

The blood moved very slowly. In fact, she might not have even noticed that it was moving if the slow takeover of the ceiling's rough, uneven texture hadn't given it away. The sluggish but steady spread of the blood was only half of the mystery. The other half was the part that was tearing at her sanity.

It didn't seem to exist.

Oh, sure, she could see it. That was her first thought when her best friend had playfully punched her arm and accused her of leg-pulling when she'd tried to point out the then-small patch of red on her bedroom ceiling. Maybe it was just her imagination. But surely even a hallucination wouldn't be there all the time.

No, the problem came the first time she tentatively climbed a step-stool to try to touch it, so she could pin down exactly what it was and clean it. Her fingers brushed the ceiling and felt nothing but dry, dusty plaster. Again and again she rubbed firmly against what appeared to be a slick red stain but felt only the perfectly dry ceiling. And no matter what kind of bleach or how strong a solution she used, the red stain was never affected in the least.

In a moment of desperation, she bought a canister of paint and slathered on coat after coat, but the stain was never obscured, even for a moment.

She slept rarely. How could she? The blood stain repulsed and yet fascinated her.

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Her eyes flew open. She had been dozing in bed, which is what passed for sleep these days. Some noise has broken her light sleep. It had sounded like a voice...a whisper, perhaps. Her eyes darted to the stain and she gasped and stopped breathing.

There in the middle of the blood, a face was showing. Or at least, it looked like a face. After a few seconds, the small part of her brain that still thought rationally told her it was just the shadows playing tricks on her mind. But her heart kept pounding loudly in her ears, and she knew it wasn't a trick of the light.

She started trembling and drew the covers closer about her as she kept staring at the face. Slowly, it became clearer and more defined. Then, the clouds that had been diffusing the moon's light passed, and her room was illuminated. The slight shadow that might have been a face was brought into sharp focus.

It was indeed a face. Or at least, might once have been a face. There were two large dark patches where eyes might belong, a smaller patch between and beneath them that might pass for a nose, and below that, two rows of small square patches that could be teeth.

Fear coursed through her veins and silent tears flowed down her gaunt cheeks. Her body was now trembling violently and she caught her breath in shallow gasps.

Then the face moved. It seemed to push down into her ceiling, which gave way as though it were a thin film, conforming to the shape of the face. As it sank down into her room, the dark patches formed the features of the face, and took their places on the slowly-emerging head. The "skin" was that awful blood-red color of the stain.

She fervently wished that she could look away, and that this was all a dream, but it was as though she was entranced.

The head turned her way and suddenly two slits appeared in the eye sockets, and its eyes opened and locked onto her eyes.

Oh God she thought she would go insane and in fact she was wasn't she it was too much to take and she knew that it wanted her that way if she was scared she wouldn't be able to fight it but what did it really want anyway but of course that didn't matter in its eyes were death and torment and things worse than death and those were all in store for her she knew and her mind started to weaken and break because this thing whatever it was oh God what was it was now starting to drop to the floor and it was coming toward her bed and
NOWITWASJUSTAFEWINCHESFROMHERFACE-

The whirling thoughts of her mind stopped abruptly. The blood stain was gone from her ceiling now, because it had formed a shape that looked almost human, and was now standing looking down at her.

Even though her mind had stopped working, her body was shaking almost as if in a seizure, her face soaked with the tears flowing from her bloodshot eyes.

It reached a shape that might have been a hand out and touched her, just over her heart, and the organ went crazy, fluctuating between fast and slow, pumping and still...

Even as her eyes silently begged it to stop, it touched her again, with both "hands" this time, and her lungs painfully inhaled and exhaled at its bidding, not hers...

Those terrible eyes leaned closer until they were all she could see, and the last thing she heard was an evil whisper that sent frigid cold throughout her body, *I have chosen you...*

The eyes consumed her vision and she fell into them...

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...her body lay on her bed, spent, used, and lifeless...under the covers, blood soaked the sheet, her nightclothes, and her skin, but examination would reveal that there was not a scratch to be found...and a reason would never be found as to why her eyes were so wide...nor why from that night onward, other tenants would be awoken in the middle of the night by her terrified, agonized screams...