked powerful, built like a bull. Too bad he couldn't afford something like that now. Rarely could anyone find something like that in good condition under ten grand. He drained his cup, threw a couple of dollars on the table and headed for the door. Everything was off. He didn't know why and he suddenly felt like getting a few groceries and getting home instead of lingering. The waitress stared at him. It was an odd, unreadable stare with unblinking eyes. He frowned, wondering why she was staring so hard. She never took much notice of him before. He took the alley way back home. He could hear the low growl of a powerful engine in the distance behind him. The Monte Carlo was turning down the alley behind him. He walked faster. Suddenly the engine roared, sounding like an angry grizzly bear. He jumped, his heart leapt in panic. His ears were burning. He ran down the path trying to find a yard with an open

gate to turn into as the car followed him, engine roaring. He ducked into a narrow passage between two small garages and waited for the car to pass. The engine died down to a purr. A purr that vibrated through his body and made his teeth rattle just a bit. It slowed down and stopped for a few seconds. He peeked out from his hiding place. The windows were black as night. There was something else. He had thought, back at the diner, that the car was black. It wasn't. It was a red so dark it seemed black. He said nothing but stood there trembling, afraid of who might jump out after him. After some seconds it sped away down the alley. He was bewildered. *Who was that? What do they want with me?* Fear washed over him as he remembered the bruises on his neck. *Is someone trying to kill me? Did someone attack me last night?* He touched his bruised neck absently. *What's going on? How did I ever manage to wake up? Should I be dead?* Dreadful thoughts flooded his mind all at once. Maybe that's what he was trying to remember and couldn't. An angry bookie, maybe? He hadn't done any betting recently. Was he just losing his mind? Beads of perspiration formed at his temples. Even though the cold air bit his fingertips, he barely noticed it through the sweat pouring off of him. Dread pressed in on him. He looked around cautiously. There were groceries to buy or else he'd go hungry. Save-A-Bunch supermarket was only a couple of blocks away. He decided to keep to the regular front streets in case Mr. Monte Carlo and the car of many colors decided to backtrack. He could yell for help and be seen on the street. *Or at least if someone kills me*, he thought darkly, *people might see a giant car speeding away from the scene of the crime.* He so was deep in thought that he scarcely noticed how deeply he had bitten his tongue. Scarlet fluid squirted out through his teeth and trickled in a long, delicate thin line down his chin. It tasted nice, pleasing. Almost calming, even through the throbbing pain. He was surprised at his pleasure of the taste of his own blood. He wiped his chin and headed to the store. As he turned the corner he had grim thoughts of being ambushed and assaulted by some faceless killer while making his way up the staircase at home. Deep within he was almost relieved that something had been revealed to him. He still didn't understand what had just happened or why but it was a start. It was far better than wandering around in the dark, trying to recall things that wouldn't reveal themselves. He was really going to need some beer.

### 3

It was only 2:00 that afternoon but the day seemed to drag on endlessly. Thinking about an ice-cold glass of beer and a bowl of pretzels took his mind off of his other problems. His arms full of grocery bags, he wandered tentatively down the alley towards his apartment. The sun was a deep yellow color and its rays warmed his cheeks. A large slice of sunlight peeled down the back of the building, spilling over his face. He closed his eyes and lingered a moment to bask in the evening sun. The warmth changed abruptly to coolness as a shadow blocked his face. He opened his eyes. The manager had come outside to throw out his trash. He was a Goliath of a man with limbs as thick and strong as logs and a fleshy face with beady, black eyes. He wore the same filthy red shirt and jeans everyday. The very sight of him shattered any and all pleasant thoughts he briefly had. He tried to hurry towards the door, but the man strode over to the door and blocked his path.

"You got rent money?" The man barked.

"No, I don't have it yet." He avoided eye contact.

"You got money for beer but you ain't gonna the pay rent?"

"I'll have it by the end of the month! "

"The end of the month? I want it this week!" The manager demanded. He sharply inhaled the cold air, flustered and irritated. The man's meaty jowls quivered and seemed to expand making his small eyes recede even further into his face.

"I'm sick of hearin' excuses, I want the damn rent! You know, I can kick your ass out on the street anytime I want!" The man's voice grew a steely-edge, becoming more menacing. He could feel the man's hot, foul-smelling breath on his nostril hairs and he could feel the hairs wave ever so slightly. He imagined that they were being singed.

"I promise I'll pay it at the end of the month!" He shot back, almost tripping over his feet. He pushed pass the man to get to the door.

"You got 'till Saturday you little shit! Next Saturday, you hear me? If I don't get paid by then, I'm bouncin' your ass and your trash out on th' street!"

His head was spinning. He felt more dwarfed now than he had in the past few hours. When the night approached, the nightmares would once again overtake him. He walked up the staircase to his apartment very slowly. Upon entering, he threw off his coat and closed the door gently behind him, overwhelmed, simply standing by the door. A sudden, wicked pain slammed into his right temple, developing immediately into a headache. He pressed his back against the door and slid down to the ground to sit, letting his bags fall from his hands. The beer cans toppled out of the bags and rolled around in spiral motions on the floor. He sat there for a long time, staring at them. He was drowning. He picked up a can of

beer, opened it and gulped the liquid down. The cold beer washed over his tongue and down his throat, smooth and soothing. It tingled and burned in his belly. He reached for another, and another, distancing himself from that other world,

the awful one called Reality, and soon he was wrapped in a warm, cozy blanket; in that pleasantly dreamy place between the sobriety and euphoria, feeling his cheeks burn, feeling that glow.

#### 4

Late that night he awoke screaming in terror. Sweating profusely, he clutched at his shirt, choking and gagging in his own saliva. He sat up straight, feeling his stomach roiling. Once again he was in his bed, waking from a nightmare. Breathing laboriously, thoughts scattered, he wiped the sweat from his face and pulled his knees up pressing them against his chest and buried his chin between them, shivering in the cold. He sat on the bed staring into the dark. The intensity of this latest dream burdened him with a heightened sense of dread that he had not experienced before. Yet, he could not remember what it was he had dreamed about. It was late dusk and the weak embers of sunlight were still hanging about on the horizon, long after the sun had gone down. He could still see most objects in the room if he squinted. Beer cans were spread about on the floor. He got up and went to the bathroom. He turned on the hot water, letting it run. Some time had passed, he couldn't remember how much. Hot steam billowed up from the sink and drifted towards the ceiling. He began rinsing his face. The air around him became very warm and moist. Steam curled and wafted all around the door and around him. He wet his hair, running his fingers through it and then reached for a towel. He frowned, looking around. The bathroom suddenly looked and felt like a sauna, enveloped completely in thick steam. He couldn't find the door. He heard soft clucking noises and jerked his head around, looking for the source of the sound. He heard it again, then a soft, mocking laugh. He slowly lifted his left hand and wiped the steam away from the mirror above the sink. There, his reflection was staring back at him. Except it didn't behave like a reflection. It was very handsome. It wore a dark, blood red tailored Italian suit and a silk, ink black tie. He merely stared at it, stunned. "Hello Jack. It's about time we got reconnected." The voice was deep and mellifluous, like oil. His own voice. Only the timbre was different.

"Who...who are you?" Jack felt an odd sensation coming over him. It wasn't quite terror.

"You've forgotten already?" It smiled widely, showing a set of beautiful white teeth. The canines were sharp.

"Come now. It's time for me to collect, Jack. I thought that leaving a few clues would help you remember your debt."

"Clues?"

"Do I look like your landlord? Why does everyone feign stupidity when it's time to pay? You had some problems that were weighing you down and you wanted to get rid of them so you sought my help at the cross roads behind the diner. Remember?" Jack slowly sank down, seating himself on the edge of the tub, voluminous steam swirling everywhere. He began to shake his head. His body trembled uncontrollably. A dim realization began to dawn.

"No, no, no,....."

"Let's not make a fuss. I helped you get rid of your unwanted problems, who, by the way, were trying to ruin you. I will have my payment. Come with me now.. Give me my due."

"But I can't go yet! I'm not fini...No!" Jack shouted wildly.

"I don't know what you mean! You haven't done ANYTHING for me. My life is in tatters!" Jack was wild with fear and rage. The reflection stared at him dispassionately and said nothing.

"I have nightmares and terrible headaches every night and I've felt sick to my stomach for weeks! My life was supposed to get better! What exactly have you done for me that I should give you anything?" At this the reflection laughed.

"You never asked me for a life full of fun and debauchery. If you had, I would have provided it. Some people are made of stronger stuff than you. If you have nightmares it is because of your own guilt. That is not my issue. I never promised you anything beyond getting rid of your immediate problems and you never asked me for anything beyond that. I have fulfilled my end of the deal. How I *keep* my word is my own business. All of the people who tried to hurt you are gone. Now, I want payment. Hold out your hand and touch the mirror once again." Its voice became quieter, hissing like a snake. Jack's body was shaking uncontrollably; he was now fully terrified. The parameters of the box he was in were finally coming into focus.

"I remember no such deal!" Jack repeated stubbornly, his voice trembling. The reflection's eyes changed. The brown pupils turned black and became unusually large, like a cat's eyes in the dark, full of predatory malice.

"I will come at a later time. Take care." The reflection smiled broadly. It was a million watt smile, bright as a Las Vegas night. It was a smile that was not reflected in the eyes.

#### 5

He could hear sirens in the distance. He still had his clothes on and he slid his fingers across his clothes and across

the bed covers, feeling a strange, chilly wetness. The driving hammering of his heart flooded his ears as he blindly fumbled

towards the side of the bed to switch on the light. He nearly fainted at the sight. The bed, the sheets, and his clothes were soaked in blood. He could hear the faint echoes of a wailing voice, and more muffled voices somewhere far away. His eyes were wide open but they were unable to penetrate the blackness of the room.

"My God! What happened!?" He cried out in panic. His heart was flailing within him so wildly that he thought it would rip through his chest. It roared in his ears so that he couldn't hear anything else. He leaped from the bed and his eyes caught something. Stained and glistening on the floor, there were crimson footprints leading from the door to the bed. Jack ran into the living room and flicked on the lights. There, on the door, the floor and on his couch. Blood. Jack ripped his clothes off and searched his body. No wounds anywhere. No pain, no wounds. Salty sweat stung his eyes. *Maybe that was it. I'm not seeing things correctly!* The voices that he had heard previously in the distance were coming from somewhere downstairs and were growing louder and more urgent. There was some commotion going on that he could not decipher but a sharply rising fear that he was the reason for it. He inhaled and exhaled deeply, trying to collect his wits about him. Downstairs, he could hear the soft moans of a woman's voice. By the windows, behind the curtains he saw flashing blue red and white lights illuminating the dark neighborhood streets. His eyes searched the room, glancing at the pizza boxes, beer cans and clothes strewn all over the floor. In the corner, by the coat closet he saw a thin, crimson streak of fluid trailing out from under the door. He slid his sweaty hands through his hair and slowly walked over to the closet. He could hear the sound of numerous footsteps shuffling downstairs. Approaching the closet door, Jack wondered in horrific fascination what could possibly lay behind it. As he opened the door a long, bloodstained wooden handle fell before his feet. Peering closer in, he could see the rusted old ax head, its dulled edges and rough surface glistening with blood. He stared down at it and at his clothes. He hurried to the front door, first putting his ear to the door, listening for noises in the hallway. He slowly opened the door. The light bulbs in the ceiling were covered with grime and dust. The light flickered and blinked weakly. Jack opened the door to the stairwell. Bloodied footsteps led up the stairs from the first floor. With both dread and morbid curiosity he went down the stairwell to the first floor. He gingerly opened the door to the hallway. Around the corner and down the hall he could see that the door to the manager's apartment had been busted in and was hanging off its frame from the top hinge. He caught a glimpse of the manager's wife, whose bloated face was red and wet from wailing. *So that's where that miserable howling came from!* Jack thought. He caught sight of a large, lifeless body lying on a stretcher, one of his arms a mere bloody stump. Blood was leaking from the body from a number of gaping wounds. *I killed my landlord!* He wanted to laugh. A wild, pulsing sensation started behind his right eye, growing and pounding unmercifully. He clutched his head in agony. Like the creeping of the dawn, the thought occurred to him that he needed to escape. He closed the door silently and stood by it, sweating and trembling, walking a tightrope between incredulity and panic. *What will I do? he thought. Where will I go? This is not happening! It's not happening! I'm still dreaming and....and eventually I'll wake up. I'll wake up in my room, safe!* he thought desperately. He heard talking outside in the hallway. The noises startled him. Jack's eyes darted wildly about. He dashed upstairs and into his apartment, locking the door. The voices below were getting louder, more persistent. Footsteps were coming closer. Up the stairs. Jack's feet and legs felt as cold as ice and as heavy as logs. He staggered over to the bedroom, half expecting to see his material body soundly asleep in his bed. Frightened, he wanted desperately to believe that it was a dream, for it seemed too real, the coppery smell of fresh blood too raw to bear, but he knew that he was fully awake. Any minute now and they would be breaking the door down after him. He grabbed a jacket, got his wallet and shoes, opened a bedroom window and made his way down the fire escape. Down below in the alley was the old Monte Carlo, gleaming and polished. The car was empty, passenger's side door was wide open as if someone had just dashed inside a house to grab something. The keys were in the ignition. Above he could hear the screams of the police as they kicked in his door. He jumped in the car, slammed the door shut and started the ignition. The car started up instantly without much noise, the engine purring softly. He slammed his foot on the gas and drove off. He could see at least two police cars, sirens and lights rolling, pulling into the alley. More were approaching. Lights were coming on everywhere inside the apartment building. The walls were very thin. Folks heard all manner of business in the building. Other tenants peered out into the alley, gawking at the growing spectacle with curiosity. It wouldn't be long before everyone knew what he'd been up to.

"They're after you, Jack. Hot on your trail." A deep voice came from the back seat. Jack heard mocking laughter.

"Make a left turn here. Now." The voice commanded, the inflection and tone suddenly turned harsh, like Black Speech. The words lashed out and tore at him with a painful force, like a whip with razor tips. His hands immediately obeyed the order. A massive clump of blackberry bushes to his left twisted and pulled themselves into a tunnel opening, revealing a secret out from the alley. Jack turned left and floored the gas pedal.

"You should have been a drag racer, Jack." Jack looked up into the rear view mirror. There was his image sitting in the back. It was holding a long, elegant, cigar, the smoking end glowing fire red.

"Please keep your eyes on the road." He commanded again. Jack flinched and drove on down the road. The lights from the building and the sirens in the rear mirror grew dim and the road ahead looked very dark and unfamiliar. It

started to rain. Jack felt despondent. Wispy tendrils of smoke uncurled and floated from the backseat, spreading out towards him. The warm air inside the car smelled heavily of tobacco and copper.

“Where are we going?” He asked quietly.

“Home.”

“I just came from there.” His dapper reflection, now wearing a black Italian suit with a blood red tie just smiled its broad smile.

“I guess you've got a new one now.” Jack never knew he could be so gorgeous looking.

“I don't remember any deal. Why can't I remember it?” Jack said softly, more to himself.

“Ah. The crossroads. Don't feel too bad. Most folks don't. They block it out. No one likes to remember the desperation that drives them to such lengths. However, lest you think you've been forced into this, I don't have the power to hold anyone to a contract they don't agree with.”

“I agreed to be hunted down like a murderer?”

“You are a murderer.”

“I'm almost sure I never agreed to anything like this! I just wanted them gone! Out of my life!”

“You wanted the worst kind of revenge. But, like a typical coward, you hide from everything. Even your own desires. And they are quite dark. Jack.. I've been around for a very long time. Long enough to thoroughly understand the human heart and mind. I knew exactly what you wanted even if you didn't realize it was what you wanted. I'm a little disappointed. I would have thought you would have lived it up a little before your number came up. No matter now.” Jack felt numbness wash over him. He shook his head slowly in disbelief.

“You don't remember? It was burned into your contract like a brand of fire. Most people these days don't read anything anymore, do you?” It laughed harshly.

“Especially not the Bible. Let me remind you of our contract; “*For the soul of the flesh is in the blood, and I myself have put it upon the altar for you to make atonement for your souls, because it is the blood that makes atonement by the soul in it.*” Leviticus 17:11. In your case, the blood and the soul within it is payment for services rendered.” Jack felt his heart beat slow down. As if he were dying.

“You twisted that somehow.” He said quietly. Tendrils of smoke curled around his ears and neck. Soft laughter.

“Why blood?” Jack asked quietly. The reflection smiled its toothy smile, showing sharp canines.

“Because He always did take the best stuff for Himself. If He wants it, it must be good, I figure.”

“Are you a vampire?” Jack asked, he felt ragged and worn down. It shrugged.

“When it suits me.” Hot tears ran down Jack's face as his world was swallowed up by the heavy blackness before him. His heart felt nearly dead inside of him, leaden like the rain outside beating heavily on the windows.

“You know,” it said absently, “the mind can force the body to do ugly things. It animates your body, like a man controls a marionette. You asked me to get rid of the people who were making your life miserable. I did just that. We had no agreement in how it would be done, only that it would be done. It's a gross business, revenge, and these days, what with the amount of people requesting all sorts of wicked things from me daily - I prefer not getting my hands dirty anymore, if you know what I mean.” Silence.

“The dreams. . .” Jack said to himself. The voice started up again, softly this time.

“Yes. You haven't been sleeping well. You see, the brain has to dream in order to rid itself of all sorts of minutiae and prepare the mind for the next day, but you've been quite busy at night, Jack. Doing very bad things. You haven't had time to dream.”

There was another long, silence between them. Only the aggressive motor from the car and the heavy rain could be heard but to Jack even these things seemed impossibly far away.

“It wasn't supposed to happen this way,” Jack said weakly, his voice was ragged, barely audible, “you cheated.” Jack stared at the creature in the mirror. It looked hard at him for a long time, the expression unreadable. The irises were large and unfathomable, like black wells of ink.

“I'm the Devil.”

**By V. A. Jeffrey**

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