

TERROR IN THE CLOSET

By Ken Broadway

The night the dresser spit the drawers out, spewing socks and underwear all over my darkened bedroom was enough to scare the beejezus from me.

But it was the following night that I came totally unglued.

"Careful Robert," Mrs. Bellman had warned me, wagging an aged digit at my face while snatching the first month's rent from my open palm.

"Things have been known to happen here," she said, punctuating the word *happen* as if it were some sort of secret that she wasn't supposed to let on.

Taking the money, she said no more before turning her decrepit frame and leaving me standing in the doorway of the attic apartment.

Figuring that her age and lack of social contact had come to infect her brain, I shrugged it off, giving it not another thought as I went about setting up my new life in the dinky flat.

Guess maybe I should have paid more attention to the old woman.

Not long after settling in, Mrs. Bellman's words began to ring true...things began to happen. Small stuff, hardly noticeable, still, they were things.

Searching for my keys in the morning, for example, I would come across them lying on the floor under the window, or beneath the couch.

Those things could happen to anyone, (though probably not as often as they were happening to me,) but then, I had been under a lot of stress lately, changing jobs and moving on short notice and such.

Oh, and there was the time that the television in the living room decided to up and change channels on its own

accord while I was in the kitchen. But power bumps, even minute ones, can effect odd behavior in electrical appliances.

For the record, I've never been a supernatural fanatic. There are things that we don't understand of course, but I just never had much interest in delving into the occult.

If in fact losing my keys, or the television acting strangely were connected to the beyond, then so be it.

Outside of the occasional nuisance though, nothing that happened around my apartment those first weeks was actually what I would call paranormal.

It wasn't until the past couple of nights that things had gotten really freaky.

The dresser drawers had literally sailed through the dark of the bedroom. One of them, a smaller, top drawer had just missed me, turning in the air and spilling its contents all over the place as it raced past my head, before bouncing off the wall and landing on the bed.

In stark shock, with my heart jumping out of my chest, I stared at the thing, motionless in front of me.

After a moment, when I could breathe again, I moved myself cautiously to the edge of the bed, placing first one

foot among the scattered drawers, making sure not to step on anything, then the other foot, then finally stood up.

Normally, dresser drawers don't just fly out all by themselves, but I had one hell of time convincing myself at that moment, because, right in front of me they were strewn everywhere, most overturned, one of the larger ones standing on end against the corner of the wall opposite the window.

Hightailing it to the living room, I spent the rest of that night in an uneasy way, with the lights and the late-night black and whites keeping me company, while straining to hear anything coming from the bedroom.

Sleep must have finally won out because the next thing I was aware of was jerking awake to the room basking in late morning.

Daytime television was in full swing as Alex Trebek said something about four hundred.

The back of my neck felt like iron.

Rubbing the kinks out, I realized that I had been dreaming something about Mrs. Bellman, but I couldn't remember it exactly.

All at once, it dawned in my fuzzy, as of yet uncaffeinated brain...THE BEDROOM!

Racing to the doorway, I stopped dead, in disbelief. The room was empty...that is to say that it was clean. No drawers on the floor, no piles of clothing anywhere.

Turning my head slowly, partly because of the pain, partly out of apprehension, to peer around the frame, I saw that the drawers were stacked neatly in the dresser, just where they belonged.

The bed was made up with no trace that I had ever laid upon it.

"What the???" I uttered, my voice dying in my throat.

Had I dreamt it all?

Was I losing it?

Did I just need coffee?

Gathering myself as best I could, I ambled to the kitchen, still bewildered.

The strong dark smell of brewing coffee was almost enough to bring me back to my senses, and, rejuvenated by the first cup, I sat, elbows on the table and tried to look at the evidence rationally.

That something incredibly...well...strange had happened was seemingly undeniable, but I found myself in a muddle.

The drawers had been thrown from the dresser, I knew, because I was there, I told myself. One of them just missed taking off a piece of my forehead.

Yet, on the other hand, there was absolutely nothing amiss, at least anything that I could detect, in the bedroom this morning.

Which, on the third hand--if there was such a thing--would disprove the flying drawers in the first place, unless they had simply reversed themselves right back into the dresser at some point when I was out of the room. I had awakened in the living room, true, but that really proved nothing either, because I sometimes fall asleep there, though I normally make my way to bed at some point.

My bed showed no signs that I'd slept in it and there was no way I would spend any amount of time making it up before my morning coffee.

I remembered (or at least thought I remembered) the horrific events of the previous night in living color, but my tidy bedroom was the only tangible proof of anything, and it pointed overwhelmingly in the opposite direction.

So, with the last swig of my coffee, the decision was made: it had been a nightmare, nothing more, and I let it go at that...at least I tried to let it go at that.

Passing Mrs. Bellman later, on the first floor, I retrieved my mail from the slender slot on the wall with my name on it. "Good afternoon Mrs. Bellman," I said, greeting her politely, mail in hand, attempting to pass her in the narrow hall.

"Robert, are you sleeping well?" she inquired, in the formal, call-you-by-your-proper-first-name way that old ladies do, striking me uncomfortably.

"Uh...yeah," I stammered, "Sure, and yourself?"

"Oh...fine Robert...thanks for asking," she said waving at me, sounding somehow ingenuine.

Was she mocking me?

Or, perhaps I was still jumpy, due to my recent nocturnal experiences.

Either way, it made no difference because by the time she was back in her apartment, I was already gone, rushing up the stairs to my own.

Something about that old woman just made me want to bolt.

That night, I stripped and climbed into bed with a nervous eye on the dresser.

I was being silly of course, I told myself switching off the light; it had been no more than a bad dream, probably brought on by something I ate...right?

Still, I wondered at the vague gnawing in my middle.

Was I being watched?

That was ridiculous.

I was giving myself the jeepers for nothing, and, putting it out of my mind, I slept.

"Robbie..."

I was startled awake by a voice. I must have been dreaming again, I thought, sitting up in the dark.

"Robbie...wake up."

That was no dream.

"Robbie...hey, wake up!"

The voice, sounding like a young boy, was coming from the closet.

But that was impossible!

"Robbie, can you play?"

Oh good Jesus...I pinched myself hard...it hurt.

This was insane.

A scratching sound on the door, then...

"C'mon Robbie..."

"Won't you play with me?"

"Robbie?"

Holy Fucking Shit...

Lying still as I could, not daring a breath, I pinched myself again and it hurt again. I was awake...awake, not dreaming.

Suddenly, I had to pee.

"Hey Robbie, it's dark in here..."

Terror squeezed my bowels. I wanted to bolt and run and scream.

"Are you scared Robbie? I bet you're scared of the dark, and dead people, huh, Robbie, are you scared of dead people?"

"You know what Robbie, I'm dead...I'm dead and I'm in your closet! What do you think about that?"

My mind rolled over in my skull...

"Robbie, if you won't come in here, I'm gonna come out and get you! I'm gonna come right out of this closet and get you Robbie. I'm dead, and I'm gonna GET YOU!"

Suddenly, the dead boy screeched hysterically.

"ROBBIE!! ROBBIE!! ROBBIE!!"

Over and over--the screeching--the pounding on the door--till it shook. Any second now, I feared it would burst open, and I would have to see inside...and I didn't want to...with all of my heart threatening to leap from my chest, I didn't want to.

"FUCK YOU ROBBIE! YOU WON'T PLAY WITH ME!"

"FUCKER...I'M DEAD ROBBIE, DO YOU HEAR ME!"

The door blasted open, banging off the wall, as I swallowed my tongue, unable to scream.

My bladder let go in a torrent and I peed myself hard.

"HERE I COME ROBBIE! I'M GONNA GET YOU!"

Snatching the covers over myself, I curled into a fetal position, shuddering and jerking with pure terror, as the dead boy screamed maniacally.

Rushing from the closet, he pounded across the floor to the bed where I cowered, praying for it to stop; praying that it wasn't real; praying that the dead boy from the closet would leave me alone.

Balling myself tighter I waited to feel his small, grimy, dead hands clawing into my body.

But they didn't.

In an instant, the room fell silent.

Surrounded by the fear-filled odor of my own urine, I hid--straining to listen over the pounding in my ears...was he waiting for me to look?

Without warning, the covers were yanked from my body, and in that instant, my bowels loosed.

"LEAVE ME ALONE!" I screamed, flopping over on my back and flailing my arms in front of me...expecting to see the

abominable apparition of a dead boy, reaching to rip me apart.

But instead, Mrs. Bellman stood there, next to the bed, holding my pee soaked blanket.

"Robert," she asked in that sweet, phony, old lady voice, "Are you okay? I heard you screaming, downstairs, and when you didn't answer, I let myself in."

Sitting naked, on the bed, exposed and terrified, shivering in my own soil, my brain struggled to comprehend.

"Robert, did you see something?"

Dumbstruck, I pointed at the closet and stuttered something unintelligible.

"The closet?" she asked, turning to look.

The door was closed again.

"But...it was," I stammered finally, teeth clacking.

"Robert, are you all right?"

Mrs. Bellman placed a leathery hand on my sweaty forehead and asked me softly, "Do you have a fever?"

"There...there was boy...a dead boy..."

"A dead boy?" she repeated, "Where?"

I felt like screaming at the top of my lungs, "THERE WAS A GODDAMN, FUCKING DEAD BOY IN MY CLOSET YOU SHIT FOR BRAINS OLD BITCH! DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND! HE WAS GOING TO GET ME!"

But all I could do was tremble, at first, and then weep.

A small snicker escaped the closet.

Turning towards it, she called out, "RITCHIE! IS THAT YOU! YOU COME OUT HERE THIS INSTANT!"

Slowly, the door swung open, and a boy of no more than eight or nine emerged, giggling and laughing from the dark.

"Richie, you little bugger, have you been hiding in the closet, scaring the pants off of Robert all this time?"

With that, she turned back to face me.

But it was too late--I had already fainted, dead away.

End.