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The Taste Of Blood

Written by Matias Travieso-Diaz | 👁 Hits: 13



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Blood is really warm, it's like drinking hot chocolate but with more screaming.

Ryan Mecum

Todd's descent into madness occurred slowly, year after year of accumulating misery. His life had gone on autopilot; he drifted from a meaningless job to another and shed relatives and friends little by little without even noticing.

He developed a routine. At the end of every work day, he would leave the shop or office and pick up some fast food. He would take the dinner to his barren apartment and would eat it slowly, masking its blandness with beer, while he watched the news and the early evening game shows. After dinner, he would go online and surf through the social sites; he would then play a couple of rounds of video games, at the end of which he would turn to the prime-time TV shows. If a football or basketball game was being broadcast, he would watch it while he smoked a couple of cigarettes and drank more beer.

Weekends differed from workdays only in that during the week Todd had to get out of the apartment to do whatever was necessary to earn a paycheck, whereas on Saturdays and Sundays he would, weather permitting, go on a solitary walk to a park some distance from his apartment complex. There, he would sit on a bench by the pond and stare vacantly at the birds hunting for morsels under the waters and the turtles in their ponderous transit along the muddy banks. Children would ride by Todd on their bikes, joggers would pant back and forth on the path a few inches from his bench, walkers would stride by. He hardly noticed the human traffic and paid no attention to it.

Todd was unconsciously isolating himself from the outside world. He was deactivating many of his mental functions leaving only those of the "old brain" where the most primitive instincts reside: hunger, sex drive, self-preservation.

The few people with whom Todd interacted were co-workers who suffered from similar emotional handicaps as he. One of Todd's most frequent companions was a young man five years his junior named Zeke. They worked together at a carpentry shop; Zeke was more skilled than Todd and more than once helped him put together a fancy chair or side table in accordance with a customer's requirements. Their frequent contacts led to a relationship as close to friendship as either of them was capable of sustaining. Zeke would come to Todd's apartment to watch an important game, and Todd would likewise pay occasional visits to the home Zeke and his sister had inherited from their parents.

Zeke's sister, several years younger than he, was as different from him as two members of the same family can ever be. Elaine, or "Leni" as everyone called her, was outspoken, precise, and kind hearted. She was also pretty in an unassuming, straightforward sort of way that did not threaten other girls or bring out the lascivious side of her male acquaintances. She was perfectly suited for her job as an elementary school teacher.

Todd's sex drive was instantly awakened when he met Leni. Not that she did anything to arouse the man's desire, but her mere presence brought out one of the active elements in Todd's reptilian brain, the urge to copulate. He started dealing with the girl in a coarse imitation of a courtship.

Todd began visiting Zeke more frequently. For those visits, he would dress a little better, and would try to appear well groomed. Leni was out on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, to attend meetings of charitable organizations of which she was a member; Todd scheduled his visits to Zeke to avoid the days she was absent.

When they met, Todd tried to make pleasant conversation with Leni and feigned interest in the social issues about which Leni was passionate: care for the homeless, child welfare, drug rehabilitation. She was polite, but perhaps she saw through his attempts at congeniality. In any event, her extroverted personality dominated their conversations.

Being open and inquisitive, Leni began probing into Todd's habits, his behavior, his beliefs: the things that, for normal people, would have fostered greater intimacy. But Todd did not like to be confronted with the oddness of his behavior. He felt under attack, and his primitive brain started to experience the need to fight back or cease pursuing their relationship.

Matters came to a head one Monday night, when Todd invited himself to Zeke's house to watch a football game. At halftime, Leni and Todd repaired to the porch, he holding a beer can, she a Coke. After a couple of exchanges about the game, she turned to him and said: "Todd, I sense you are leading a rudderless life, drifting from one meaningless thing to another without purpose or plan. I like you, but you need to take stock of yourself and start acting like a regular human being."

Todd felt a painful shock and sat silently for a few moments, faced drained of color. His anger then started rising, and he ended up almost shouting when he replied, pounding the arms of his chair: "What right do you have to criticize me? Do I ever find fault with your silly charity projects? Do me a favor, and shut the hell up!"

Leni was so surprised that, at first, she did not know how to respond to the outburst. Finally, her school teacher training kicked in. She got up and left the porch without saying a word. She would not speak to Todd the rest of his visit.

Perhaps it would have been better if they had engaged in a shouting match that allowed Todd to let off steam; that way he could have just written Leni off as a romantic prospect. He left the house midway through the third quarter and returned to his apartment to stew in unrelieved anger over the way Leni had abused him.

Matters did not get better as the week went by. Todd knew that Leni's criticisms were valid, but could not bring himself to acknowledge that his life was a waste and instead resented Leni for her accusations. By the weekend Todd's repressed anger had reached a boiling point.

Four of the carpentry shop employees would get together Saturday nights to play pool at a nearby tavern. That Saturday Todd was not in the mood for a game, so he called Zeke and complained that he had a mounting headache and intended to stay home and go to bed early. That was indeed Todd's plan but, as he tossed and turned, he realized that he was too distraught to sleep and needed to get some fresh air. He got dressed and went out.

Todd's stroll took him to the vicinity of Zeke's house and the obsession that festered in his mind coalesced into a decision: he would see Leni and demand a retraction.

He knocked on her door several times before the girl, dressed in a nightgown, came to the door and called out: "Who is it?"

"It's me, Todd," he grunted. "I need to speak with you."

There was a moment's hesitation, and then Leni answered: "It's late, Todd. I was already in bed. Can it wait until tomorrow?"

He replied in a quivering voice: "No, it's rather urgent."

There was an audible sigh and the door swung open.

They stood in silence in the entryway, staring at each other; then she asked: "What did you want to talk about?" Apparently, she was expecting him to say he was sorry for screaming, for she crossed her arms and assumed the pose she took before a wayward student. However, Todd stood with his fists tightly closed and replied very slowly: "I want you to apologize for the lies you said about me the other night."

Leni gasped. "Are you serious? What I said was true. You should mend your ways rather than demanding apologies from me."

Todd, seething with indignation, was no longer able to respond with words, but lunged at Leni, seized her shoulders, and shook her violently. "Apologize, I said!" he cried.

"No, I won't. Let me go and get out!!"

They struggled, Leni trying to free herself and Todd's hands moving from her shoulders to her neck, choking her. Their gyrations led them back to the front door, against which he pressed her body. Leni pummeled his chest, but he ignored her blows and tightened his hold on her throat.

Leni started to slide towards the floor and blindly reached out for support. Her hand touched a stand next to the door and landed on her umbrella, which she seized and used to hit Todd repeatedly on the arms and neck.

The umbrella was a flimsy bit of pink fabric and aluminum, and the blows she delivered with it served only to further enrage Todd, who ceased trying to choke her and began pounding her head forcefully against the door, striking over and over as she cried in agony. Finally, she went limp.

Todd dragged her inert body to the living room and stretched her on the floor. Blood was streaming from the back of her head, turning her blond hair into a sticky mess. Her breath was coming out as irregular gasps, and after a while it ceased.

Todd regarded the girl's prone figure with confusion. He felt regret over his deed; however, the most intense emotion he experienced was a sense of triumph, of accomplishment. He had silenced his detractor, punished her wrongs.

He realized he was panting from the effort and noticed that his throat was parched; perhaps he had screamed as he fought with Leni without realizing it. He felt a sudden thirst, and the immediate need to quench it. He bent over Leni's body and licked the blood that continued to stream out of her broken skull.

His first taste of human blood was unsettling. It was salty, with a metallic undertone, and he felt he was engaging in a repulsive act. Yet, he kept drinking without pause until he realized he had to get out of the house before Zeke returned.

Back home, Todd played back in his mind all that had occurred since he decided to take that stroll. He still felt no guilt, but a full measure of satisfaction. His contentment turned to fear when a new thought assaulted him: he was sure he had left multiple fingerprints at the site of his murder, and it would not be long before the police came after him to charge him for the crime. He had to get away.

He filled a backpack with whatever valuables and essentials he could carry and left the apartment. Stopping at an ATM, he emptied his bank account and left in the direction of his favorite park. The place had an eerie feel in the middle of the night, bereft of human and animal life; its solitude was comforting. He sat on his bench by the pond and reflected on his uncertain future. In the morning, he would try to hitch a ride out of the city and move away, somewhere in the countryside, perhaps to a village where could resume the anonymous existence to which he was accustomed.

Then another idea took hold of him. The big city was probably the best place for him to hide in plain sight. He would join the homeless people that dwelt under the bridges and expressway underpasses. With luck he could avoid capture, or at least delay it for a long time.

He was now a stalker, a creature of the night that existed by preying on those he hunted or who passed by his hideout. He preferred young ones, sampling their blood and perhaps partaking of their flesh one way or another. He became a legend, stoking the city dwellers' fears during their waking hours and haunting their dreams.

He was ultimately captured and confined to an insane asylum, but by that time he felt he had succeeded: his life had been proved to have a meaning after all.

END

Bio:

Born in Cuba, Matias Travieso-Diaz migrated to the United States as a young man to escape political persecution. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over one hundred of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in anthologies and paying magazines, blogs, audio books and podcasts. Some of his unpublished works have also received "honorable mentions" from several paying publications. A first collection of his stories, "The Satchel and Other Terrors" has recently been released and is available on Amazon and other book outlets.



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