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2nd Period
9 September 2013

The Horrors of Bane Manor

It was a dark and dismal evening in Surrey, England, and no light could be seen save the occasional flickering flame and the flashing of the night sky. Despite the relatively early hour, the clouds above loomed black, and they shook the sky with periodic cracks of thunder. With each burst of lightning, a man, wrapped in a cloak to fight the storm, could be seen hurrying through a path surrounded by overgrown bushes and low-hanging branches, constantly grabbing at his clothes. As the man reached the end of the treacherous trail, he was granted with a view of his destination, a legendary mansion known as Bane Manor. The house itself was massive and magnificent, with high arching windows, tall, pointed towers, and two gargantuan front doors, with doorknockers the size of a skull. Yet, there was an air of neglect about the place. The plants were unkempt, the grass overgrown, cracks crawled their way up the decaying stone walls, and gloom hung around every corner like an doomed mystery no one wants to solve. The man climbed the front steps to the towering doors, seized the huge knocker, and struck it against the wood three times. He waited for a moment, and then, just as an especially violent crack of thunder shook the grounds, the handle clicked and the door began to slowly open...

Knock, knock, knock. Upon hearing the familiar sound of the morning, footsteps approached the front door, and the owner of those footsteps pulled the door ajar to find a single letter lying on the mat. Curious, the man grabbed the letter, seized his knife, and slit the parchment. The note read "Dear Daniel, I would be most honored to receive your

company on the eve of this coming Sunday. I think we have a great deal of catching up to do after these many years, and I would like to seek your assistance about my estate. You see, over the past years, I've grown sick, and in the event of my death, I would like to ensure that Bane Manor falls into the desired hands. As I understand, this is your area of expertise. I am very much looking forward to our meeting, my old friend. Sincerely, Alexander Bane." At the bottom of the page, written in small but bolded letters were the words "*Come alone.*" As a writer of wills and testaments, Daniel received similar letters frequently, often from sickened elderlies or worried sons or daughters, but there was something...odd about this particular note. Alexander Bane...the name of course is well known, as he is among the richest men in all of southeastern England, and although widely respected, his name is shrouded in mystery. Born to an extremely wealthy family, Bane's life was thrown into turmoil when his parents were brutally murdered by a local serial killer. Young Alexander was five years old, and he witnessed the entire ordeal, no doubt scarring his eyes for life. Unlike most other wealthy Englishmen, Bane lives alone, except for a few housekeepers, in his secluded manor, seldom leaving the grounds. But what struck Daniel most peculiar about the message was the way Bane referred to him as an old friend, even calling him by his first name. It was true that Daniel had once known Alexander Bane when they were young children and had attended the same preliminary school, but the two had limited contact at best. Over a period of four years, Daniel had spoken to Alexander only a handful of times, but he always held the opinion that Alexander desired a friendship with him. Now that he thought on it, he reminisced how Alexander would often stare at Daniel and his friends as they would play, displaying a jealous but sorrowful expression on his face. In fact, Bane had no real friends at all,

living alone his whole life. And yet, here was Bane, years later, sprung out of the blue and into the real world to seek an old acquaintance. Worrisome feelings of apprehension and confusion couldn't help arousing in the pits of Daniel's stomach.

"Good evening, Mr. Stephenson, you're expected." Peering through the opened door, Daniel caught a glimpse of the dimly lit interior of the house before a shadowed figure stepped into view, blocking his vision. Just as Daniel was wondering about the identity of the figure, lightning cracked, the sky lit up above, and for a split second, the figure's face was revealed. Daniel, momentarily shocked, gasped sharply at the figure. Standing much closer to Daniel than he had expected, the man was severely aged, his harsh face characterized by drooping wrinkles, dark circles under his eyes, and a thoroughly unpleasant grimace that seemed to never change. Standing quite tall compared to Daniel, the man wore a dusty black butler's suit, plagued by years of wear and tear. Realizing that this was the man that had spoken to him, Daniel said, "er, right...thank you. Quite a night."

"Indeed, sir. Near perfect conditions, I would say." The man stepped back and said, "Please come in, Mr. Bane is most anxious to see you."

Trying to ignore the man's odd comments, Daniel stepped over the threshold and into the great mansion. Never in all of England had Daniel seen such a beautiful building. Everywhere he looked he saw exquisite furniture, masterfully crafted statues, and wondrous artifacts, all filled with extensive details. In the middle of the room was a massive, elegant double-sided staircase, with a dark, candlelit corridor running underneath it. At the landing at the top of the stairs sat a colossal statue. The statue appeared to be some sort of blend between a man and a creature, with a horned human

head, giant wings, a long, pointed tail, and a large trident in its left hand. The man gestured towards the left side of the staircase and began to ascend the stairs, talking in a quiet, raspy voice as Daniel followed him.

"My name is Gregor, and I am the butler for Bane Manor. Mr. Bane will meet you for supper within the hour. For now, I shall show you to your quarters."

"Thank you, Gregor, I very much appreciate your hospitality. I must say, this place is most exquisite," answered Daniel.

Gregor responded slowly, almost cautiously, "Indeed...it is...adequate for our purposes here." This puzzled Daniel a bit, as he was unsure of Bane's profession or hobby, but he shook the thought and continued to follow Gregor. The butler walked through the upstairs corridor, turned right around a corner at the end of the hall, and arrived at the first door on the left. "This shall be your room for the evening. I imagine you will be quite pleased by with its quality." Gregor paused, then continued, "I will call for you when Mr. Bane is ready. Make yourself at home." Daniel began to respond with his thanks, but Gregor strode away from the room as soon as he finished speaking.

Daniel shut the door and turned to find a magnificent guestroom before him. A large four-poster bed with emerald green sheets sat in the middle of the room, surrounded by beautiful canvasses and paintings, and a welcoming fire crackled in the corner. Tired from his bout in the tough weather, Daniel sank onto the warm bed, covered himself with the silky sheets, and fell asleep. After about half an hour, he awoke with a start as something hard struck his window. Slowly climbing out of the bed, Daniel made his way to the windowsill to investigate, but found no sign of disturbance. As he turned, however, he felt an icy chill rush through him, feeling as though the temperature had dropped fifty

degrees. The fire had abruptly gone out in the corner of the room, and outside, the wind began to scream. His body shivering, Daniel stumbled towards the bed, and just before he reached it, he heard a faint whisper. It was so quiet that at first Daniel wasn't sure he'd actually heard it, but when it repeated itself, he heard it loud and clear. "*Daniel...*"

Puzzled by what he had heard, Daniel stood still for a moment to organize his thoughts, but was interrupted by a sharp rap on the door. He hastily made his way to the door and pulled it ajar, revealing the butler, Gregor. "Mr. Bane is ready for you sir, if you'd kindly follow me," said Gregor in his usual slow manor.

The butler turned to his left and made his way down the dark corridor; Daniel followed, the troubling occurrences of his recent experience still rushing around in his mind. Gregor descended the stairs down into the entrance hall and turned left into a large wooden door that Daniel hadn't noticed earlier. Upon his entry to this new room, the dining hall, Daniel's eyes were greeted with yet another brilliant sight. In the center of the hall sat a grand dining table covered with a horde of delicious looking food that made Daniel's mouth water, and on the wall to the right of the table was a large, impressive fire place with tall dancing flames that cast a flickering light upon the whole scene. Standing in front of the table was an elegant, grandiose man that could only be Alexander Bane. Although he was no taller than 5'10, his proud posture made him look both giant and superior. He wore black pants and a luxurious black shirt, with detailed silver buttons and sleeves rolled up at the elbow. On his right hand, he sported a silver ring with a sizable emerald green gem, and on his left, a gold ring featuring a small, deep red ruby that twinkled menacingly in the firelight. Bane had dark brown hair and a goatee of the same color on his pointed chin, with bits of grey creeping into the corners, and on his face he

wore a smile that should have been welcoming but seemed somewhat forced and unpleasant. Seeing Daniel enter the room, Bane stepped forward and offered his hand, and said, "Welcome, Daniel! It has been far too long since we last met." He gestured towards the table and said, "You may take the seat at the far end." Daniel shook Bane's hand and returned the greeting, then proceeded to take his seat in a kingly chair set at the far end of the lavishly decorated table. Bane spoke again. "As you can see, the feast has already been prepared for us. I do hope you find it to your liking."

"Well it certainly looks fantastic, Mr. Bane, thank you," said Daniel as Gregor approached the table and filled his glass with wine.

The host chuckled and responded, "oh Daniel, please, call me Alexander. We are old friends after all!"

Again struck by Bane's insistence of their friendship, Daniel just nodded his head, picked up his wine glass and said "cheers."

"Ah yes, cheers Daniel. Let us eat first, and then we shall speak." Daniel dug into his food, which tasted as wonderful as it looked. For nearly twenty minutes, the two men filled their stomachs in silence as the warm fire blazed and Gregor watched from the corner of the room. When Daniel had finally had enough, he put down his fork and knife and sat back in his chair, exhaling deeply. Bane completed his meal soon after that, and Gregor strode to the table and collected their used china. It was Bane who spoke first.

"I'm glad to see you enjoyed your supper, Daniel."

"Yes, thank you very much Alexander. I hadn't realized how famished I was from my journey here," answered Daniel. He paused, then continued, "I have to say, when I received your post last week requesting my presence, I must confess I was a bit, well,

surprised. Having not seen you since our days at preliminary school, I didn't expect a letter from you, especially since we never knew each other very well."

The grin on Bane's face faltered slightly for a moment, then regained its former shape. "Ah Daniel, I think your memory deceives you. We were indeed quite close friends back then," he said, dropping his gaze from Daniel.

Bane was clearly not seeing his point of view, so Daniel skipped on to the next subject of interest. "I understand you are sick and desire to draft a will in case of your death?" he said.

"Indeed, that is why I called you here, I suppose," answered Bane.

"Good, good, I can help you there. You actually look very healthy for a man plagued by illness," said Daniel.

"Yes...the sickness comes in bursts. Most of the time, I feel like my normal sane self, but every once in a while, the illness will fight its way into my head, and it won't leave until it...it...is satisfied," said Bane, slowly and almost painfully.

Finding this statement extremely puzzling, Daniel remarked, "that sure sounds like a complicated illness to live with, Alexander. I hope recovery is in your future."

For the first time in minutes, Bane lifted his head and his eyes met Daniel's. The look of sorrow and pain suddenly disappeared from Bane's face, replaced by an expression full of malice and violence. Staring at Daniel with eyes of fire, Bane said "oh I'll be fine...I wish I could say the same about you...sweet Daniel.." CRACK, total darkness.

In an instant, the roaring fire and all of the torches went out in the dining hall, leaving Daniel stranded in the gloom. Thoroughly disturbed by Bane's words and rapid

change in personality, Daniel kept quiet and tried to organize the horrifying thoughts running through his mind. Feeling his heart pound in his ears, he blindly tried to make his way to the wall of the room, hoping to find a door. Walking cautiously with his hands outstretched before him, he eventually made it to the stone wall. Anxious to escape, he advanced along the wall quickly, running into a blunt object on the ground with his shin. Cursing to himself, he felt a searing pain in his leg and a warm liquid that could only be blood ran down his skin. Moving slower now, Daniel clutched the wall desperately, still unable to see anything in the pitch-black room. Finally, the stone turned to wood as Daniel reached the door. He pushed through it apprehensively, horrified at what might lay on the other side.

Daniel stumbled back into the entrance hall and was met with a vision of pure mayhem. The entire room - the staircase, the paintings, the walls - were all engulfed in gigantic crimson and orange flames. Feeling the wave of extreme heat rush over him, Daniel fell to the ground, his head pounding and heart racing. Looking up, he was filled with terrified shock as he saw that the statue at the top of the stairs, now a blazing red color, had come to life and was shooting flames from the end of his trident. Daniel, feeling worse by the second, tried to crawl away from the dining hall door to the front door of the mansion, but his vision gradually became blurred, and his head threatened to explode with every passing second. The closer he got to the door, the more chaotic the scene around him became, and Daniel tried desperately to ignore the insane things that were occurring around him. Finally, Daniel reached the door, and mustering all his strength, he stood up off the ground and grabbed the door handle. Just as his hand touched the metal, a viscous, piercing scream erupted throughout the entire manor. The

noise penetrated Daniel's already weakened mind and brought him back to his knees, and although he concentrated all of his remaining strength and willpower on remaining awake, Daniel felt himself slipping into insanity. His head spinning and body aching, Daniel heard footsteps among the ruckus around him. Looking up, he saw through his blurred vision a dark figure walking towards him. The figure, dressed in a black suit, grabbed Daniel's limp arm with an icy hand and began dragging him across the floor. Daniel, on the point of mental and physical break, could do nothing to help himself. Barely able to see, Daniel saw through one open eye that he was being pulled underneath the stairs into the mysterious corridor he had seen upon his arrival at the mansion. Leaving the lifelike statue and the flames behind, Daniel was dragged down into the dark depths of the house. Unable to fight any longer, he gave in, shut his eyes, and blacked out.

Daniel awoke with a start. Momentarily forgetting what had happened to him, he opened his eyes slowly and gasped, taking in the situation. He was lying on the filthy ground in a prison cell, his body aching with pain. The memories came flushing back, and the feelings of terror reinstated themselves in his mind. His head still spinning from his previous experience, Daniel surveyed his location. The cell was completely empty except for a small rickety table, which sat in the corner, a few rocks which had broken free from the ancient wall, and a grotesque bone, caked with a greenish-black mildew that filled the room with a foul stench. The cell was bordered by three stone walls and a set of rusted iron bars with a heavy metal door in the center. Light was scarce in the dark underground dungeon, with the only light coming from two flamed torches down the hall. Besides Daniel's still-pounding head, he otherwise felt quite sane, so he began to

examine his cell for weaknesses that might result in escape. Although the cell was rusted and old, it remained relatively strong, and Daniel found no loose rock or wide iron bar that he could squeeze through. However, the loose rocks on the floor still puzzled him. Clearly having fallen from the wall, Daniel was led to believe that a weakness existed in the stone, but he was unable to find one. His plans thwarted, he sat down on the dirty floor to rest. Suddenly, the realization of his true situation crashed over him. Daniel was locked in an inescapable cell deep down in a huge secluded manor, brought here by an insane man who certainly would only make things worse for him. Daniel began to weep. In between sobs, he repeatedly muttered "why me? Why me..."

After what seemed like an eternity, the pressing silence of Daniel's cell was interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps. The intimidating shape of Alexander Bane strode into view, carrying a big, rusty pair of pliers. Daniel, afraid of what was to come, shouted, "What do you want from me Bane?" Bane chuckled slowly but did not respond. Daniel yelled again, "Please! I don't understand.... let me go...."

Without a single word, Bane pulled a small key from his pocket, unlocked the cell door and entered it, standing over the prisoner. "What...what are you going to do?" Daniel mumbled. This time he earned a response.

"I am going to torture you."

Daniel looked up at Bane, meeting his eyes. A cold, inescapable rush of fear fell in his stomach as he looked into the evil red eyes of Bane. The entire persona and look of the man had changed. His hair, previously neatly done, was none disheveled, and his cheery smile was locked into a sick, twisted grin. The polite and welcoming nature that displayed itself at dinner had completely disappeared, replaced by violence, insanity, and

pure evil. In the single moment, Daniel knew all hope was gone.

Out of the darkness came Gregor, wheeling in an object that appeared to be a table. He entered the cell and suddenly seized Daniel. Too weak to defend himself, he was pulled onto the table by the butler and forced into a set of leather restraints that held his arms and feet. Approaching Daniel, Bane, with a sick grin on his face, said "Now, where to start first? Ah, how about the nails..." With his pliers in his right hand, he grabbed Daniel's thumb with his left hand and clamped the pliers on the nail. He looked at Daniel, flashed a wicked smile, and pulled with extreme force.

AAARRRRRGGGGHHHH"

Daniel's nail had been ripped clean from his thumb. Looking down at his bloody and mangled finger, tears of pure pain streaked down his face. This torture continued for what seemed like hours, and throughout the ordeal, neither Bane nor Gregor spoke a word, although they did laugh many times. There was no motive for the torture, no reason at all. Lying on the table, blood streaming from his hands and tears running down his face, Daniel knew that Bane had every intention of making him suffer, obtaining every last bit of life from him before finally killing him. Daniel was going to die.

Daniel survived in this living hell for days, growing paler and weaker with each passing hour. Blood constantly poured from untreatable wounds, and his mind slipped deeper and deeper into insanity each day. Gregor and Bane would come torture him each day at the same time, always using different methods to inflict pain. Even when the torturers were gone, Daniel found no peace or relief; the walls shook and horrific screams echoed through the hallways in the dead of night. Daniel began to pray for death. On the seventh day, Bane entered the cell brandishing a freshly sharpened knife. Since Daniel

had become so weakened by the abuse, Gregor didn't tie him up anymore, believing that Daniel had no strength to resist. Ready to begin the latest torture session, Bane approached Daniel from the back, caressing his neck with the blade. Seeing the opportunity he had dreamed about, Daniel mustered all of his remaining strength and took a deep, relaxing breath. He spun on his heel in a single rapid motion and seized Bane's knife. In shock, Bane and Gregor stood motionless, and in that split second Daniel made his decision. The butler was standing outside the cell, holding the keys which had locked the cell doors minutes before. There was no escape. With a brave and final act of life, Daniel swung the knife across Bane's throat, painting the floor beneath him with blood and gore. Smiling to himself at his work, Daniel closed his eyes and took in one deep breath, appreciating the life that it gave. He then turned the knife towards himself and stuck it straight into his own heart. He was unable to bear life anymore. With a triumphant grin on his face, Daniel fell to the ground with a soft thud. Relief came over Daniel as he took his last breath, having ultimately defeated the horrors of Bane Manor.