THE LOSS OF FEAR

Written by

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(BEAT)

1 PETER 3:14

FADE IN:

EXT. STREET - DUSK

A heavy snow falls under an ashen sky.

A soft hum emanates from street lights that stand on either side of a long, tree lined street.

They suddenly SNAP on ready to do battle against the encroaching darkness.

At the end of the street stands a white house with red shutters and a black door.

A large lawn lays hidden under a pristine coating of snow. An oak tree seems to have forced itself out of the ground by sheer force of will.

A sign stands a few feet in front of the tree and reads:

"SHIPLEY'S FUNERAL HOME, EST. 1932"

INT. ANTEROOM - DUSK

The house is silent, save for the muted sound of falling snow and a Big Ben clock tirelessly ticking away the seconds, minutes, and hours.

A long winding stair case leads upstairs.

The outdated decor appears as though it hasn't been renovated since the first Reagan administration. In fact, a portrait of the former president hangs, slightly askew, next to a door.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

At a kitchen table sits JAMES WADDLE (early 20's), a prim and proper young man who speaks with a stutter.

James looks up from a POCKET BIBLE towards a stretched, yellow telephone cord that leads into another room.

On the phone MR. SHIPLEY conducts his conversation in semihushed tones.

> SHIPLEY (O.S.) (fake stutter) I'm going to leave the kid. (beat) Yeah, well you said you needed a fifth player so I don't really have any other choice. (beat) Yeah, I got the booze, just make sure you got some money this time.

Mr. Shipley, a short, balding man with a beer belly enters the kitchen. The fake stutter is gone.

SHIPLEY (CONT'D) Well kid, looks like you're gonna have to fly solo tonight. You okay with that?

### JAMES

I...

SHIPLEY You'll be fine. Sides', there really isn't any other option. The old lady been clamoring for a date night for weeks, and she won't take no for an answer.

JAMES

Ι...

SHIPLEY C'mon kid, I don't have all night.

JAMES

I'll be fine, Mr. Shipley, I just wish they hadn't sent <u>him</u> here.

## SHIPLEY

Yeah, and I wish the old lady could still get her wedding band off those sausage links she calls fingers, but that hasn't happened since the Gipper, rest in peace, was running for his second term.

JAMES We've never had anyone like him before.

#### SHIPLEY

Like hell we ain't. Every stiff that comes in here is deader than a door nail. What he was in life is one thing, once he comes to us he's no different than the rest of em'.

JAMES I guess you're right, Mr. Shipley.

Shipley studies James for a few moments.

SHIPLEY That's a boy. I already prepped him, just give him about an hour or so and then you can start in on him.

JAMES Okay, Mr. Shipley. I'll be fine.

SHIPLEY Of course you will.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

James watches through large bay windows as snow continues to fall and Shipley makes his way to his car.

He waves to Shipley but gets no response.

Shipley starts his car, turns on the headlights and wipers and drives off.

James is alone.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

The sparsely decorated office sports a cheap indoor/outdoor rug that is worn and stained.

An uncluttered desk with some folders neatly stacked in one corner sits in front of a window facing the street. An old fashioned typewriter, a dying fern, and a 13" TV are the only other accoutrements.

The wind HOWLS as James reads one of the folders at the desk. The TV BLARES in the background.

### WEATHERMAN (ON TV)

We're hoping that at some point tomorrow evening the cold front will move out of the area, but for the time being it looks like its going to keep us company. Stay indoors, and stay warm.

ANCHOR (ON TV) Thanks, John. Now back to our main story.

(beat) The fear that has gripped the region for the past five years has finally begun to ease after reports surfaced this morning that the serial killer who stalked and brutally murdered 12 people was found dead this morning. Apparently by his own hand. Reporter KATE SWAN has the latest developments. Kate...

James puts down the folder and picks up his pocket bible.

KATE SWAN (ON TV) Well, Aaron the man known simply as the Stalker was reportedly found dead early this morning. Police have not yet identified the man and they've been keeping a tight lid on details. However, a source tells us that the body is currently at a local funeral home and that his death has been ruled a suicide. The police will be conducting a news conference later this evening, and we will bring you those details live.

## INT. BATHROOM - LATER

James washes his hands. He leans down into the sink and douses some water on his face. Suddenly the lights go out.

He tries the light switch on the bathroom wall. Nothing.

## INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The entire house is cloaked in darkness.

James enters the hallway just in time to notice something FLITTER across the end of the hallway.

The walls seem to quiver as a strong gust of wind SMASHES against the house.

# INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The huge oak tree on the front lawn produces an imposing shadow on the office wall. Tree branches flail violently in the heavy wind.

They no longer look like branches at all, they look like wriggling arms fighting one another.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. CHURCH - 8 YEARS AGO

Dust particles are visible in the air as rays of rich sunlight cascade through the ornate stained glass windows that line both sides of the pews.

James (12) sits alone in a pew. His face is puffy and red.

FATHER RICHARD GREEN (late 50's), paternal looking with eyes that convey a willingness to help comes upon young James.

FATHER RICHARD James, have you been crying? What's wrong?

JAMES (ashamed) I'm sorry, Father. I was just leaving.

FATHER RICHARD Nonsense. Tell me what's wrong. Let me try and help.

JAMES I'm frightened, Father.

FATHER RICHARD And what are you frightened of, James?

JAMES Everything.

#### FATHER RICHARD

(laughs) Well you can't be afraid of everything. You've made it here today. Haven't you?

#### JAMES

I guess.

FATHER RICHARD Then what is it?

JAMES I'm afraid of death.

## FATHER RICHARD

I see. Well you are much to young to be thinking about death, James. Besides, there is much good in this world and in order to appreciate it, you must overcome your fear. Only then can you enjoy what life has to offer.

JAMES How do I do that, Father?

# FATHER RICHARD

(laughs) In due time James. For now why don't you concern yourself with some of Sister Margaret's banana nut muffins. Nothing to fear there. Except if she's gotten into the sacramental wine.

BACK TO PRESENT

James sits at the desk enveloped by darkness.

He tries one drawer, then another. He finds a FLASHLIGHT.

INT. BASEMENT/MORTUARY - LATER

Pitch blackness.

A door slowly CREAKS open. James is silhouetted at the top of the stairs.

The flashlight CLICKS on and James begins a slow, cautious, descent down the stairs.

### INT. BASEMENT/MORTUARY

The big house above continues to settle against the storm.

The beam from the flashlight CUTS through the darkness revealing shelves stocked with jars of fluid and embalming equipment.

The flashlight settles on a box stuffed away in the corner of the basement.

James rummages through the box and finds some candles.

The darkness appears to move all around him.

A living, breathing entity.

He SWIRLS around on his heels and his flashlight illuminates a sheet covered corpse lying on a table.

INT. BASEMENT/MORTUARY - LATER

Candles are arranged around the table. They provide James with just enough light to perform his work.

He slowly, respectfully rolls back the sheet. He looks at the corpse and says...

JAMES You knew this would happen. Didn't you?

Lying on the slab of stainless steel is Father Richard.

A smile creeps across James' face as he begins to massage and flex the legs of the corpse.

FLASHBACK #2 TO:

## INT. RECTORY - PREVIOUS EVENING

Most of the office is ensconced in shadows as a desk lamp gives off a low glow.

In the corner of the room sits an armoire.

Father Richard sits behind a desk with a wooden box before him. Across from him sits James.

Father Richard caresses the box, almost lovingly

#### FATHER RICHARD

You've matured into quite a young man, James. I'd like to think that I had something to do with that.

JAMES

Of course, Father.

FATHER RICHARD

You know, they will never understand what I've done. But you do.

JAMES You've tried to show them a path to happiness.

FATHER RICHARD That's right.

Father Richard slowly lifts the cover to his box.

For a brief moment, his eyes twinkle as they first catch sight of its contents.

A trace of a smile begins to form at the corner of his mouth.

FATHER RICHARD (CONT'D) I've tried to show them a path. A path out of darkness and fear. Only then can one truly begin to live as God intended. You see that now James, don't you?

James nods a silent agreement.

Father Richard begins to empty the contents of the box.

He holds a driver's license and examines the picture of a pretty, young woman.

FATHER RICHARD (CONT'D) I always knew that you would. When you first came to me, you were a weak and frightened young boy but I saw so much more yearning to come out.

Father Richard puts down the license.

He peers down once more into the box, and picks up a HUMAN TOOTH. The trace of a smile is gone.

He grins widely. Fascinated by his memento.

He starts to put the tooth back amongst the other contents of the box, hesitates, and finally lays it to rest in his breast pocket.

JAMES The first time were you scared, Father?

FATHER RICHARD I'd prayed on it, James and I'd steeled my mind against any such unpleasantness.

JAMES

And after?

Father Richard turns his attention from his precious box and looks at James.

All friendliness and care is gone from his eyes. This is a killer's stare.

FATHER RICHARD The guilt you mean? When one sets out on an un-blazed trail, there are pitfalls and dangers all about. One doesn't really know what to expect.

Father Richard visibly tries to calm himself. He leans back in his chair.

FATHER RICHARD (CONT'D) For a while, I waited. Waited for the guilt to rise up in me like some filthy disease. But in the end, there was nothing.

He leans forward, turning his attention back to his box.

He picks up a lock of black hair. Brings it to his nose and breathes deeply of it.

FATHER RICHARD (CONT'D) I suppose the rewards of my work outweighed the need for any guilt. That was when I knew I was on the right path. That *HE* approved.

JAMES They will hate you. Say that you turned your back on Him. FATHER RICHARD Yes. Just as they hated Him when He lived. Now they revere and worship him. What they fail to realize is that I could not have done this without free will. <u>His</u> greatest gift.

He studies James and tries to judge if his sermon has reached its intended target.

FATHER RICHARD (CONT'D) If He had not approved, He would never have planted the seed. To be free is to know God, and to truly be free one must live without fear. When I killed I became *their* greatest fear, and so I had none.

Father Richard closes the box. He gently glances a hand over the top one last time.

FATHER RICHARD (CONT'D) And now you must lose your fear James. It's my last gift to you.

Father Richard stands, the paternal gaze that comforted James 8 years ago has returned.

He smiles with the pride of a father as he walks toward the armoire and opens its doors.

His back turned towards James, he closes his eyes.

James stares at his mentor for moment.

Stealthily, he rises out of his chair.

He brandishes a barber's razor blade. In a FLASH, he is upon Father Richard and cuts his throat from ear to ear.

Blood spews out of the gaping wound with a violent ferocity.

The armoire is caked in a sticky coat of blood.

The body collapses in James' arms like a heavy burlap sack. Slowly, gently, he lowers the corpse to the floor.

He produces a cloth and wipes the blade before placing it in Father Richard's lifeless right hand.

James takes the souvenir box off the desk.

Underneath the box is an envelope left by Father Richard addressed:

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN"

BACK TO PRESENT

INT. BASEMENT/MORTUARY

His gaze perpetually fixed on the ceiling, a milky white film glazes over Father Richard's eyes as he lays on the embalming table.

James sits by his side gently stroking his hair as GUTS and INNARDS flow sporadically through a clear tube that protrudes from Father Richard's neck.

Overcome, James' eyes begin to water; a tear emanates from the corner of his right eye and gently rolls off the slope of his cheek onto the steel embalming table.

> JAMES (stutter is gone) They think it's all over. That their fear is gone, when really its just dormant. I will satiate my fear with theirs.

Upstairs, a door violently SLAMS shut.

SHIPLEY (O.S.) James! James! I forgot my damned wallet. Where are you?

The flashlight CLICKS off.

James quietly douses the candles.

He sits quietly in the pitch blackness of the basement for a few moments before he calls out...

JAMES I'm down here Mr. Shipley.

FADE OUT.

SUPERIMPOSE: "YOU FEEL THE LAST BIT OF BREATH LEAVING THEIR BODY. YOU'RE LOOKING INTO THEIR EYES. A PERSON IN THAT SITUATION IS GOD!" (beat) TED BUNDY

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.