

AS SEEN ON SCREEN

“All crap.”

Johnson Voltaire threw the stack of papers onto his desk, sending some of the loose sheets flying across the table.

“What you do, just spend your whole time watching shitty horror movies and jotting down their plots?”

Johnson raised a hand and started massaging his temples the way he saw big shot lawyers do on TV. Except he wasn't a big shot lawyer, he was a film producer, but big shots were big shots.

Nathan Andrews sat on the other side of the table, his mouth agape. In his lap, his hands were twitching, kneading into one another, fingers slipping on the build up of sweat. He had to seem calm, calm and confident otherwise he was going to lose this meeting.

“No, this is all original stuff.” He had given Johnson four different stories, each with a different angle, surely one of them had to show some potential.

Johnson raised his eyebrows and fixed Nathan with a cold stare.

“Don't try and bullshit me. I've seen this kind of stuff a hundred times before. My kid watches this kind of crap on TV all the time and it rots his freaking brain.”

“Sir please, I assure you that none of this was plagiarised, I..”

“Plagiarised?” Johnson laughed, hollow and harsh. “Fuck plagiarised Nate, this is first class, grade Z rubbish. I've been doing this job for six years; I know shite when I see it.”

Nathan's brain was working overtime in tandem with his nervous hands, squeezing each other so tight now that they were threatening to cut off the circulation. He had to think; there had to be a way to salvage this.

“How about,” he began tentatively, hoping and praying that this would be the spin needed to turn this whole situation around. “How about I cut down each of the four stories and we mix them all together. Like an anthology?”

Johnson's cold stare warmed but his eyes did not leave Nathan's.

“You mean like they did on that Tales from the Crypt show?”

Nathan tried not to smile. He had him; he'd piqued his interest now all he had to do was wrap it up in an attractive enough package to reel Johnson in.

“Exactly,” he said, his voice pitch getting higher as he got more excited, his hands relinquishing their grip on one another. “Except that we'll change it around, make it different, more edgy, more modern even.”

Johnson nodded; pressing his lips together, then suddenly slammed his hands down hard on the table. He loved being dramatic, relishing the reaction on the poor fuck's face.

“You know how freaking old that show is? That shit has been floating around since the fifties, how the hell are you gonna modernise it? Forget it Nate, it's done, I ain't interested.”

Nathan sunk into his chair, his hands gripping each other once again, much tighter than before. His last shot had just flown by.

“Please Mr. Voltaire, there has got to be something in those scripts that you can use. Please.” Nathan adopted his best puppy dog look, water welling up in his big brown eyes. It didn't work on the girls; it was unlikely it was going to work on a forty five year old man, with a weight problem and high blood pressure.

“Yeah there's something I can use,” Johnson replied, his voice softer now, his bulk rested back in his leather chair. “I can take the title, I actually like it.” He chuckled to himself, an action that made his cheeks wobble.

“The House That Dripped Pus, nice and disgusting, it's bound to be a crowd pleaser.” Every good horror movie title began with *The*.

Johnson's faint smile faded and his eyes became cold again.

“Shame the script sucks a big fat one,” he spat, scrunching up the paper and throwing it at Nate, who cowered pathetically as his script bounced off the top of his head.

“I'll give you fifteen bucks for it; now get out of my office.”

Dejected, Nathan stood up and started scraping together the various scattered papers that had once comprised his beloved scripts.

“I’ll work on something new, just give me a couple of weeks and I’ll have it ready.” He looked imploringly at Johnson, who sat leaned back in his chair, his dark eyes still fixed on Nathan’s.

“Just leave Nate,” he said, sounding almost disappointed. “Go tout your shitty scripts some place else.”

A hundred retorts flashed through Nathan’s mind but he chose none of them, instead biting his tongue and only nodding sadly in response. He gathered his papers under his arms and edged his way out of the office, trying to avoid the gaze of the pretty secretary who sat outside.

Johnson felt quite pleased with himself. He’d been a bad mood and Nathan’s crappy writing attempts had only worsened it. But now that he’d chewed the guy out he felt a little better, he always did. If he could make people feel worse than he did then it seemed to balance it all out. He guessed he was just a bit of a bastard. But no matter how much humiliating another human being might have temporarily improved his mood, there was still a nagging problem that was gnawing at the back of his mind like a scavenging little parasite. He had no good scripts and no good scripts meant no movies. It wasn’t that he was waiting for some genius script to drop into his lap; he was just waiting to see something that was at least filmable. All of the scripts he had seen over the last two months and there had been a lot of submissions, had either been awful, or would have been just way too expensive to try and shoot. He needed something simple, but also that was new. Audiences were tired of the same old slasher bullshit or rubber suited monster and CG was too big a financial step for a small production company like Nightmare Pictures. He needed something quick and easy that would make a fast buck. Give him the next Blair Witch, the next Saw, God help him even the next Freddy or Jason would suffice right now. The accountant had estimated that they had about another three weeks or so to start on production; otherwise the money would have dried up too much to even afford a budget independent flick. Johnson Voltaire had to think fast.

Motherfucker. Lame ass, talent less, shit eating, ass banging asshole. Nathan screamed these words inside his head as he headed out of the front door of the office building on 5th Street. He scrunched the papers even tighter under his arm as he felt the breeze blow by,

threatening to carry his scripts with it. What did that big shot wannabe know about horror movies anyway? He'd gotten rich re-making awful 1950s space monster movies, only in colour and using actresses with bigger tits and tighter asses. And he had the audacity, fuck it, the balls to say that his scripts weren't original enough!

Nathan turned the corner and headed down to the subway line. He needed to take the blue line east to get back to his apartment. An apartment that wouldn't be his for much longer if he didn't get some money coming in to keep up the rent. He was six weeks behind and his last paying job had been two months ago. He'd written a couple of lines for some TV movie about a woman who was dying from breast cancer whose sister was simultaneously having breast implants put in. It was one of those holier than thou attempts at promoting morality that also seemed to be so popular with daytime TV movies. It was shit, pure artist impotence, but it was a job and it had kept a roof over his head for a few more weeks. What he really wanted was the proverbial big break, but a steady income would be a welcome second best. For close to six months he had been trying to crack Nightmare Pictures, throwing everything he had at them to try and strike a cord and get something made. Hell, he didn't even care anymore if they brought in another writer to spruce the script up, the point was that it would still be his gem of an idea in there and he would be the one cashing the royalty cheques.

It wasn't that Nightmare was even a *good* production company. But it was well enough known and rich enough to pay him enough for a script to buy a few months worth of TV dinners and it was that much applauded foot in the door, that first rung on the ladder or whatever idiom you wanted to use. It was his best shot of getting something made and he could only write horror. It wasn't so much his forte; it was just that he couldn't bring himself to spend enough time on any other genre. The four days he had spent on that TV movie had been pure agony. It had felt as if he had had to prise the words from out of his skull with a spoon, digging away feverishly until he managed to get a half decent scoop. Horror had been his life, ever since he had first watched *Evil Dead*, aged eleven. From then on, nothing else would ever cut it. Horror was in his veins, it's what got his creative juices flowing. It was just a shame that they wouldn't flow from his head to the page.

What he had given Johnson was original, but he knew that it sucked. It sucked because it wasn't a re-hash or rewrite, it was him trying to break the mould. But by now, he was tired of trying to sell his old work; he needed a fresh piece, something that he could actually get excited about.

On his way home, Nathan stopped by the video store and rented out a whole shelf of the horror movie collection. It was research, he justified to himself, he needed a new idea so he had to be sure that he wasn't copying someone else's. Besides, it would be good motivation as he had purposely included several titles that he knew to be awful. There was nothing like revealing in someone else's failure to heighten your own sense of worth.

Up in his office, Johnson Voltaire had told Kelly to block all his calls; he was in a very important conference and wasn't to be disturbed. It was true; he was in conference, only with himself. Johnson had needed some space, time to think of a new strategy, a solution to all his problems. He needed a new script and his usual batch of writers had let him down, so now it was up to him to think of something.

He leaned back in his chair and propped his feet up on the desk, lighting up a cigarette. There was just one problem; he couldn't write for shit. He wasn't even an ideas man, all he did was criticise the ideas that came through that door. He wasn't a writer, or an 'artist', he was a producer, a money maker. It wasn't so much a good script he could smell out, it was its money making potential that was what got his dick hard, not some college type writing parodies and metaphors about how he had seen his parents doing the bedroom bump when they were a kid and venting out his demons in the guise of a horror script. Fuck that; fuck all that to hell and back. He was interested in a script that would grab the audience by the balls, shake them damn hard for ninety minutes and then release their crotch, their balls sore but still in working order. That was the kind of thing that was going to spread word of mouth that was what was going to get the audience back into the cinema for a second viewing. Not *art*, not *style* or *depth*. He needed to give them something that they would die to see, that they would feel uneasy to watch because that would only make them want to watch more. He needed something.

Johnson stubbed out his cigarette and immediately reached into the pack for another. He pulled one free of the carton but the cigarette stopped in mid-air half way up to his mouth. What he needed was something that people thought that they shouldn't be watching, something that they couldn't just call a *movie*. Something that they couldn't dismiss so easily, a movie that was going to stay with them all the car ride home and then all through that night, awake or dreaming.

Johnson put down the cigarette and reached for the phone.

"Kelly," he grumbled, his voice working independently as he brain ticked over the details.

"Yes, Mr. Voltaire."

"Get me Tony and his camera crew; get them in my office now."

"Yes, Mr. Voltaire."

Johnson hung up the phone and sat staring blankly at the wall. He wasn't sure about this, there was a big risk involved, but it would be cheap, so at least the risk wouldn't be financial. But it could work, if he sold it right, got in on the marketing, then maybe, just maybe, this could be the biggest independent hit of all fucking time.

Johnson Voltaire sat in his office, afraid to smile because if he smiled right at this moment, he was scared for his soul.

Three movies in and Nathan was exhausted. He yawned and looked over at the digital clock that sat on the bedside table. It wasn't even eight in the evening yet, he'd spent his whole afternoon watching his rentals, starting off with the good ones and then popping in one of the dodgy low budget atrocities he'd read about. As he watched the credits begin to roll he knew that he could do a better job than that, but not right now. At this moment, his head was throbbing with a stress headache that had belatedly set in. Watching those movies had reaffirmed that he had the talent to do better than what he had seen, but he was still out of ideas and the second movie of the afternoon had even chased away a vague idea he'd been toying with.

Nathan sighed and slid down the bed to change the DVDs. If things really got bad, he supposed he could always do some remake work. The stuff he had just watched could even provide good source material, the movie didn't even have to be that old

anymore to be ripped off, just look at *Scream*. But the work itself was so depressing. There was no sense of satisfaction, no semblance of ownership, it was just repackaging, he might as well be wrapping cheeseburgers in McDonalds. Life sucked.

Nathan switched the DVDs, inserting a copy of one of the Re-animator movies to try and lift his spirits. He had decided the problem was that there were just no new ideas out there anymore; everything you could possibly think of had been done. Bouvilivard was right, the author was dead, and his writing dreams had been well and truly buried. He settled back on the bed and thrust his head into the mound of pillows that always gave him a stiff neck in the morning, and pressed play on the remote, losing himself in a world of zombies and talking decapitated heads, whilst racking his brain desperately for new ideas.

Tony was late. Johnson paced up and down his office, the night sky filtering in through the windows, the moonlight fighting against the artificial light of the desk lamp for supremacy. He had told them to be here by eight and it was already half past. They had a lot of prep work to do and this shoot needed to be done at night, it was a horror movie for God's sake. And it needed to be tonight. Really any night would do but Johnson was afraid that if he left it much longer he was going to lose his nerve. He still wasn't sure about the idea but it was the best he had and therefore he had little choice but to go with it. Great movies had been made on madcap ideas or by insane directors. Just look at any Oliver Stone flick. But this idea was bordering on dangerously mad. But that didn't matter. He could handle it and the crew wouldn't know a thing about it. He would tell them little and they would accept it because he was providing the pay cheque. If they ever got here.

The intercom buzzed and Kelly's voice came out of the speaker. She sounded pissed; he had kept her here three hours after her shift had been over, with the little white lie of double paid overtime. He could handle Kelly being mad with him. She was pretty but not irreplaceable, there were enough wannabe actresses out there who would throttle each other over the chance of being given a job at a production company, no matter how small and shitty it might be.

“Tony and his crew are here,” Kelly snapped and that was all, not even waiting for a reply before cutting off the call.

The office door opened and a tall man with a long beard and even longer hair came striding into the office, followed by two smaller men who were as broad and as bald as each other. They looked more like bouncers than cameramen but they would do, anything would do at the moment.

“Where the fuck have you been?” Johnson snapped, un-intimidated by Tony’s ten inch height advantage. “I said eight, your watch broken?”

Tony smiled, his teeth a line of shining light underneath the dense thicket of his beard.

“Sorry boss, got a little held up, you know, seeing as these ain’t our normal working hours.”

Johnson recognised the hint immediately and decided to get the matter dealt with sooner rather than later.

“You’ll be compensated,” he said, his own face twisted into a mock smile. “Double overtime.”

Tony looked down at his shorter companions and all three slowly shook their heads.

“That sounds interesting but if the union got wind of us working unsolicited hours and all....”

Johnson couldn’t believe it. He was having to bow down and scrape to a bunch of fucking camera guys. If he could have got anyone else on such short notice, he would have, after all, how hard was it to point a shitting camera. But this was all he had so he would have to work with it.

“What do you want?” He asked, his fake smile gone and replaced by an authentic look of annoyance.

“A percentage of the gross, each.”

Johnson’s mouth almost fell open at what he was hearing. Since when had cameramen become fucking business prodigies? They must have been watching too many actor profile shows on Tom Cruise.

“A what?” Johnson managed to say, his voice almost having left him.

“A percentage, we were thinking about say, three percent each. Of the gross.”

Johnson needed a sit down but he couldn't afford to show any kind of weakness. It was already getting late; he needed to get this show on the road.

“Alright,” he conceded, “you get two percent each, of the net.”

He expected some kind of argument to this offer but instead the three men grinned like morons. He suspected they were amazed that they had even been given that; they had probably just been pushing their luck. Johnson groaned as he realised that he'd been had, the thought of sharing his profits with idiots sickened him.

“Okay then, if you've finished fucking around, here's what I want you to do.”

Nathan lay his head on his folded arms and watched his dinner rotate round in the microwave, its dull humming noise vibrating across the work surface, into his arms and up into his head. He hoped that somehow getting up close and exposing himself to the waves of energy coming out of the microwave might somehow jump start his brain and unleash an epic tidal wave of script ideas. He really did watch too many movies.

The microwave dinged and its inner light cut out, signalling that the food was ready. Nathan opened the door and took out the plastic tray of frozen chicken curry and sat down at his small dining table, his fork poised above the tray as he waited for the steam to cool off a little. There had to be a way out of all this. How much longer could he keep up this kind of crummy lifestyle, squatting in a tiny one bedroom apartment and eating frozen microwave meals day after day? But there was only one way out that Nathan could see and that involved him sitting down at his laptop and actually writing something good for a change. He was his own ticket out of here. As a last resort, he supposed there were always his parents but he didn't want to look a failure in their eyes. They had always been so supportive of his choice of career, never nagging him into getting a decent job, one that would actually pay the rent on time. He couldn't bring himself to have to go crawling back to them, it would be the end of his writing career, he would have to face up to reality and get himself a real job and he wasn't prepared for that yet.

Nathan spiked a piece of chicken with his fork, put it in his mouth and chewed slowly. He swallowed with a grimace and tried not to imagine the different types of animal that this meat could actually be from. He was sure that one of them wasn't chicken. He had to think of something fast.

“You got all that?”

The three men each nodded once but Johnson didn't believe that any one of them had fully understood his directions.

“Now remember what I said, this guy, he's a character actor, you know what that means?”

Again all three heads nodded in unison. Johnson still wasn't convinced.

“That means that he won't break character, not even for a second.”

“Why not?” It was Bob who had spoken, one of Tony's underlings.

Johnson breathed deeply and tried to maintain his composure.

“Because it's part of his method. If he breaks character then he loses the moment and his performance turns to shit. Okay? Any more questions?”

This time the three heads shook in perfect unison.

“Good. So even if he screams and shouts and claims that he doesn't know what's going on, he does, okay? It's all part of the act.”

“So it's in the script?” This time it was Tony who spoke up.

“No Tony, remember what I said before, there is no script this is all going to be improv. You never seen a Lars Von Tier movie? Stupid question.”

“But how about....”

Johnson cut the man off before he could say any more.

“Just don't worry about it. All you guys have to do is to point the camera and operate the boom mike, just make sure you get everything. Clear?”

This time there was no nodding of heads just an exchange of confused and slightly worried looks.

Johnson didn't have time to explain it again, the clock was ticking. It was past eleven already as it had taken longer than he'd expected to go through his instructions and get all the equipment together. But now they were here. Everything was ready; all

they had to do was shoot this sucker and print it. It was going to be gold, fucking cinema gold.

“Okay then boys, get your shit together and get ready to roll.”

As the three men collected their gear, Johnson slid open the side door of the van and climbed out into the night air. He felt great, like some kind of army commander, readying his troops for battle. But in the pit of his stomach lay a twisted knot of nerves. This could all go so wrong, he had to make sure that he did everything right. It was risky, but the payoff was too great to ignore.

He looked over at the apartment building on the opposite side of the street and his eyes moved up to the sixth floor. Room six one six. That’s what the return to sender address had written on the back of the script envelope. It was in that room that his movie lay. His set was going to be the four walls of that apartment, an on location shoot. Johnson smiled wickedly as he stood in the moonlight. Nathan Fortune was going to give him a smash hit after all.

Nathan sat in the low light of his bedroom lamp shade and scratched his head, ruffling up his unkempt hair with his fingers. He was the typical struggling writer, all he needed was a waste paper basket overflowing at with rejected pages and an ash tray full of cigarette stubs and the picture would be complete. Except that there was no need for a waste paper basket when all your work was typed on computer and Nathan hadn’t smoked since he was twelve, when he had inhaled a single puff as a dare and had threw up all over his best shoes. But the struggling part was dead on target.

He glared at the computer screen. All it showed was a title and an opening paragraph to set the scene.

THE HOUSE THAT BLOOD BUILT

INT – day –

The room is old and dusty, full of antiques. There is an old grandfather clock in the corner that no longer runs. In the centre of the room sits an old man in a faded armchair. He has thinning white hair and is dressed in a black suit. The man is dying.

This was it, the start to his masterpiece. Apparently. It was as clichéd as hell but Nathan liked the image of the old man sitting in the dusty room, himself an antique amongst all of his old possessions, gradually wearing away just as they were. But then where to go from there? And the title? He hated writing titles, he could never think of one that sounded right. He knew that they had to be snazzy, shocking even; they had to be a sequence of words that would scream from billboards and posters in the movie theatres, rearing in punters like cattle. The title at the top of his screen did no such thing. It was silly and outdated and sounded way too much like an old Herschel Gordon Lewis flick. But the title didn't matter, he could change that, or the studio could. Producers didn't give a shit about titles, not really. They would probably end up changing it anyway; no matter how good it was, so that it would fit in better with their advertising campaign. It was the story that he needed to concentrate on; except the problem was that he didn't have one. He had this one image but nowhere to take it.

His eyes were beginning to hurt from staring at the screen for so long but he was determined to get a good start on this tonight. If he did, then he would sleep better for it and could awake renewed and ready the next morning to try and hack out the first quarter of the script. It was possible, he had done it before, but he needed that initial idea, that little gem that got him into that crazy state of mind where he could spend eight hours tapping away at his keyboard, caught up in a frenzy that he fuelled with copious cups of coffee. But right now, that desired state seemed totally out of reach. Instead here he was, looking at a nearly blank screen and tapping in a few odd words at a time. He supposed he was suffering from writer's block. That was the nice way to put it.

A noise from behind broke his trance. He spun around, his eyes bleary and rimmed with red. It had sounded like the front door. He turned back and looked at the clock in the corner of the computer screen. 11.33. It was too late for anybody to be coming round now, not that anyone did so at any time of the day. Shrugging it off, Nathan turned back to his computer screen and resumed his personal torture.

Johnson stood outside of the door at the end of the hallway and struggled to control his breathing. He hadn't anticipated that he would feel this nervous about going in, but his heart was pounding and his lungs were snatching at gasps of air. But this had to be done. It was going to make him rich, hell, even famous. After this he'd be rubbing noses with the major players, talking about co-producing with some of the top names, bullshitting with movie stars at over priced social events, rather than dealing with the usual street crap that came walking in through his door looking for a job. This was his shot at the big time and he refused to screw it up.

Behind him, Tony and his team were waiting, Tony and Dale carrying cameras while Bob held the boom mike aloft, sound equipment wrapped round his body. This was it, they were ready and now it was up to him to start the show. There were so many doubts in his mind but they all had to be ignored. Making it to the top always required a sacrifice.

"You guys all set?" Johnson whispered back over his shoulder, keeping his voice low so that the others wouldn't notice the tremble instilled in it.

Three heads nodded.

"Okay, follow my lead."

Johnson sucked in a deep breath and squared his shoulders, his hand casually stroking over what he had concealed in his pocket, checking it was still there.

"Remember," he said, "it's all just an act."

With that, he rose up his foot and slammed it hard into the door, just under the handle. The suede loafers that usually adorned his feet were gone, replaced with heavy duty jack boots that he had found abandoned at the back of his closet.

The door splintered easily, thank God for modern workmanship, and swung open. They were in.

Johnson motioned over his shoulder for the team to follow him and he stepped cautiously inside. He knew that the noise was probably enough to wake the neighbours so he tried to hurry the other three in quickly behind him and then motioned for Dale to shut the door. He looked at the blinking red light on top of each of the cameras for reassurance that this all wasn't going to go to waste.

He walked forward, trying his best to look like he was stalking something, someone. This was when Johnson Voltaire had to make the move from producer to actor. Michael Douglas the second.

He moved into the kitchen and found it empty. Perhaps the guy was asleep and they had got lucky with smashing open the door. But then maybe not. Johnson heard a sound from the room at the end of the kitchen, one that lay behind a closed door. He patted his pocket once more, reassured by the bulk that lay there. He crept forward, hearing his footsteps echoed by the team following him. This was it, show time.

Johnson stopped outside the door listening. There were no more noises but he was sure that he had heard something come from here only a moment ago. This was to be the main set, the scene of all the action. He hoped that the lighting would be okay for this shot, he didn't want to see muddied dailies tomorrow morning, this was a one take kind of shoot.

This time Johnson reached out with his left hand and grasped the door handle, turning it slowly, using his other hand to call Tony over to get a close up on the handle turning, building the tension. In his mind's eye, he could already see the audience beginning to sweat. Fuck reality TV, this was the real deal, all to be presented in wonderful Cinemascope.

He turned the handle and edged open the door, wanting to draw this out for as long as he could. His breathing was heavy, perfect for his character.

The door opened out into a small living room that housed an old TV set, a bean bag chair and a desk and not much else. Johnson cursed but his frustration quickly changed as his quick movie mind realised that this was just all adding to the set up, giving the audience a fake scare. He smiled slyly; this was going to be fucking great.

Johnson turned back round and exited the room, the two cameras hovering directly behind him, capturing his every move. There was another door just down the corridor. It was either the bathroom or the bedroom; Johnson was going to have to take pot luck. He couldn't really afford another fake scare, the audience wouldn't tolerate it, they wanted results not a lot of shots of empty rooms, but if the worse came to the worse, he could always lose it in the editing suite. No big deal.

He stopped outside the two doorways. Was it door number one, or door number two, which one held the prize? Moving more quickly than before, Johnson started turning the handle on the first door and abruptly burst into the room, the cameras stumbling behind him, trying to maintain focus amidst the quick action. Bingo, it was the bedroom but again it was empty. The cameras were presented with nothing more than a big double bed and another small desk in the corner, an open laptop perched on top of it. Johnson was starting to get worried. Surely this sorry son of a bitch didn't have that much of a social life to be out on a Tuesday night? If he really knew what was good for him, he'd have his face glued to that laptop, trying to come up with something barely resembling a movie script. But the laptop was still on, so that meant he was still here, somewhere.

Biting back his frustration, Johnson reasoned that there was only one more place that the writer could be and he headed back out into the hallway to try door number two. As he poised his hand above the handle, hoping for it to be third time lucky, he glanced back over his shoulder towards the glare of the cameras. He smiled at the light shining on him. This was where he was going to make a million. He patted the hinting knife in his pocket one last time and opened the door.

Nathan had heard the front door go and had nearly knocked over the laptop in his fright. He was pissed, the realtor had told him that this was a safe part of town, no break-ins in this building ever, or so he had been misinformed. It looked like tonight was going to be the night to break that record. Without thinking, he immediately got up and raced to the bathroom next door, shutting the door behind him, leaning against it, panting hard as fear gripped hold of his body. They could take anything they wanted, just as long as they left him alone. He reasoned that the bathroom was the safest place, what could they possibly find in here to take? Unless they were druggies? In that case, they might try and raid the bathroom cabinet, looking for some medication that they could grind up and snort, or whatever the hell they did with it. Shit. Nathan spun round, looking for a way to escape but there was none. There was no bathroom window to jump out from when you lived on the sixth floor of an apartment block, cased in at the end of the hall where a bathroom window would have only provided a view of your neighbour's bedroom. He eyed up the

shower curtain and almost moaned at the cliché. With no better option evident, he stepped into the bath and drew the curtain around him, an orchestra of string instruments playing in his head, mocking him. He waited, hoping that the burglars would just take what they could find and leave, he didn't have much anyway. Except his laptop. His fucking laptop, how much trouble would it have been just to pick it up and carry it in here with him, they would never know. Just a moment's thought, that was all that was needed, but now it was too late. It wasn't like he had any great masterpieces stored on there, but with his dwindling funds, how the hell was he supposed to afford another one? You couldn't give a producer a hand written script; they'd laugh in his face, even more than usual. Life really was one hell of a fucking bitch.

The bathroom. Was that to be the scene of the movie's key moment? It had worked for Hitch and countless other horror movies that had oozed their way out of the eighties. It was a little corny, but what the audience would see was to be something that they never in their tiny pea brains thought they would ever get to witness. A real life murder. Yes that's right folks, roll up, roll up and come witness the greatest, sickest most *extreme* spectacle ever to grace the medium of cinema. Of course, they wouldn't know that it was a *real* murder. That knowledge led to all kinds of implications and criminal charges and Johnson was not doing this so he could spend the rest of his life in jail. It would be billed as the most *realistic* death scene ever shown in a major theatre, but he would never say it was real; it would all be in the implication. The audience would sit down in their little seats, pulling their feet free from the sticky floors and sucking away on their mega Pepsis and chewing on their popcorn and nachos, settling back, ready to be bored by yet another horror movie about serial killers and bloody murders and then they would see it. Of course, it would like any other movie killing. Kids these days wouldn't be able to tell the difference between stage blood and the real thing, but the visceralness would be in Nathan's reaction, it would be deep set in his eyes, eyes that would water with fear. That was what the audience would see, whether they realised it or not. And it would haunt them; stay with for the rest of the night. But it would also bring them back the next week. One problem though. The bathroom was empty.

Nathan huddled against the side of the bathtub, the shower head dripping water down into his hair. He felt it run down his face and mingle in with the beads of sweat that were already running across his forehead. They must be druggies after all, raiding his bathroom cabinet for whatever goodies they could find. Except they were out of luck, unless they wanted to shoot up some aspirin. He had to keep perfectly still; they couldn't know he was here. They were look in the cabinet and then they would leave. They might possibly smash up the mirror or something out of frustration but that was okay, he just had to stay calm and not let the shock of it get the better of him. In the back of his mind, Nathan was thinking what a great scene all of this would make, if only it hadn't been done a thousand times before.

Johnson was not to be deterred. First impression surmounted that the room was empty but looks could be deceiving. He had seen it a hundred times the host of horror movies he had watched in his lifetime, both good and bad. It was time for the reveal moment, when the protagonist goes up to the shower curtain and yanks it back, the audience holding their breath in anticipation of the horror that they are about to see. Ninety percent of the time, it's nothing more than a false scare, building up the tension only to relieve it with a big empty space, kind of like when a teenage girl goes roaming about in the dark and hears a strange noise only for it to be revealed as a stray cat, that sort of thing. But then there was that other ten percent, the time when the curtain is drawn back and you either see a great bloody mess, or the killer standing there, waiting. Johnson was in favour of the ten percent.

He crossed the bathroom, making sure that his team were close behind. This was getting more and more clichéd but none of that would matter, the pay off would be worth it. He pulled his knife out of his pocket and held it out towards the shower curtain, turning his head to tip a wink at Tony, just to remind him that this was all one big day at the fair. He reached out and laid a hand on the side of the curtain, his fingers gripping the plastic, the knife held tight in his other hand. This was it; he was going to make Nathan suffer for his art. He exhaled and pulled back the curtain.

They weren't leaving, instead, they, whoever *they* were, had decided to come over and check behind the curtain, God only knew why.

Nathan started to panic, his stomach rolling, threatening at any minute to bring back up his microwaveable curry. He had to think fast. If they found him hiding here then who knew what they were going to do to him, they certainly weren't going to just tell him to go hide someplace else. They could kill him. Nathan swallowed hard, his head pissing sweat as he watched the shadow through the curtain draw nearer. Why could he do? He didn't know how many there were but he thought he had heard more than one set of footsteps. Either way, his options were limited, he was going to have to try and make a break for it.

He balled his hand up into a fist and stood there waiting, the shower head still dripping water into his hair as he waited for the inevitable moment when the curtain would be pulled back and his assailant revealed. He clenched his fist tighter as he watched the shadow of a hand reach out and started to pull back his arm as the curtain was suddenly snatched away.....

All Johnson felt was a blinding ball of pain erupt in his nose and he fell to the ground, blood pouring from his nostrils, his hands held up trying to catch it, the knife dropped as he was taken by surprise....

Nathan didn't have time to register who it was standing behind the curtain before his fist had already made contact and the man was down. Nathan stood in the bathtub, took shocked to move, absently stretching out the fingers of his right hand to try and alleviate some of the pain that was spreading through them. He looked down to the crumpled man on the floor and his eyes widened in shock, like some bad close up shot where the victim finally sees the identity of the killer, a true Scooby Doo moment.

"Mr. Voltaire?" He said, his voice quivering as shock waves still rippled through his body.

Nathan looked up and saw the three men standing in his bathroom doorway, two of them holding up cameras, pointing them down at the fallen man.

"Mr. Voltaire, what exactly is going...?"

Nathan looked back down and saw the knife lying on the bathroom floor, glinting in the artificial light. His stomach somersaulted again. Without thinking about it, he stepped out of the bathtub and reached down to retrieve the weapon, grasping it in his left hand as his right was still throbbing too much to grip anything. He held it up to the light and stared at it, before looking back down at Johnson, who was now struggling up to his feet.

“Hang on a minute there Nate,” Johnson mumbled as he stood back up, his one hand still clasped around his bleeding nose.

“Hold on, it isn’t what it looks like.”

Nathan didn’t have a clue what it looked like, he had absolutely no idea what the hell was going on.

In the background, the camera team still stood in the doorway, their sights aligned, the film still rolling.

“What are you doing here?” Nathan asked, his eyes back on the knife. “What’s this for?”

Johnson drew himself up to his full height and tentatively removed his hand from his nose. Another trickle of blood soon had it back there.

“I can explain, everything,” he said, his voice partially muffled by the palm of his hand. Blood was running through his fingers. Tony zoomed in to get a better shot of it.

Nathan was only half listening. He touched the point of the knife to one of his fingers and quickly withdrew as it broke the skin.

Johnson was waiting for a reply, but realising that he wasn’t going to get one, he carried on.

“This is all a big misunderstanding.”

“Is it?” Nathan replied his voice dreamy, his mind far off somewhere else.

“Of course it is. The thing is, well, the thing is Nate, I was up in my office tonight, you know, thinking about my next flick, when I had this idea.” Johnson could feel the nerves in his body eating away at him, but he had to keep cool, he had to talk his way out of this. He was no longer the man with the knife.

“You see, I thought that....”

“Did you come here to kill me?” The question was blunt but fair. Johnson’s heart leapt.

“Kill you?” He asked, the producer trying to capture an Oscar worthy performance. “Of course not, this was all part of my new idea. Kind of like reality TV but for the movies. I was going to come up here and yeah, okay, I admit it, I was going to try and scare you a bit. I know, asshole huh? Guilty. But that was all. Then we’d cut and I’d film a fake death scene tomorrow at the studio.” Johnson was desperate. “Isn’t that right boys?”

He looked back over his shoulder towards the camera team, but there was no nodding of heads this time.

“Why don’t I believe you?” Nathan said, his eyes moving from the blade of the knife, glaring at Johnson.

“Why do I have this crazy idea stuck in my head, that you didn’t come all the way here just to scare me? You came here to kill me.”

Johnson started to protest but Nathan cut him off.

“You fucking producers are all the same. You’re just a bunch of vampires and you don’t care how you get your pint of blood.”

“Hey,” Johnson laughed, trying to lighten the suddenly darkened mood. “That’s pretty good; you should put that in one of your scripts.”

“Which one?” Nathan snapped, “one of the countless that you rejected? Would that little quip change your mind?”

He felt a surge of anger boiling deep down within him. He was tired of having a shitty life; he was tired of having no luck except bad. And most of all, he was sick and tired of movie producers.

He held out the knife in front of him and took a step towards Johnson, who had now backed away towards the wall.

“What are you doing Nate, this isn’t fucking funny.”

Nathan shook his head.

“No, you’re right *Johnson*, it isn’t funny.”

He turned his attention over to the team in the doorway.

“You might want to come a little closer boys,” he said, his eyes glinting much like the knife he was holding.

“You won’t want to miss this.”

- END -