

***Dink! Dink! Dink! Dink!***

The dumbwaiter had arrived backstage at the coffee bar.

Slowly ... Kevin sat up, shifted forward to the cushion's edge, his hands unconsciously purchasing a claw-grip on the armrests ...

*Clang. Scrape.*

The large wooden handle on the exterior of the dumbwaiter convulsed once, then slid smoothly up and over, till it banged resoundingly ...

Kevin sat, watching from across stage ... the twin doors of the dumbwaiter *banged* open, smacking against the cabinets.

He peered ... his eyes digging into the darkness inside the open, traveling cupboard. It was too dark in there. Couldn't see a damn thing. Was it empty?

Presently, there was movement inside ... something flopped between the open doors of the dumbwaiter. Something twitched ... slowly extending from the black cell.

Boggled, Kevin watched, but did not comprehend. An ill-defined form slid ... bumped ... laboriously extracting itself from the compartment.

Now ... it stood, erect, upon the backstage floorboards.

*God almighty.* The form. Humanoid.

Soundlessly, the thing teetered.

Then, to Kevin's horror ... it began to walk. Straight at him.

It knew Kevin was there. No mistaking. The thing was advancing directly at him. Moving deliberately, painstakingly, as if injured or somehow partially incapacitated. On ... and on ... it came ... propelled forward by an iron intention.

It stepped ... and half-dragged ... and stepped ...

Employing spastic fingers Kevin fumbled with his iPhone, clicked on the flashlight app and pointed it at the thing ...

... it lumbered forward and waddled into the light of Kevin's phone ...

Kevin saw it ... his heart swelled and froze stone-hard ...

It was Hunter.

*Hunter.*

He looked ... dead. Looked like a corpse.

It moved and dragged ... till it stood, leaning over the sweating man in the chair ...

Kevin wanted to scream. Wanted to scream like a *girl*. But he couldn't get anything out ...

... the thing bore-down ...

... looked into Kevin's face ... displaying dead eyes of an unseeing cadaver ... but ... the irises were moving.

It spoke.

It said ...

“Kevin ...”

It wheezed. Appeared to take a breath, with effort ...

“Kevin, my friend .... Why did you do this to me?”

Reflexively, Kevin's eyes moved from the creature's face, down the neck, to its chest ...

... Kevin's horror amped off-chart ... at the spectacle — a knife was buried in the chest of his best friend, black gunk oozing from the wound. It was not Kevin's hunting knife, but a crude, uglier implement.

A wave of nausea spilled through Kevin's head and throat — he felt he might be blacking-out.

He found his voice ... feeble ...

“I ... I didn't do that ... there's no way. It wasn't me, Hunter ....”

At the sound of these words Hunter staggered, then pulled himself upright. His plaintive voice replaced by snarling ...

“You *lie*.”

“No ... I'm not lying, Hunter. I would never hurt you. I ... didn't do anything ....”

The corpse's eyes flamed. It coughed ... or upchucked, Kevin couldn't tell which. Teetering, the Hunter-thing bellowed...

“You *lie!*”

Then ... it moved its hands toward the knife in its chest. Wrapping first one hand round the handle of the blade, the second hand enfolding over the top of the first. The fingers clenched, knuckles turning even whiter. The cadaver began to pull on the knife. As it labored, the Hunter monster spoke in hideous, exploding syllables with each yank of the blade ...

“You ... are ...” the knife flexed and ground outward fractionally “... *a ... ly... ing ...basss ... turd ...!*”

... Kevin flinched at the sickening display ...

... the Hunter-thing took a deep breath ... violently yanked the knife handle, bellowing ...

“... *Bass-turd!! ....*”

— the implement broke free of the chest with an audible expulsion of rotten air from the chest wound, capped by a wet sucking sound. The stench was indescribable.