

BRICK WALL

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John was jolted awake by the shrill sound of his alarm. His ex-girlfriend, Meredith, from whom he had been separated for almost two years, had once upon a time chosen her favorite animal, the armadillo, as his eternal morning companion. Since then, John had had the dubious pleasure of starting each and every morning with a high-pitched screeching in his ears.

There were two reasons he hadn't changed his alarm sound. For one, John wasn't very tech-savvy. Born in 1998, he didn't experience the analog era before the internet, yet he had never chased the latest iPhone or delved into social media. In fact, John might have significantly contributed to the LP record's resurgence. Ever since his dad gifted him an old-fashioned record player for his tenth birthday—his “real” present was an iPod, but his father quickly noticed the look of betrayal in his son's eyes—he had become an avid collector of both new and old LP records. This hobby had intensified over the past three years since John had started to work at one of the largest book publishers in his city, which allowed him to dedicate more disposable income towards expanding his collection.

However, this wasn't the main issue. He probably could have changed it himself despite his lack of technical skills or he could have asked his brother, Alec. Alec, employed at a “computer company”, the specifics of which John never quite understood, was always ready to assist, albeit with a penchant for simultaneously mocking John for his technical challenges.

The frequency of these help-and-tease sessions had increased lately as John couldn't rely on the computer department at work for his frequent email troubles anymore. His vocal criticism of the publisher's budget allocation, favoring new digital solutions over manual manuscript proofreading, had soured his relationship with the head of IT and attempts to seek their help had become futile. No, the real reason John hadn't replaced the piercing screech of the armadillo with something more soothing was that he wasn't over Meredith. She was the love of his life, the one who got away.

After John laboriously wiped the sleep from his eyes, he rose from his bed, which was placed in the largest room of his apartment, a room that served both as a bedroom and a living area. This room, aside from his bed, also contained a sofa, an old-fashioned bulky TV, and a desk where he spent his

workdays correcting manuscripts with a red pen and, much to his chagrin, using his work computer for email correspondence with colleagues and clients.

He walked through the living area to the narrow hallway. The hallway, bridging the living space and his small kitchen, housed the apartment's sole door, apart from the front entrance that led directly into the kitchen. This door opened to a surprisingly spacious bathroom, a contrast to the compactness of the rest of his studio apartment.

After completing his usual morning routine, a brief affair consisting of using the toilet, taking a quick shower, and brushing his teeth, John moved to the kitchen to prepare a cup of coffee. These days, this task required little effort. When the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated working from home, John realized his old traditional coffee maker was ill-equipped for his daily consumption of eight cups. It failed to retain heat, forcing him to brew fresh batches repeatedly.

After he had lamented this inconvenience to his brother, one day, while meticulously editing manuscripts, he was unexpectedly interrupted by the doorbell. Upon opening the door, John found no one there; instead, a package awaited him. The contactless deliveries, commonplace during the pandemic, suited him fine. His social anxiety often flared up when he spotted delivery drivers through the peephole. However, he couldn't recall ordering anything. Curiosity piqued, he scanned the vicinity of the stairwell for the deliverer to no avail. Hence, swiftly, he had brought the package inside to discover its contents.

At first glance, upon opening the package, John was perplexed by the unfamiliar device inside. It was only after perusing the manual that he recognized it as a new type of coffee machine, a "coffee pod machine," adorned with the gleaming logo of "Nespresso." Alec had sent him this gadget, partly out of consideration, but perhaps more so to tease him—a chance Alec seldom missed.

However, unexpectedly and against the odds, John grew quite fond of this new appliance. The coffee it produced was far superior to what his old machine could manage, and the device, surprisingly, was quite user-friendly, even for John. The irony that Alec hadn't had the chance to derive amusement from introducing John to technological advancements brought a self-satisfied smile to John's face as he retrieved his cup from the machine and faced the kitchen window overlooking the courtyard.

The snowstorm, which had now paralyzed the city for three days, appeared to still clutch the city in its icy grip. John deduced this much, especially since yesterday he could barely make out the snowflakes swirling outside and a faint glimmer of light emanating from his neighbor's window across the courtyard. Today, however, with the sun remaining hidden and a dense heaviness in the air, likely due to the wet snow, John mused, all he saw was engulfing darkness.

Since the storm's onset, John, already somewhat averse to social interactions because of his slight awkwardness, found himself even more reluctant to venture outdoors. The seclusion didn't bother him, it allowed more time to indulge in his beloved LP collection post-work. This particular day, though, necessitated a trip to the grocery store across the street. He was nearly out of milk, and for John, milk was an essential addition to his coffee. With a slight grunt of inconvenience, his mind briefly lingering on this bothersome errand, he turned away from the window and made his way to his desk to start today's labor.

He commenced by turning on his computer, filled with anticipation for an email from his manager about his recommendation to onboard a new writer at the publishing company. This writer had, as if out of thin air, sent him a manuscript. John had puzzled over how the author had obtained his contact details as they were not publicly available on the company's website, he had always preferred to keep a low profile at work. The manuscript, an homage to what John imagined as the writer's steadfast determination, aptly featured a story about a detective.

Despite its unsolicited nature, John found himself drawn into reading it. Once he began, he couldn't stop, a rarity among the manuscripts he encountered nowadays. Consequently, John had taken an unprecedented step to advocate for signing the author with his publisher, a bold move for him, as he was usually content working with the manuscripts assigned to him.

Once the computer finally turned on, after an agonizingly long wait that felt even lengthier than usual, John was met with disappointment. His inbox was unexpectedly empty. "How strange..." he reflected, accustomed as he was to a deluge of spam-like emails every morning. Promptly, he drafted a new email to his manager, a reminder about his earlier message.

John's excitement was palpable, it had been a long time since he felt this enthusiastic about anything at work. The task of editing manuscripts, despite his deep love for literature, a passion that had led him to major in

English Literature in college, had become a tedious routine, stripped of the initial joy it once sparked in him. No sooner had he hit send than his computer chimed with the arrival of a new email. John's spirits lifted slightly, hoping it was his manager, who was known for her late starts, responding to his first email as her first task of the day.

However, the email that had arrived was not the anticipated reply from his manager. John struggled to make sense of most of its content, but it was clear that it was some kind of error message indicating that his email hadn't been delivered. "Recipient not found..." he murmured to himself, perplexed. The issue, he deduced, seemed to stem from his internet connection, as evidenced by a 404 error page that greeted him when opening his browser instead of his usual homepage, the website of The Society for Editing. "I knew this heavy reliance on modern technology would backfire..." John thought, a hint of frustration in his mind. Resigned, he reached into his drawer and pulled out the manuscript he had planned to work on for the day.

The manuscript before him, titled *Echoes of the Night*, was penned by a newly signed horror author, a recent addition to the publishing house's roster. While the narrative had its merits, John's red pen was in constant use. Rumor had it the author was a retired academic, a fact that the writing's complexity seemed to confirm. Sentences often veered into the overly intricate, bordering on the obscure. "What a show-off," John muttered under his breath, having just deciphered the meaning of a particularly convoluted sentence.

Time flew by as he delved deeper into the manuscript. Despite struggling with the complex sentence structures, he found himself engrossed in its gripping plot, which revolved around the forbidden love between a castle lord and the widow of his late best friend. Subtle hints suggested, however, that the friend might not have fully departed to the afterlife. It was only when his right hand began to ache from constant writing that John realized it was time for a break.

Setting his pen down, John's gaze lifted to his computer screen, prominently positioned on his desk. The absence of the familiar ping sound had already hinted that no new email from his manager awaited him. Still, he couldn't help but pull the computer closer for confirmation. As he suspected, his inbox remained empty, much to his disappointment. He even checked if the internet had come back to life only to be greeted once more by that persistent 404 error page. "Looks like I'll have to call her," John thought, his reluctance palpable as his eyes began to search for his phone.

He was acutely aware of his manager's aversion to phone calls. Since the beginning of his job, John had preferred direct calls to emails for urgent matters. However, it hadn't been long at the publishing house before he encountered resistance. "Stop calling unless it's an absolute emergency. Otherwise, just send an email," his manager had firmly instructed, just three weeks into his tenure. This, somewhat hostile, directive had instantly triggered John's social anxiety, prompting an immediate and profuse apology with a promise to adhere to this new rule. Now, phone in hand, John hoped his manager would agree that this situation warranted a call. With a hesitant finger, he dialed his manager, Samantha.

The call connected, and John nervously awaited his manager's response as the dial tones rang through. Suddenly, the tones ceased, suggesting the call had been answered, but an eerie silence filled the other end. Intermittent with John's hesitant "Hellos," there was nothing but static noise at first. Then, briefly, a series of sharp, unintelligible voices fluttered in the background before the call abruptly ended.

A chill ran down John's spine. Though he had heard voices, none seemed to belong to his manager. In fact, they didn't sound human at all—too shrill and high-pitched. Confused, John pulled the phone from his ear to double-check the number. It was correct: "Samantha (Manager)" displayed clearly on his "last called" screen. Perplexed, he attempted to call again. This time, pressing the phone to his ear, he was met with complete silence. No dial tone, no static. Nothing. After a moment, he pulled the phone away, only to find its screen pitch black. Dead. He pressed the power button futilely. It was odd, the phone should have been almost fully charged, as he habitually charged it overnight. Moreover, his infrequent use meant the battery usually lasted the entire day with plenty to spare by evening.

Due to his technophobic tendencies, John still had a landline phone, but it offered little solace now. Samantha's number wasn't etched in his memory, and with the internet down, he had no way to look it up. Once again, John found himself ruminating on the frailty of modern technology's omnipresence.

Resigned, he glanced at the analog clock in the kitchen, a cherished heirloom from his grandmother, and contemplated whether this peculiar turn of events justified a break to fetch the milk. Noting that it was nearing three in the afternoon, he decided it was time. He resolved to resume work on the manuscript upon his return.

Halfheartedly, John plugged his phone into a charger near the kitchen sink even though he doubted that was the issue. He then donned his jacket, hat, gloves, and shoes, bracing himself to face the snowstorm outside. As he simultaneously opened his inward-swinging front door, a feature of the old building he lived in, he accidentally dropped his keys. Bending to retrieve them in one fluid motion, he stepped out of his apartment into the stairwell. But instead of the open space he expected, he walked straight into something massive with a thud. Startled, John staggered back, fixing his gaze directly ahead. To his utter disbelief, he found not the open space of the stairwell, but instead was faced with a solid brick wall.

John's astonishment grew as he fixated on the wall. He stared intently for a few seconds, then hesitantly reached out to touch it. The wall was frigid, shockingly so, causing John to retract his hand almost instantly before touching it again, this time letting his fingers trace the bricks' surface. The crimson red bricks were unyielding under his increasingly forceful push.

Ceasing his efforts, he knocked on the wall, listening intently for any sign of hollowness. A lack of sound confirmed his fear. It appeared to be a solid entity, with no open space behind it as evidenced by the absence of any echo or reverberation.

"What the hell is going on?" John thought, a rising tide of panic swelling within him. "The window!" he exclaimed aloud, a mix of hope and desperation in his voice. Even though his apartment was on the second floor, he figured he could survive a jump, a scenario he had often contemplated in his habitual worst-case scenario planning, like being trapped in a burning building.

Approaching the window, he was greeted by the same impenetrable darkness that had enveloped the morning. Absorbed in his work and the day's strange events, he hadn't given it much thought. Standing directly in front of the window, John's heart sank. What he had assumed to be the result of an unrisen sun, a relentless snowstorm, and amassed fog on the glass was something else entirely. Confronting him was the same sight he had encountered at his front door—a solid, crimson red, brick wall.

Panic began to churn within John. "This can't be real," he thought, grappling with the idea that he might be dreaming. Perhaps he had dozed off at his desk, his head resting peacefully on the manuscript, its unnerving storylines weaving into his subconscious and conjuring this nightmare. This possibility brought a momentary relief. The more he pondered, the more

plausible it seemed. “This has to be a dream,” he assured himself silently. “How else could brick walls suddenly block my front door and window? Only in dreams or stories do things this bizarre happen,” he mused, finding a bit of comfort in this line of thought. John knew one thing for certain: he was not the protagonist of some novel. He had never been the centerpiece of any story in his life.

Following the classic method, he pinched himself, expecting to awaken from the odd dream. Yet, when he looked again, brick walls still barred his front door and kitchen window. Despite this, John clung to the belief that he was dreaming, albeit with a sparkle of doubt.

Amid the surreal situation, John suddenly remembered the other window in his apartment, the one in his living area, which had momentarily slipped his mind. John walked through the hallway, reluctant yet expecting. He was almost sure he’d find another brick wall convinced as he was that he was caught in a dream. As such, he wasn’t surprised to face the same obstruction at this window too. A brick wall blocked all sunlight, sealing off not just the room but also John’s hopes of escaping through it.

This unsettling fact only reinforced John’s conviction that he was indeed trapped in a dream. No other explanation seemed plausible. Suddenly, he recalled the earlier anomalies with his computer and cell phone, for a moment forgotten in his shock. This realization eroded the last vestiges of doubt about his dream theory. It was inconceivable that all these bizarre events could align in real life.

To confirm his suspicions, he went back to the kitchen to check on his cell phone. As he pressed the power button, hoping to see it spring to life, he returned to the living area. There, his computer screen was ominously black, unresponsive to his fervent attempts to revive it. His phone, too, refused to awaken. With little hope, John tried his landline in the kitchen, but to no avail. There was no dial tone and pressing the numbered buttons yielded no response.

His TV shared the same fate, remaining lifeless despite his efforts. After exhausting all means of contact with the outside world, a resigned sigh escaped him. “At least the electricity is still working,” he muttered to himself, trying to find a sliver of solace in his bizarre isolation.

“Now what?” John pondered, grappling with his surreal predicament. If indeed he was ensnared in a dream, how could he escape it? The common tactic of pinching himself had failed. While wrestling with this puzzle, John

remembered a manuscript he had once edited. The story eerily mirrored his current situation: a protagonist trapped in a dream, unable to break free. In the narrative, the character managed to return to reality by falling asleep within the dream, subsequently waking up in his bed in the real world. “But how on earth am I supposed to fall asleep in a situation like this?” John wondered. Despite his conviction that he was dreaming, the idea of achieving a state of relaxation deep enough to induce sleep in these bizarre circumstances seemed an insurmountable challenge.

John’s thoughts drifted to a particular jar of pills nestled in his bathroom cabinet. They were prescribed to him just after Meredith’s departure when sleep eluded him, and existential anxiety overwhelmed his every waking moment. Uncertain if the rules of the dream world mirror those of reality, he figured it was worth a try. He made his way to the bathroom, retrieved the pills, and then fetched a glass of water from the kitchen.

Settling into his bed, John opened the jar and gazed at the small, cylindrical white pills. Normally, just one was enough to invite sleep, as prescribed. But tonight, under these extraordinary circumstances, he decided to deviate from the norm. He carefully took out four pills, a significant increase, aiming for a quick and potent effect. As he swallowed the pills with a gulp of water, John closed his eyes and thought, “Let’s hope this works,” silently yearning for a quick escape into slumber. The pills swiftly took hold, and soon, John was deep in sleep.

Opening his eyes, John was met with a grogginess reminiscent of a singular previous experience in his life, specifically the day after a frat party he had attended with a college roommate. The overwhelming feeling had convinced him to steer clear of such excessive drinking and the crowds that indulged in it. It simply wasn’t for him.

As he managed to drag himself out of bed, his gaze was unconsciously drawn to the window. To his dismay, the brick wall loomed as a daunting barrier just as it had yesterday, signaling his continued entrapment. “I must not be dreaming,” John thought to himself, his mind racing to figure out his next steps to escape the dire situation.

But first things first: breakfast. In all the commotion yesterday, he had forgotten to eat, and his growling stomach now reminded him of the need to refuel. Intent on getting something to eat, he headed toward the hallway leading to his kitchen. Yet, as soon as he stepped into the hallway, he stopped

dead in his tracks. Where at its end there should have been the opening to his kitchen, now stood another brick wall.

With his legs failing him, John collapsed on the floor in a hunched sitting position in front of the brick wall. Hopelessness filled his very being. Trying somehow to make sense of the situation, John pondered if he might be in a coma. He remembered he had read somewhere that these sorts of things could happen to people in comas. People in comas can be living out their whole lives in their minds, despite being seemingly unaware of anything in the outer world. If that was the case, was there a symbolic meaning to what was happening to him or perhaps some insight he needed to realize to wake up?

John brushed away the thought and somehow collected a new will to act. The grim reality set in. His apartment had shrunk, losing a room since yesterday. This alarming change ignited a renewed determination within him. Faced with the prospect of his living space further diminishing, John knew he must find a way out before it was too late. If the brick walls hindered him from leaving his apartment, perhaps there were other ways to make contact with the outer world.

In a departure from his usual calm demeanor, John erupted into a frenzy unlike anything he'd ever exhibited before. He launched into a full-blown rampage, pounding on the walls, stomping on the floor, and shouting at the top of his lungs. "Hellooo! Can anyone hear me? Help me, I'm stuck!" he bellowed repeatedly, pausing every few minutes to listen for any response or distant sound. Each time, an oppressive silence greeted him. His frenzy carried him from the living area to the bathroom, where he struck the tiles with such force that they reverberated. He banged on every visible pipe with all his might, but the result was the same as in the living area: nothing. No response.

Pressing his ear against each wall in turn, he strained to hear something: the usual sounds of neighbors, their TVs, their arguments—anything. But today, there was only silence. As his tantrum yielded no results, John wearily attempted to turn on his computer, phone, and TV. The outcome was as fruitless as the day before; none of the devices responded. The electricity, indicated by the light from his lamps, was still on, though the bulbs seemed to flicker and were more faded than usual. Somewhat resigned, John realized what he must do next. It was time to confront his nemesis head-on.

Grasping the heaviest object within reach, a hefty iron candle holder, once a gift from Meredith's mother, he approached the brick wall. Gently, he

traced its rugged surface, which exuded the same bone-chilling cold as when he first encountered it. As he examined it closely, the crimson hue of the bricks seemed to have deepened, now eerily reminiscent of the color of blood. Gripping the candle holder with both hands, John launched an attack on the wall. The force of his strikes was fierce, but after several attempts, he paused to assess the damage.

Despite the relentless assault, the wall was barely scathed, the targeted brick showing only minor dents. These aren't ordinary bricks, John realized, panting from his exertions. After a half-hour of strenuous effort, fatigue overcame him. He stepped back, surveying the minor crumbles he'd managed to inflict. At this rate, dismantling the wall brick by brick seemed an impossible feat. John acknowledged he needed a different strategy, a new approach to breach this inexplicable barrier.

Taking a brief respite in the still-functional toilet, a small yet comforting reminder of normalcy, John contemplated his dwindling options. He mulled over the possibility of either tearing down the apartment's other walls or making a hole through his ceiling or floor. The thought of dismantling the toilet seat or basin also crossed his mind. "No, that won't achieve anything," he concluded.

The walls, ceiling, and floor were solid concrete, and he suspected the same impenetrable bricks that blocked his other exits lurked behind them. Even if he could remove the toilet and basin, escaping through the drain was out of the question—the opening was far too small. Sipping some water from the faucet, John solidified his resolve. His decision was made: to continue attacking the brick wall leading to the kitchen, disregarding the one blocking his window due to its impractical working position. And now, armed with a clearer strategy and renewed determination, he knew exactly how to do it.

Standing again before the brick wall, John cautiously knocked on it. A faint echo responded, hinting that the wall might not be as solid as the one blocking his stairwell. Puzzled as to why he hadn't thought to do this earlier, John shrugged off the thought, knowing it wouldn't have changed his situation. John resumed his assault on the brick wall but with a refined approach. This time, he directed his efforts not at the bricks themselves but at their binding element—the mortar. He positioned the sharp end of the candle holder's base against the mortar, focusing his strikes with precision.

With each strike of the sharp end, the mortar yielded more easily than the bricks, crumbling and breaking away. This brought a glimmer of hope to

John. Diligently, he kept at his task, relentlessly attacking the mortar. The process was slow and grueling, hours if John were to guess, but gradually the mortar around one particular brick loosened enough for him to consider extracting it. Eventually, after a final forceful hit, the brick began to move.

Setting aside the candle holder, John carefully wrapped his fingers around the brick, feeling the hollow space left by the crumbling mortar. With some effort, he wiggled and pulled until, finally, the brick came loose. Eagerly, John peered through the newly created gap, only to be met with a disheartening sight. Behind the removed brick lay another, effectively replacing the one he had just painstakingly extracted.

John's grip loosened, allowing the brick to drop to the floor with a hollow thud, echoing his own sense of defeat. This overwhelming feeling of helplessness wasn't new to him, it reminded him of the despair he felt when Meredith first expressed her unhappiness in their relationship, a situation where he also felt clueless and overwhelmed. The chaotic frenzy of his recent actions—screaming, banging, and hammering, had yielded no results, no external acknowledgment or rescue.

The task of dismantling the brick wall brick by brick seemed insurmountable, a futile endeavor that could take a lifetime. Exhausted and out of options, John contemplated the possibility of returning to bed. Despite the improbability, he clung to the hope that this might all be a dream after all. "What else is there to do?" he thought to himself, a mix of resignation and exhaustion in his thoughts. Perhaps, he speculated, the next time he wakes, everything will have returned to normal. In the absence of any viable alternative, the allure of sleep beckoned, offering a temporary respite from the inexplicable reality that confined him.

His weary eyes fell upon the face of his analog wristwatch, a steadfast companion. To John's dismay, he found it sharing the same fate as his other devices, the hands frozen in time, the rhythmic ticking silenced. Even unaware of the time, John felt completely exhausted while simultaneously lacking any clear direction.

He fetched his glass from the bedside table, headed to the bathroom, and refilled it with water. He took the water and pill jar with him while retrieving two pills from it, a calculated choice. He wanted to avoid the grogginess that plagued him earlier, yet he also desired a swift escape into sleep, free from the torturous cycle of his thoughts. "What's the point in overthinking now?" he reasoned, his mind weary of the inexplicable events

around him. After taking the pills, John lay down, finding it initially challenging to drift off despite his tiredness. Eventually, the gentle pull of sleep overtook him, and soon, his quiet snores filled the room.

The next time John opened his eyes, he found himself engulfed in a darkness so profound it was akin to a void. His hand instinctively reached for the bedside lamp, tugging the string that normally bathed the room in light. There was no response, not even a flicker. The lamp remained lifeless, joining the ranks of the modern conveniences that had deserted him.

Rising from his bed, John's movements were hesitant, almost fearful, as he navigated through the pitch-black room toward the hallway. Arms outstretched, seeking guidance in the blindness, his hands eventually collided with a surface chillingly familiar. It was the rough texture of bricks. Slowly, his hands explored the expanse of this new barrier, his heart sinking as realization dawned. Where the hallway once led to the rest of his apartment, there now stood an unyielding brick wall. His world, already constricted, had now shrunk further, leaving him confined to what was once merely a living area, now his entire domain.

John wearily made his way back to his bed, navigating through the engulfing darkness with a sense of resignation. Collapsing onto the mattress, a heavy sigh escaped him. "So, this might be how it all ends," John contemplated silently, the weight of his situation pressing down on him. His mind raced through his limited options, each more futile than the last.

The exhaustive efforts of the previous day, the relentless screaming, the forceful banging, the futile hammering, seemed pointless to repeat. They had brought no salvation, no escape from this nightmarish reality. No one had heard his cries, no one had come to his aid. The brick wall, his unyielding captor, stood mockingly resistant to his endeavors. As John reflected on the pattern of the past three days, of hope diminishing with each supposed sunrise, he couldn't help but feel a deepening sense of despair. The future, if the past was any indicator, didn't bode well for him.

This realization steered John's thoughts away from potential escape plans, leading him instead to reflect on his life choices, particularly those tinged with regret. A wave of unfamiliar and unacknowledged anger began to surge within him as he contemplated the limitations his social awkwardness had imposed on his life, especially in forming close friendships.

This self-directed anger soon shifted focus. He brooded over his inability to respond effectively when Meredith had expressed the need to

work on their relationship. Further fueling his frustration was the realization that he never allowed himself to even consider starting a new relationship after her.

But John's contemplation of past regrets was short-lived. "What good does it do to dwell on these things now?" he wondered to himself. His eyes drifted resignedly to the pill jar on his bedside table. "At least this way, it's on my terms," John contemplated as he reached for the jar. He extracted the remaining pills, his movements lethargic and almost mechanical. As the pills approached his lips, John found himself praying, an act he hadn't engaged in since childhood when his mother insisted on it. The only prayer he remembered was thus that of a child. As he whispered the final words, "...and wake me with the morning light," he swallowed the pills with the last sip of yesterday's water. And then, finding comfort in his rare case of resolve, John closed his eyes.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christian Gadolin is an Associate Professor with a background in scientific writing, often focusing on organizational development in public sector contexts. However, his passion extends beyond academia. A lifelong enthusiast of horror, Christian has a keen interest in human behavior and the unknown, which has inspired him to explore writing in the horror genre.