

Ghost Writer

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James was a noted author who had a dead line to meet for his next novel. When writer's block stalls him, he finds inspiration from beyond the grave. Thanks to brucek for the inspiration.



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James Lamar Bateman was a twice published author from Rhode Island. His last book, Remnants of the Past, had done really well making his agent all the more anxious for him to begin a third novel. He wrote murder mysteries, kind of "who done it's." Normally he would have no trouble coming up with a new and innovative plot to captivate his reading audience. The problem was, James was suffering writer's block and no matter how hard he tried to turn his attention toward meeting his agent's demand for a new piece of work, nothing came.

"What do you want from me Adrian? All I can tell you is that I'm working on an idea; it takes time you know. I'll have something down on paper for you soon, ok?"

James hung up the phone knowing full well he was lying through his teeth. He had nothing, not even an idea for a story. He'd already cashed his advance check, so he was getting desperate.

"Honey, since you're kind of stalled right now, would you mind taking Anna to the mall and help her pick out school supplies? School starts in two weeks, she needs the usual stuff. I'd take her myself, but I promised Ruth Gordon I'd come over today to help her get ready for the party she's having tonight."

James heaved a heavy sigh. His wife had just confirmed what he already knew. He was stalled; devoid of ideas. Why not spend his time strolling through Wal-Mart doing some mundane errand for his daughter. At least it would mean doing something productive for a change.

James and his daughter, Anna went straight for the school supply displays. Anna went ahead of him to gather a few binders, notebook paper, etc. James turned his attention to some of the stationary items on the shelf. He stepped away from his cart to look at some sticky note pads, on which he liked to jot down ideas.

He didn't even notice when a book dropped from the shelf and fell into his shopping cart. Anna came up and threw some of her items in the cart and soon they had finished checking out.

Back at home, James noticed Anna had left a journal type notebook in the bag.

"Hey you, you forgot this." He said holding up the journal for her to see.

"Oh, that's not mine Dad. Why would I need a journal for school? It must be yours."

James shrugged his shoulders. He didn't put it in the cart, but he didn't want to drive all the way back to the mall just to return it. He decided to keep it.

He looked at the journal, reading the words on the cover of it. "Inspirations", the word slapped him in the face.

Inspirations huh, Well, I'd welcome a little inspiration about now. You got anything for me? He thought to himself as he opened it to see blank pages. *Didn't think so,* he said tossing it over on his desk. If nothing else, he could use it to jot down ideas; that was of course, if he ever came up with an idea. This was the longest case of block he had ever suffered and his fear was that it might be permanent.

James had given up his job as a system analyst a year ago when his second book took off. Allison was a nurse and her salary alone wouldn't support them if he failed to get this next book done. She had supported him

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when he wanted to devote his efforts full time to writing; he didn't want to fail her faith in him.

The next morning he sat back down in front of his computer, determined to get something down on his Word Processor. *Think Jimmy boy, you can do this if you just put your mind to it.* He saw the journal lying open and started to doodle a face on the first page; the face of a guy who looked haggard and slightly evil looking. *Maybe this is my killer, or maybe Iâ€™m just doodling to put off writing something.*

He slammed the journal shut, rubbing his face with his hands in exasperation. He looked back down at the journal and it was again opened to the first page. There was his doodle staring up at him, but this time there were words written beneath the doodle.

Talk to me James. I can help you with that writerâ€™s block problem youâ€™re having buddy.

â€œWhat the hell?â€ James said aloud. â€œI didnâ€™t write that!â€ Closing the journal once again, he got up from the desk. He turned looking at the journal again, this time it remained closed. He wanted to reach for it and see if he had imagined the words, but he decided against it.

If Iâ€™m losing my mind right now, I donâ€™t think I want to know. James thought to himself as he proceeded to the kitchen. He poured a strong cup of coffee to clear his head. He gave up trying to write for the day, deciding instead to take a jog down by the lake.

That night, all James could think of was that damn journal and the words that had appeared on the page under his creepy doodle. Curiosity got the better of him. He got out of bed in the middle of the night and went to his study. Turning on the bankerâ€™s lamp on the desk he immediately looked at the journal. It lay open and the face stared up at him as a shadowy, grimacing smile seemed to cross its lips. For some reason James felt as if a cold draft had just blown over him, he shuddered slightly as he reached for the journal.

Maybe I did write under the drawing. It was done in an absent minded moment after all. He muttered to himself while picking the book up.

He opened the journal and his jaw dropped. The face had taken on a new look; more menacing than heâ€™d drawn it. There were again scribbled words on the page.

You took your sweet time getting back to me Jimmy. Go ahead; ask me how I can help you with your little problem. I donâ€™t do anything until you ask me.

James threw the book down, his hands trembling and his heart racing. He felt dizzy and his stomach seemed to be doing flip flops, making him nauseous.

Iâ€™m having a breakdown of some kind. This canâ€™t be happening. Oh God, this isnâ€™t happening! James said aloud, as he sank into the chair behind his desk.

At that moment, the journal snapped opened. James watched the words appearing this time across the page; no pen no human hand to form them.

ASK ME JAMES!

Now James was shaking violently; he couldnâ€™t move. He just sat there staring at the words for what seemed like an eternity. He didn't understand what was happening, but at this point he was getting desperate. Finally, he picked up a pen from his desk, and with still trembling hand, he pulled the journal to him and wrote.

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“Tell me how you can help me with my writer’s block.”

The face at the top seemed to smile, as words again began to appear on the page.

I can write the story for you. All you have to do is write it just like I tell you to. Don’t change anything I tell you to write; not one word. It’ll be better than anything you’ve ever written. Hell, it will be made into a movie Jimmy. You will be famous! You can take all the credit; no one will ever know where it came from. Just you and me Jimmy boy; what do you say?

“Who the hell are you? What are you?” James’ voice came out almost in a shout. He quickly lowered his voice, not wanting to wake Allison and his daughter. They would think he was insane if they were to hear him arguing with someone that wasn’t even visible.

“What am I thinking, I am insane apparently!” He mumbled. “I’ve heard of ghost writers; but this isn’t what it meant, I’m sure.”

I’m waiting James! Do you want my help or not?

James slowly put his pen to the paper and began writing.

“Yes, I want your help.” He replied to the unseen author of the question.

Good choice Jimmy. We’ll start in the morning. Go get some sleep pal; going to be a busy day tomorrow.

The journal snapped shut; leaving James sitting in the dim light of his study. He thought of himself as an intelligent man, sane to the point of being boring. Now he doubted his sanity; wondering if the pressure being put on him by Adrian and having writer’s block was causing him to hallucinate.

James felt drained, both emotionally and physically. He finally got up from his desk and headed for the bedroom. He wasn’t sure how much sleep he would get, but perhaps things would be better by morning.

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It had been a fitful night for James, with little sleep and what sleep he got was filled with nightmares.

He drug himself to the shower and by the time he stepped out to face the mirror, he was feeling a little better. Grabbing a comb, he looked into the large mirror over the sink.

*Damn, I look like death warmed over.* He thought, as he looked at the dark circles under his eyes.

Normally he thought himself to be fairly good looking. His dark brown wavy hair, hazel eyes and strong jaw line along with a dimpled chin made most women look twice in his direction. For thirty-eight, his body wasn’t bad either, jogging every morning and twice a week at the gym kept his muscles toned. But this morning, anyone having to guess his age would have put him ten years older.

He went downstairs, letting Allison sleep in, since it was a Saturday, and it was rare for her to have a Saturday off. He made coffee and two slices of toast for himself and headed to his study. Hoping that last night was just one of the nightmares he remembered having.

Sitting down in front of his computer, he glanced over at the journal; it was closed. James was briefly relieved, thinking everything was back to normal. He leisurely ate his toast, and complimented himself on

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making a great brew of coffee.

“ Now, to get to work on this damn book; Iâ€™m not getting up until Iâ€™ve written at least the first chapter.”

Just as he started to type the title page, he caught a movement from the corner of his eye. He looked to see the journal lying open, words quickly spreading over the page. Again, James sat frozen, unable to take his eyes away from the book.

*What are you doing James; not starting without me I hope. We made a deal last night, remember?*

*Oh God, it wasnâ€™t a nightmare. Whatever this thing was, it wasnâ€™t going away. He wasnâ€™t hallucinating, he wasnâ€™t going crazy; this was real, it was happening.*

“ What are you? What do you want from me?”

*Iâ€™ve been a busy guy Jimmy. Check it out.*

The journal started flipping page after page; as if caught by a strong wind. The pages all filled with writing; the entire journal was full.

James picked up the journal and saw that it was several chapters of a novel. At the top of the first page was the title; A Taste for Blood.

James reluctantly began to read through the story. It was good, really good. He was surprised at the style and the grasp of the English language contained in the story. It was written from the killerâ€™s prospective, which was different from anything he himself had written. This collaboration might just work out; he could take all the credit after all. If the story remained this gripping all the way to the end, it would be the best thing he'd ever written.

He propped the journal up beside his computer and began typing. Before he knew it, several hours had passed.

Allison came into the study and smiled as she saw him typing away in front of his computer.

“ Looks like youâ€™re over your writerâ€™s block honey. Thatâ€™s great; itâ€™s so good to see you working again.”

Hearing her speak startled James. He hadnâ€™t heard her enter his study. He quickly closed the journal and laid it to the side.

“ Yeah, something came to me last night and this morning itâ€™s practically writing itself.” He smiled.

“ Fantastic. Whatâ€™s it about?” Allison leaned over his shoulder to see the computer screen.

He minimized the screen, and mumbled something about wanting it to be a surprise. Even after just a few chapters, the story had already gotten pretty graphic in its descriptions of a serial killerâ€™s murders. It started with killing animals when the character was a young boy; but now he had progressed to people, mainly young women.

“ Ok, Iâ€™ll leave you alone. Anna and I are running into town to pick up a few things. Iâ€™ll be back in a bit.”

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James was glad to know he had the house to himself for awhile. Not that Allison ever bothered him when he was writing; but if he had a conversation with the journal's author he didn't want it overheard. He returned the journal to its place and started typing again. The next paragraph spoke of killing a young woman. It seemed each killing became more disturbing than the last.

*I watched her for three days before taking her. Learning her routine, where she worked; I even knew she liked her coffee with two sugars and one cream. She would be my fourth and I really wanted to do something special with her. Take my time; make it last as long as possible. I guess that's when I really got into to the torture fetish thing. It's like doing drugs; after awhile you have to do more and more to get that rush; that high.*

*Running a blade over her body; seeing the blood ooze out like a beautiful ribbon reminded me of a present. She was my present, and watching her squirm under my knife; begging and crying for me to stop really turned me on. I could smell her fear. I licked the blood that trickled down her stomach. It tasted sweet, and I wanted more*

*I cut deeper the next time, and she screamed in pain; I was in control. This was going to last a long time. I teased her, making her think I'd let her go if she told me she liked it. That's the way it went for hours, before she passed out. I finished off the night by raping her, and then I slit her throat. When it was over, I stared into her pretty blue eyes that had become blank with death. I missed the look of fear in them. I knew soon I would have to find another to satisfy my taste for blood.*

James stopped typing and just stared at the computer screen. This was getting more violent with each paragraph. Adrian would never believe he wrote this; it was completely out of the box, and nothing like his other mystery novels. What ever this thing was, it was evil and dark. James began to regret inviting it to help him.

*I'm not sure I can do this. The stuff you're writing here is pretty damn sick. I know it's from the serial killer's viewpoint, but maybe we could tone down the gore a little for the readers.*

*I told you James, you don't get to change a word. That crap you were writing before was for kiddies; this story will make you look like a freaking literary genius. You think you can sell movie rights with your last book? Producers don't want PG murder; they want it real, and they want it full of blood because it sells at the box office.*

As distasteful as some of the scenes in this book were; James knew this *thing* was right. If he wanted to really make his mark in the book world; he had to keep writing the story.

For the next two weeks James lived at his computer. He slept only a couple of hours a night; and barely ate, even though Allison brought meals in to him. Every time she had suggested he take a break from writing, he snapped at her and told her to leave him alone.

Even if he'd wanted to get away from the computer and relax; the *thing* that was leaving him the chapters wouldn't allow him to. James felt as if it was in the study, standing over his shoulder watching every word he typed. The more the book progressed, the more he felt its presence in the room.

This morning when he sat down at his computer, he thought he caught the scent of a cigarette. He didn't smoke and neither did his wife. But the smell was strong and he could have sworn he saw smoke hovering in the air of his study. He didn't know if it was the smell, or the fact that he had not been taking care of himself, but he noticed he was feeling weak and having a hard time concentrating for the past few days. He'd be glad when this book was finished and in the hands of his agent.

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“ Maybe you’ll leave me alone after this is finished. I’m sick of you, and I’m sick about what you’re doing to those poor women. The only saving grace is that they aren’t real, and this gore is just fiction.”

*Ah, Jimmy boy I thought you would have toughened up by now; and who said it was fiction?*

James stiffened and looked at the journal. The original doodle had been slowly changing and now it appeared to be a man in his mid-forties; with piercing black eyes and his black hair hung tangled. He looked evil with deep creases lining either side of his mouth; which now seemed to curl into a wicked mocking grin. He also noticed the image had faded a great deal; what the relevance of that was, he didn’t know.

“ Are you telling me that the things I’m writing are real events? Oh my God, it’s you isn’t it; you’re the serial killer! This is *your* story I’m writing.”

*Relax Jimmy, somewhere deep down inside that head of yours, you knew you were writing a real story. Besides, you’ll love the ending; I got caught and they gave me the death sentence. I got fried in the chair Jimmy; they put a hood over my head and turned on the juice. You’ll get a real kick out of writing that chapter, won’t you? But that’s a couple of chapters away, so we still get to have a little fun with a couple of blonds before it’s over.*

James felt ill, he turned quickly to a trash can that sat by his desk. What little lunch he’d eaten was now gone. It seemed the room was spinning. He wanted to get up and leave the study, but he didn’t have the strength to get out of his chair. He suddenly felt as if he was an accomplice to these grizzly murders. He fell forward onto his desk.

Sometime later, James lifted his head from his desk and looked toward the clock on the wall. He’d been out for more than forty-five minutes. He groaned and thought for a minute he was going to be sick again.

*What the hell is happening to me? This is more than not taking care of myself; I feel like I’m dying.*

He managed to get up and go to his bedroom; flopping face down onto the bed. He slept for several hours. It was the first sound sleep he’d had in weeks and when he woke, he felt a little better.

Hearing Allison moving around in the kitchen, James made his way downstairs. He had neglected her and Anna ever since he started writing the book; now he wanted to spend time with them. He wanted to sit and chat; catch up on things with Anna and school. He wanted to feel normal again.

“ Well, look who’s up? I was so glad to see you away from that damn computer of yours and getting some rest. I’ve been worried about you James; you haven’t been yourself lately. You look so tired and pale.” Allison said, giving him a kiss on the cheek.

“ I know Baby, but you know how I am when I start a new book. I’m fine I promise; and the book is almost finished. You’ll be wishing I was back in my study in no time at all.” He said, as he gave her an apologetic smile.

“ Well, I’ve never seen you so intense with your writing before. This one seems different somehow.”

“ For now, let’s forget about the book and just have a nice supper, and spend some quality time as a family.”

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James relaxed with his family and even managed to laugh a few times during supper. His appetite hadn't really returned to normal though; he tried to hide the fact that even the smell of food was making him feel nauseous. He choked down enough to keep Allison from nagging him, and then pushed his plate away.

"Oh Dad, I want to show you my essay paper I wrote in English class. I got an A+ grade on it. I'll be right back, I'll run upstairs and get it." Anna said, jumping up from the table.

In less than a minute James and Allison heard a blood curdling scream coming from the base of the stairs in front of the study.

Both jumped up and went running to see about their daughter. They found her standing in the doorway to the study, shaking like a leaf.

"Honey, what is it; what's wrong. Are you ok?" Allison asked.

"I saw something; someone, standing over by Dad's desk!" She said, pointing in the direction of her father's desk.

James walked into the room, looking for signs of a person being in the study. He saw nothing at all out of the ordinary; no one there. He did however; notice the distinct smell of a cigarette.

"Sweetie, there's no one here. You probably saw a shadow or something; nothing for you to be scared of Anna."

James calmed his daughter down and convinced her that there was no one in the house. They went back to the kitchen and James tried to act as normal as possible for the remainder of the evening with his family. The truth was he was feeling unsettled by what his daughter thought she saw in his study. He had smelled the cigarette smoke several times now, and he had felt he wasn't alone in his study too. Was this thing manifesting itself; the thought terrified James. This had to end; one way or the other he had to rid himself of this monster.

Later that evening, he returned to his computer, determined to finish the book and be done with all the strange occurrences that had surrounded him since he brought home that damn journal. Once the book was done, he hoped all of this would be over and whatever; whoever this was would simply go away.

*When this is done, I'll burn this journal in the fireplace!*

He picked up the journal and got ready to type the remaining chapters to his book. The face stared out at him, barely visible, but very angry looking.

*Hey Jimmy boy, I wouldn't be too quick to burn this journal up. You never know, you might just need it again sometime.*

"I won't need it after this book is finished. Once it gets published; I'm done with writing for good. Now leave me alone and let me get to the chapter where you burn in hell, you bastard!"

*By all means, write the final chapter Jimmy. I'm as anxious as you are to get this over with; maybe even more so.*

James typed like a mad man; until he was nearly finished.



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*The serial killer was lead to the death chamber; a priest uttered a final prayer before the guards strapped him into the electric chair. His head had been shaved and they placed a black hood over his head; and then lowered a metal skull cap hooked up to several electrodes, on top of the wet sponge that lay atop the man's head. Once everything had been secured, they were ready to carry out the execution.*

"I'll be back; you can't kill me you sons of bitches! I'll go after you wives and your daughters; you'll see!" The man shouted just before the guard in the chamber nodded to another man standing behind a glass wall in the next room.

James paused for a moment before writing the last sentence of his book.

"You ready to feel the current surging into your body one more time; you sick demon?" James asked.

*Fire away Jimmy boy; pull the switch. Get your pathetic jollies while you can sucker.*

*The man in the room looked up to the clock on the wall, there were five seconds remaining until mid-night. Putting his hand on the handle of the electric panel box; he waited for the second hand to click down, five-four-three-two...one. He pulled the handle down; held it for a full minute and then raised it.*

*The doctor in the chamber placed a stethoscope on the prisoner's chest and listened for a heartbeat.*

*Shaking his head, he motioned for the guard to lower the handle again. This time he held it for a minute and a half before raising the handle once more. The doctor confirmed the prisoner was deceased.*

Just as James typed the final word onto the page; he felt something happening to him. He looked at the journal, which was now blank and the face was no longer there.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, causing him to quickly turn to look behind him. There stood the man James had described in his book as the serial killer! Even as he turned, James realized something terrible was happening to him. His body grew so weak, he couldn't even speak. His eyes grew wide and the terror that only a dying man can know overcame him. He couldn't breathe and the pain was unbearable; beads of sweat rolled down his face as he struggled to scream.

"Time for you to go now Jimmy boy; you see I waited for you for a long time. My soul stuck in a frigging Journal, waiting for a genuine writer to come along and set me free. Of course the only way it would work is if you actually asked me to help you write your story. Sitting in my cell waiting to die, I wrote in a journal. I made a deal with the devil; and now I'm back."

"I'm out, and free to resume my fun with the ladies. Who knows, I might just start with that gorgeous wife of yours. Maybe sweet Anna too; spare them the heart ache of finding you slumped over your desk, dead from a heart attack. Should of taken better care of yourself Jimmie; so young too.

Can you feel it Jimmy boy; the ticker slowing down, pain in the chest like a vice squeezing the life out of you? Now your soul can spend years in that journal looking for someone to set it free." His laughter echoed through the house. James was beyond any response; he was now just another victim of the serial killer.

Franklin Earl Jenkins walked out of the study, took a cigarette from his shirt pocket and lit it. He turned around and blew smoke toward James.

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Three days later the headlines of the morning newspaper read: Young Woman's Body Found Raped and Savagely Mutilated in West Park.

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