



**A Witch in the Nest**  
**Chapter 1: Not a Sound in the House**  
**By Jon Mallet**



*Petawawa Holiday Inn Express - Room 22*

*-Rapid bed squeaks-*

- Oh, Todd, yes! God, yes! Yes!*
- Come on. -groan- Come on.*

*-Slower bed squeaks-*

- Harder! Fuck me! Harder!*

*-Lazier bed squeaks-*

- No, no, no. -panting- Come on!*

*-One last desperate bead squeak-*

- Ugh. Fuck.*

*-Silence-*

- Damnit, damnit, damnit! -sigh- I can't, ok? I just can't do it! I can't cum, Johanne, fuck! Fuck! -bed squeak- Can't I ever get a fucking break, uh?*
- A break? Really? From what? Fucking prostitutes?*
- Yeah, yeah, real funny. -bed squeak- I need a break from my past is what I need, from what happened, 'cause every time I try to have a "little fun" to forget, those ugly days creep back in my mind and make me feel miserable.*

*Real miserable! -screech- Can you imagine? Uh? Can you imagine how it feels like to be doomed? To have no hope? No! -bed squeak- You can't! You can't even begin to imagine what it's like for me. The things I saw back there. -gasp- It fucked me up real good. Look at me. -bed squeak- I'm a broken man, Johanne, it broke me! It was the voices and it was the visions and it was the pain and the way...*

- *Yo, Todd babe, yo, chill out. Don't sweat it. It's ok, these things happen sometimes. Well, I mean, they always happen when I'm with you but, uh, you know, it's ok; I ain't got no feelings you can hurt.*
- *It ain't about you...*
- *Business is business and you're just a client. Let me be real with you: I don't really care if your dick doesn't work, or if you cry like a baby for an hour, -click- -click- -inhale- as long as I get paid, -exhale- I'm all there for you.*
- *You're so romantic, Johanne.*
- *Am I? -exhale- Really? Well, you booked me until ten so we still got about an hour to go. Here, I think we're done with the fucking for right now, I'll get you a beer and you can tell Jojo all about that big bad trauma that's stopping you from coming all over my big tits.*
- *Ok, ok, I get it. I get it. Spit it all out. You're right. You're right. But there's just one problem.*
- *What's the matter, Todd?*
- *I don't, eh, I don't drink. I mean, I can't drink, I just can't. We got any coffee?*
- *Oh. You're shitting me. -snigger- What are you? Preggo? I gotta say I'm surprised. You and I are not the same. But, eh, yeah, whatever floats your boat, as long as it gets you talking. I saw a coffee machine on the minifridge when I came in. I'll get it going.*
- *Geez Johanne. -bed creak- You're so nice to me. Thanks. And, uh... You think... Uh... You think I can bum a cigarette from you? Please? Thanks. Thank you so much. -click- -inhale-*

“So, it all started when Rosy bought this house out in the country, somewhere around Petawawa. You know Rosy, right? Moonwalk girl? About this tall? No? Haven’t seen that girl in some time; I wish she’d call me more often. I always kinda miss her but I don’t, you know what I mean? I really liked hanging out with Rosy; she made me feel so cool. She had all that I wanted in a girl: she could hold her liquor, she was cute and she was always nice to me. I would’ve done anything for her, and she knew it. We used to hang around a lot, but that was before the house. One day, her father, who’s this big shot real estate agent in Ottawa that knows everyone important around town, had a chat with one of his deputy friends. He got wind of a great deal on a house that hadn’t been put up for sale, yet. He rang up Rosy and told her about the place, a “long-term investment” he called it. The whole estate had been neglected for years and it needed some loving, but once the house got fixed up, she’d have a place to party all she wanted and could sell it in a few years for a profit.

Rosy knew that I’d been doing house repair jobs on the side with my uncle Tom to earn a little drinking money. That was two years ago but at the time, I was hanging out with Rosy and her crew and we were partying hard, real hard. Every night we’d be out there having shots, snorting coke, chugging kegs; I was turning into a train wreck just to impress her. And at some point I’d had enough. I was losing it, plain and simple. I needed a break from the lifestyle, you know, I couldn’t keep up. There’s a tax on your body when you hang out with a girl like Rosy. One night at this darkcore rave party, I popped like ten pills at the same time because I wanted Rosy to notice me. I ended up passing out on the dancefloor and woke up three days later in the hospital with severe tinnitus. My ears never stopped ringing since then, it’s always on like that.

- *Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep.*
- *Ok, Todd, I get it. I get your point.*
- *Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep.*
- *Stop!*

- *I can't! It never stops, Johanne, even if I wanted to! That's the whole point.*

When the ringing started is when I became more of an alcoholic than a druggie. The bourbon would numb some of the pain and made it somewhat bearable. I was real strung out by that point. For a very long time, I stayed inside my room with a pillow over my head, trying to mute out any noise coming in from the outside. The cars roaring by, the sirens, the jackhammers; Ottawa was just too damn loud for me. All I wanted was peace and tranquility; that's it. So, when Rosy suggested that I go to her new house to restore it because her dad said it needed some repairs, I took her up on it. I was also really glad to be of any help to Rosy. Anything for Rosy.

I borrowed my uncle's tools, picked up a few cases of Blue Ribbon, a few bottles of bourbon, and we were on our way. Rosy drove me down there to make sure I had everything I needed and to check out her new place for the first time. We were both surprised with how deep inside the woods the place actually was. You had to go down a gravel road, drive for some time, open an iron gate, cross a sketchy bridge, more woods, go around a hill, more gravel road and there it was, in the middle of nowhere.

As soon as we got out of the car, we were welcomed by this chilling October wind. Most of the trees had lost their leaves; they looked like long skeleton fingers waving at us. There were also a few crows flying around the roof like they already lived there. To tell you the truth, the whole mood was a bit scary, but it was calm so I didn't mind. My ears finally got some rest.

We unpacked everything. The vibe inside the house wasn't all that great, it didn't feel welcoming. Rosy warmed up a pizza in the old rusty stove while I settled upstairs in the only bedroom of the house. My cot felt so tiny in the giant room that took up most of the second floor. All the windows of the house had been barricaded with plywood so it was already pretty dark inside even though it wasn't night yet. Rosy had a rosé and I had a beer

and we had dinner. She told me everything her dad had told her about the house. The owner, some guy called Mr. Tremblay, had passed away about two weeks before Rosy bought the place. He lived all alone by himself so they had brought in a company to clean out the place. They threw out most of the stuff, but not all of it. She told me that I could keep whatever I found; that she didn't care. We finished eating and it was getting late. I was secretly hoping Rosy would stay for the night but she had some party in town to go to. She told me she'd be back in a few days but she'd be keeping in touch until then.

As she was leaving, I remember how the lights all the way down the hallway leading outside kept on flashing because the bulbs were so old; they needed to be changed. Rosy looked around one last time and straight up asked me: *"Are you sure you're still ok with being all alone out here? I mean, I can bring you back home if you want, I'd understand."* I didn't want to lose face with Rosy, I wanted her to think I was cool; so I shotgunned a beer and told her I'd take care of everything. She didn't need to worry about me. Once I'd fixed up the place, we'd throw some wild *ragers* out here, real big parties. *"Don't sweat it Rosy. I've got enough beers to last me a week,"* is the last thing I told her. Now that I know how things turned out, if there's one thing that I've come to regret was that exact moment, when I still had a chance to leave. If I'd listened to my instincts instead of my hormones, I wouldn't be the mess that I am today."

- *Hold on a second there Todd, you're going too fast, what was the house like?*
- *Mmmm... Well... The house was very big and very old, that's for sure. If it didn't look all beaten up like it did, it would've made for a nice mansion in the woods, but, you know; it felt haunted.*
- *You make it sound like it was pretty scary in there...*
- *It was. It felt like the place had been abandoned for years. The paint was peeling off from the walls, some doors were unhinged, there was dust everywhere.*
- *Didn't you say a guy used to live in there?*

- *That's the thing, I can't believe someone would live like that. Most of the furniture had been removed, so it was pretty empty in there, but even then, the place still felt like it had seen things. It was so unnerving just to be there.; like Mr. Tremblay was still hiding inside the walls. The man had lived in there for more than twenty years and had left it in ruins. That just told me it wasn't a good place to hang around if you know what I mean.*
- *Oh, I get it,, I get it, you were all alone all by yourself and you were shitting your pants. -snigger- Go on.*
- *Yeah, yeah, you can laugh all you want, but you weren't there. Whatever. Can I bum a cig? -click- -click- -inhale- Thanks Johanne...*

"Rosy's car vanished into the woods, and I was left all alone with the house as my only friend in the middle of fucking nowhere. I was already pretty drunk by then and called it a night. All was quiet outside, the ringing in my ears was just a distant droning buzz. I downed some more bourbon and got ready to pass out for a good night's sleep.

For some reason, when I had left my apartment that morning, I kind of expected there would be bedsheets, or a proper bed for me to sleep in, but that was not what happened. I slept in a cot on the wooden floor with a tiny polar blanket that barely covered my arms. The house got cold at night, ball-freezing cold. I couldn't sleep. With my headlight on, I looked around the vast bedroom. The place was mostly empty except for a few piles of old smelly clothes and newspapers scattered here and there on the floor. I also found an old cast iron radiator. The thing must've been ancient, it looked like it belonged in a museum. I cranked it up and prayed that it would work properly. Heat came out of the radiator and it began to feel warm at last. I moved my cot next to it and got real close to falling asleep, but just before I did...

A loud BANG! I almost had a heart attack!

I hid under my blanket.



I couldn't move; I was petrified. My ears started ringing real loud. I thought I was hearing voices behind the noise. Was I really alone out here? I tell you Johanne, my imagination just went wild.

*Bang! Bang! Bang!*

What the hell was I supposed to do? Wait and get jumped on by some fucking maniac? I had to act, you know, I had to do something about it. What were my other options anyway? Get tortured? Get killed? So I counted to three and started punching at the darkness in front of me, yelling my lungs out because I was so scared.

*Bang! Bang! Bang!*

As you can imagine, Johanne, I didn't hit anything, there was nothing; I was standing all alone in the dark.

*Bang! Bang! Bang!*

There was a rhythm to it almost like a groove, -finger snap- and that's when I understood. I took out my headlamp and lit up the radiator. It was tilted to the side. The steam inside couldn't circulate properly through the pipes; so it banged. Easy science. All I needed to do was to level it back up and the steam would flow through again, it would shut up.

By that point I was already wide awake, and I knew the noise would keep me from ever sleeping. So, I got a beer, got my tools and got to work.

I loosened the nut from the valve, unplugged the radiator, packed some boards under to elevate the structure, checked the level, plugged it back in and tightened the nut. It sounds like an easy job but it's usually a two men's job, and that radiator was big and heavy. I was dead tired when I was all done but felt like I'd earned a good night's sleep. But before that, I took one last good look at the radiator, and when I did, I noticed something strange. Some of the pipes were kinda twisted in an angle like that, like something or someone had pulled the antique radiator away from the wall.

The rough metal was covered in scratches. But that's not all, the wooden floor under it was also damaged, like it had been clawed real hard with fingernails."

- *What the fuck Todd? What's your problem, you weirdo. Why would you stay in a place like that? I would've gotten the hell out of there!*
- *To go where? To go out and get lost in the woods in the middle of the night? No thanks. I had a shot of bourbon to keep my cool, and reasoned out that maybe the owner had a dog at some point and that maybe he had kept it on a leash, or something. I mean, it explained everything.*
- *Yeah, I guess. -exhale- I don't know.*
- *Well, it was good enough for me, I was too tired to think it all the way through anyway...*

"I fell asleep in no time but it was an uneasy sleep. I kept having this weird dream where I was lying down on my cot, in the dark, next to the radiator. I would see this silhouette with long blond hair that strolled around, in and out of the room. I would hear the wind blowing outside and the sound of wings flapping in the distance. The buzzing in my ears grew stronger and stronger as the night went on and my mind became saturated with noise.

When I woke up the next day, it felt like I hadn't slept at all. I felt like shit. I had bourbon and pizza leftovers for breakfast and got back on the job. At around noon, I was painting in the kitchen when Rosy called to check up on me and the house. I told her I was getting used to the place, but I didn't say anything about the hallucinations from the night before.

"Good for you, I'm glad you like it down there," she said to me, and then she started going on about how she had stopped for gas in Petawawa on her way back from the house. When she told the gas lady she was the new owner of Mr. Tremblay's old house, they started chatting. She learned Mr. Tremblay had always been some kind of an urban legend in Petawawa. No one knew much about him, except that he had moved out in the woods around ten years ago and that he never really left his place. He only came

into town from time to time to pack up on food and check in on his mail. That's it. *"He weren't the kind'a guy who talked too much, really. Yes, no, thanks; that's about it. He always had this same dirty flannel shirt on and this black leather eyepatch that covered his missing eye. Only thing that changed on him as the years went by was how long his beard was."* The cashier said word around town was that he was under some kind of witness protection program. Others said he was working on some secret project. But no one really knew, they were just rumors.

- *Wait a minute there. So you're telling me this dude with a missing eye lived there all alone in that dump for ten years like some kind of loner?*
- *Not too fast, Johanne, not too fast. I never said he was all alone all by himself. Mr. Tremblay also had a wife, and she was almost as much of a legend as he was, but for very different reasons.*
- *Well good for her, I guess.*
- *No, not good for her. Hey, think I can bum you another smoke? I'll get you a new pack, come on. Thanks...*

"Rosy's story got even worse when she told me about the wife. Only one person in town had ever seen her, and that was the woman from the gas station. Mr. Tremblay had stopped by to fill up his tank on the first day they moved into town. She was waiting in that old Chevy of his, and all that's known about her is that she had beautiful blond hair and that she was very pretty."

- *Blonde hair? Get outta here. This is creeping me out even more.*
- *You're not the only one. -sigh- Anyway.*

"About a year ago there was an emergency at the house, an ambulance down from Pembroke was brought in. The gas lady knows the medic that was on call that night, and he told her that Mrs. Tremblay was already dead by the time they got to her. *"Snip snip as they say. She slit her wrist in the bathtub. The whole town got to learn her name from the obituary in the*

*Petawawa Post that weekend: Marianne Tremblay*". The thought of someone killing herself in a house I was now alone in scared me the fuck out. It all happened a long time ago, but still... It didn't make me feel any better, that's for sure. After that, I stopped using the bathroom, from then on, I pissed outside.

Rosy hung up. I was back to being all alone, so I got to work, and kept on working as hard as I could so I wouldn't think too much about how much of a fucked up place this was. I was painting in the bedroom and it got cloudy outside; it got dark. The lights started to flicker and went out. I had my headlamp on but it was old and weak, I couldn't see properly. At some point I zoned out and my mind started to wander: *"If there was a violent death in the house, it means there could be a ghost hiding somewhere..."* I wasn't a big believer in the paranormal back then but the idea got me uneasy; so I had some more beers and a shot to calm down my nerves. The alcohol worked great for some time, but later on, as I was filling in the holes in the walls with plaster, the thought came back. *"Ok, so let's suppose there was a ghost standing right here in this room with me; could it whisper words in my ear? Maybe it would make noises or maybe it would move stuff around just to scare me..."*

Tap... Tap... Tap...

I heard tapping over my head so I looked up, but all I could see was the flaky paint on the ceiling.

Tap... Tap... Tap...

It was still day outside but dark as the night in that damn chamber. Even with the headlight on, I couldn't make out the other side of the room because it was so big. I started running around like a madman, panicking, looking all around for a clue.

Tap... Tap... Tap...

The walls were all the same, the plywood windows were sealed shut with rusty nails, I couldn't explain what I was hearing. It got me nervous. Then I reasoned, if the tapping came from above me, this meant there might be a room upstairs.

Tap... Tap... Tap...

I carefully examined the texture on the ceiling until I found a square frame pattern in a corner, a hatch leading up to the attic. I didn't want to go, but I had to, just so my imagination would shut up. You know what I mean, right? So I got a chair, I pushed the panel down, had a quick shot for courage and made my way up the stairs. A cold wind outside whistled through the roof; I could feel how big the place really was. The air was heavy with dust, I could smell it, no one had been in there for a very long time.

Tap... Tap... Tap...

The attic was pitch black, except for a weak beam of light in the distance. The closer I got to it, the more I understood what had really happened. A cross porthole window, they're the round ones with a cross in the middle, it was flapping because the wind outside had loosened the locking mechanism. I removed two of the broken screws, added two new ones, I solidified the metal plate, anchored the lock, closed the window, and slid the hook in to make sure it stayed put. The wind outside howled but the window remained shut. There was no ghost.

As soon as I fixed up the window, I wanted to get out of that stuffy attic, so I made my way back to the stairs but couldn't remember where it was. I walked around for a bit, being extra careful not to fall down the hatch. That's when I stumbled on a few boxes stacked on the wall. Curiosity got the best of me so I looked at what was inside.

The first thing I put my hands on was an old vintage photo album, it was full of pictures of Mr. Tremblay and a bunch of dirty people, I'm guessing

they were his friends; they were all dressed up in these gross animal costumes drenched in what must have been blood. They were together for group selfies like they were all tripping balls at a party or something, or like they were possessed. All of the pictures had been taken from inside the house too, I could see the kitchen and the bedroom, and the attic; right where I was, all by myself. -sigh- There was one of them that had a guy in a rat costume cutting off the head of a cat with a knife. The photos got weirder and weirder, like I was really hoping they were fake. They were terrifying. -groan- I don't even wanna talk about that, I barely even remember anyway. Whatever. I wanted to get the fuck out of there but there was another box. I couldn't just leave it there.

As you can imagine, it got weirder. In the other box I found a mason jar filled with nail clippings and another one filled with blond locks of hair. I gagged a little and threw them back inside the box. I turned around and something shined on the wall because of my headlamp. So I took a good look at it. -cough- Welded to the wall, there was this stainless steel plate with this huge eye hook bolt in the middle. They use these things to attach boats for chrissake. I pulled as hard as I could on that bolt, and I mean, I'm not a big guy but I'm pretty strong, and even then, I couldn't move it; not even a tiny bit.

"My belly groaned and I didn't want to think about what I'd just seen. The sun was already going down and I hadn't eaten anything solid that day. The beer kept me going but I was starving. As I went downstairs, down to the kitchen, Rosy called me up. She'd just talked with her father that afternoon, he'd woken her up. He felt bad because he hadn't been fully sincere about the whole house thing. He wanted to come clean. *"But hey it was too good of a deal to let it fly by like that. We're family. If I'd a told you everything about the house, I don't know if you'd a bought it, eh?"* I started getting a real bad feeling. He continued on, telling Rosy about the pieces of evidence his buddy the cop had shown him. *"The walls were covered with pictures of elaborate scenes that the guy and his wife had played out. I saw them,*

*and let me tell ya Rosy, let me tell ya, I get chills just thinking about it! Real degenerates!"* Rosy didn't go into too much detail but she said they would've made for some rad horror movie posters. I knew there were other pictures but I didn't say anything. *"The guy had been dead for a few days when they found him hanging under the beam in the kitchen."* I dropped my phone when she said that. I was right there, Johanne, under that exact fucking beam! *"He'd been decomposing for some time already, the bugs were in him alright. He didn't leave anything, no notes, no nothing. Sheesh! Can you believe that guy? And it all happened like, what, two weeks ago?"* I was about to pass out when Rosy asked me if I was doing ok over there. I tried to laugh it off, I said the whole story was killing my vibe, but more seriously I was almost out of screws and I needed more. That was a lie. *"Ok, Todd, I hear y'a, we'll get more, no prob. Here's what I'll do: there's this rad dubstep DJ from Thunder Bay coming in tonight, so I could come by and pick you up tomorrow? When I wake up? Cool? All good then, I'm sorry for all this, Todd, you're the coolest! Hang in there"* And then she hung up."

- *Hang in there? Hang in there? Come on Rosy, really?*
- *You know what? I just realized something. Looking back on the whole thing, I don't think Rosy cared for me after all.*
- *Wow. -applauses- We got a fucking mind reader over here!*
- *Yeah, yeah. Whatever. Give me another smoke.*

"I had enough booze to last me the week but I was leaving the next day, and I needed to *hang in there* until then, so I got into some serious heavy drinking. That whole time I was chugging, I tried to ignore the beam Mr. Tremblay had used to off himself, but the more I tried to ignore it, the more I kept thinking about the whole scene: his body swinging, the rope creaking. There was no escaping it. For some reason I started singing *twinkle twinkle little star* real loud to cover over some of the terror that was growing inside of me. After some therapeutic screaming and more self-medication, I got my cool back. It was only one last night after all; I'd

be out of there in no time. What's the worst that could happen? Right? Right?

Pasta was on the menu that night so I took out my camping pan, cracked one up, took a sip, and turned on the tap. Water filled my pot until it got halfway full, and then it stopped. No more water.

Rummm... Rummm... Rummm...

Somewhere, in the house, a motor rumbled. My first thought was that someone was cranking up a chainsaw, but I knew it was just my imagination playing tricks on me. I closed the tap; only silence and a faraway ringing in my ears. I turned the tap on again.

Rummm... Rummm... Rummmmm...

A week before that, I'd been with my uncle on a job and we'd had the same exact problem; the water pump was jammed. It was an easy fix, and I knew I would be needing water before the next day anyway, I had no excuse. I just had to find the water pump and the sound came from under my feet. That's when I realized that the house had a basement. Fuck.

I looked all around the kitchen and on the first floor. It had to be somewhere. There was this door in the hallway that I had mistaken for a closet when I first came to the house but it led downstairs, straight into the dark. Let me tell you Johanne, I really didn't feel like going down there. I needed more courage because I was sobering up too fast, so I downed a long swig of bourbon, and walked into the unknown.

That basement was damp, you could almost feel the mold going into your lungs. There were no windows, so it was as black as a cave in there. The walls were made of rocks and were dripping wet, you could hear water droplets falling down. You could also hear squeaky sounds running all around you. I couldn't see any rats because they hid so well, but I could feel their presence alright. I tried to ignore them as best I could and looked



around for the water pump. A quick fix and then I was out of there, back to pasta night, or so I thought.

I walked straight into a puddle of mysterious syrupy water. My feet were all wet but I found the pump in a corner, next to a pile of garbage bags. In my mind I was like: *"Fuck! I don't even want to know what's hiding in there!"*, but in reality, I just shrugged it off and got to work. By that point, all I wanted to do was eat, get smashed and pass out.

I checked on the filter. It was doing just fine, so it was a pipe problem. I pulled the plug out, took out my wrench, unplugged the pipe, and put my hand inside the hole to remove whatever was jamming the whole system. Oh Johanne, let me tell you, I felt it right away, I felt that fucking thing against my skin alright. It was all thick and gooey and sticky, like snotty hair or fur or something. I'm almost gagging again just thinking about it. And the smell, oh my, the smell. -cough- Bleh. At the time I thought it was a dead decomposed rat or something. I didn't look at it, I threw it on the floor as soon as it came out of the pipe. It splashed water from that dark puddle all over the place and I jumped away so I wouldn't get soaked. I fell to the side, straight into the pile of garbage bags and got to see what was hiding inside.

Oh, how can I describe what I found? One of them was full of old school cameras and rolls of film. But in the other box... Yeah, in the other box... Masks and costumes; but not just any masks and costumes: gross masks, scary costumes. Real evil stuff, Johanne, I just wanted to run away, but I still had to plug the pump back in or I wouldn't have any running water. I started singing really loud, more like shouting, reconnected the whole thing in a flash and ran away, tail between my legs. To this day, my wrench is still somewhere down there.

First thing I did once I got back in the kitchen was crack open a bottle of bourbon and down about half of it in one go. I got hammered alright, had problems standing up from all the liquor. Last thing I can remember before

passing out on the floor was: *"You can go to sleep now, Todd. Everything's fixed, nothing can bother you anymore, not a sound in the house. Not a sound in the house... -burst of tears- Oh, Johanne."*

- *Oh... Come here Todd, my big cry baby. Here. Put your face here; right in between my big tits. Uh, uh. Just like that. Yes. It'll make you feel better. Poor baby. -muffled sobs- I don't know what I would've done after going through all that shit...*
- *Wait. You think that's the end? You think a good scare would've scarred me for life? What's your problem? -bed squeak- Are you calling me a scaredy cat? Are you laughing at me? Is that it?*
- *Gosh, calm the fuck down, dude. I thought that was it, it felt like the end. How could I know, uh?*
- *Ok, ok, ok. I'm calming down, look. I'm calm now. Good? I get anxious when I talk about that place. Fuck. I can't control it. Hey, think I could ask for another smoke? I'm getting all jittery, look. I swear to god, I'll get you a new pack after that.*
- *Yeah, yeah, sure, go for it, I don't care, it's yours now. I'll add it to your bill. -beep- By the way, coffee's ready. -liquid trickling- Cream? Sugar?*
- *Nah, just black... Thanks...*

*"That night, the house became dead silent, but for some reason, I couldn't rest in peace. I mean, I was sleeping on a hard cot but that wasn't it. I kept having all those scary dreams about Mr. Tremblay roaming around the house, wearing different masks, looking for me. At some point I was under the sink hiding for my life, when he surprised me; he croaked into my ear. I turned around and there he was with a crow mask on, croaking through his long crooked beak, looking at me like he was about to eat me. And then I woke up. My head was about to explode, I was so hungover Johanne, you wouldn't believe. The ringing was real loud too and my mouth was dry. All I wanted then was a big glass of cool water.*

I got up after a few tries, found an empty beer can, and filled it with water. The kitchen tap ran on for a few seconds and then stopped, again. I drank it all blind but there were some mushy chunks at the bottom and I barfed all over the sink. I was dehydrated as hell, dizzy; water was all I could think about. I'd just fixed the damn pump down in that fucking basement, so this meant the problem came from the water tank outside.

Something inside my mouth tickled, an intruder between my cheeks. I caught it with my teeth and pulled it out with my fingers. It slid all along, from deep inside my throat to the tip of my tongue; a long blonde hair.

I gagged hard because my stomach was already empty and got a beer to change the taste. I had to fix this water problem right now even if it meant I had to go outside in the freezing cold at night. I really didn't feel like it but I got a few tools, my headlamp, a bottle of bourbon, and I headed outside to finish the job."

- *Hey Johanne, you know what'd be real nice right now? A rum and coke. Man, that'd be good. -sip- I can already feel the warm bite in my throat...*
- *Fuck that, it ain't worth it. I'm telling you, as a friend, don't go there.*
- *Really? As a friend?*
- *Nah. Hahaha. I'm fucking with you. -click- I'm a business woman. This is the real world, partner. -inhale- All I care for is your money. The more you drink, the less money you have to spend on me. Simple maths.*
- *But I feel so miserable right now, I just want to forget about that house. Come on Johanne, if you give me a drink I'll take it, even just a tiny little sip.*
- *Hey! I'm not your mother, I won't stop you, but you can finish your story without any booze. Be a man, Todd, prove it.*
- *You don't understand, I just want this last part to go away, like all of this never happened you know? I have flashbacks about it every day. I'm stuck with that moment until I die. What should I do about it, uh? Tell me. -bed squeak- What should I do? Put an end to it all?*

- *Fuck, man. -bed squeak- How many times do I have to tell you? Chill out, dude. There's still plenty of time left, don't stress it. Light up another smoke, drink another coffee, I don't know whatever works for you man.*
- *"Ok, ok. Got it. You're right. I can do this. -sip- I'm almost done; there's no point in stopping now. -sigh- Fuck it.*

"So, the water tank was in the backyard outside hiding under a pile of dead leaves. I'd forgotten my gloves inside the house and was already getting pretty cold. A strong wind pushed the trees around, I could feel the night frost through my bones. You know how freezing it gets out here in November. The access to the tank was right next to the patio. Don't forget, it's an old house, it ain't up to today's standards, that cement tank was much deeper than it should've been. I removed the lid and peeked inside with my head to take a look. I couldn't see a thing, but I could hear ice cracking down there, like whispers.

I turned on my headlamp. There was water down there and most of it looked slushy. I spotted a dark stain floating in one of the corners, but I couldn't figure out what it was. Using a long branch I tried to remove whatever was blocking the drain pipe in the corner but it wouldn't move. Because of how fucked up I was, I reached in a bit too far and kinda miscalculated my distances. I started skidding like an idiot, but it was already too late: I fell down inside the tank.

There was about two feet of water at the bottom; my clothes got all wet. I hurt my arm in the fall and hit my face on my knee. My ears got loud, I started seeing stars. And that damn bourbon was still up there! Fuck me. I couldn't just cry for help, nobody was around. The only way out from the tank was standing right there above my head; a black hole where I could see the moon, and the stars, and the ladder I hadn't lowered. That stupid stupid ladder, I couldn't just wait, I had to do something. I panicked and I jumped to grab the corner but I ended up falling and snapped my ankle. I

couldn't get out anymore! Can you imagine? -banging on the wall- I couldn't get out!"

-long silence-

- Todd? Todd? -finger snap- Hello?
- Uh! Fuck, I think I zoned out.
- Look at you, you're sweating like a pig, man. What's your problem?
- Yeah, -cough- I don't feel so good.
- Need a bucket? Just in case? I'm telling you right now, I hate vomit.
- Nah, -cough- I just need to finish the story, get it out of my system, you know? And then maybe I'll feel better, I really hope I do because right now -cough- I ain't flying so high. -bed squeak- Give me another cig Johanne, now! I need another cigarette.
- Woah Todd! Aren't you a fucking gentleman.
- I'm sorry, it's not you, it's not what I meant. It came out wrong. Look, it's like I'm back there all over again! Stuck in that freezing water tank! And for how long? Uh? For how long? Fuck. Fuck!

"My whole body shivered from the cold wet. My teeth clacked. Out of desperation, I started screaming as hard as I could for some help. I knew no one would hear me but I was already going mad. And then... -panting- And then the buzzing in my ears started to answer; it whispered to me. "Don't scream like that. Shush. Don't scream or he will come back..." And that's when I saw it, right in the corner of the tank: a bloated corpse floating. -silence- It looked like a small corpse, but it was hard to tell because it was pretty dark and I could only see its back. It started deflating like a balloon as soon as it surfaced, the place reeked of decomposition. Long blond hair floated up from deep down under and the body fully flipped around. I came face to face with the little girl, or whatever was left of her. -sigh- Most of her... her head and part of her brain had been sucked in by the pump. She was the reason why there was no running water. All that time, I hadn't

been alone in the house and the voice in my ears just kept on getting louder and louder...

I mean, I had gone there to fix the place up, but that house was broken beyond repair, and it ended up breaking me.

Rosy came back to pick me up late the next evening and found me stuck down there in a state of total psychosis, I was barely alive by then..."

- *Johanne, can I have your lighter? Thanks.*
- *This is so fucking messed up, Todd, what happened down there? What did you see?*
- *Oh, Johanne, I'll never talk about that. Oh no... Never. I couldn't describe it anyway. -click- -click- I can only remember and hope to forget it all one day. -very long inhale- But I'll be dead long before that ever happens. -exhale-*

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