

## Long Haul Into the Blackest Night

by Joshua Guzman

“Ismael...” Joseph whispered. The only reply he got was the harsh snore of his sleeping bunkmate.

He looked over to the single bed across the room. It was empty. “Strange.” He thought. That bed belonged to the third occupant of the room: Sade. The man could and had slept through anything and everything. It had become his defining trait. Nevertheless, Joseph thought he had probably just got up to use the restroom. There wasn't much else he could have done outside of jumping off the deck. Joseph needed to use the restroom anyways. There was no use in waiting for Sade to come back first.

The corridors had become more claustrophobic with the addition of the constant swaying and straining groans of the metal holding the entire facade together.

Inching down the corridor with his hands to the wall, Joseph finally arrived at the metal door marked with a minimalistic depiction of a toilet.

He swung open the behemoth of a door and was greeted with the last thing he had expected. Utter darkness. He flicked the light switch on and there it was before him. An empty restroom. The same empty restroom he had gotten so acquainted with over the past months.

Confused, he popped his head back into the corridor and looked around. No sign of Sade. Just the moaning of the metal and musty scent of men forced into close proximity of each other.

But at that moment it didn't matter. He had gone to the restroom to conduct business. Business that didn't require Sade or anyone else to be there. Most preferred it that way.

Choosing the furthest stall from the door, Joseph undid his jeans and sat on the metallic throne. Unbeknownst to him, he had started drifting to sleep right there, but was awoken by the faint but distinct gurgling struggle of a man... choking?

From the haze of his brief slumber, Joseph cleaned himself and got up to put his pants around his waist, but the sudden crash of a body hitting the floor of the bathroom sent an echo that brought him back down to his seat with a hair standing shudder. The sound of a large mass violently thrashing against the metal floor continued along with the squashing and unmistakable sound of bone cracking and splintering.

In a mix of shock and confusion for the situation he found himself in, Joseph got down on his knees to look from under the gap of the stall.

The sight of the abomination before him sucked the life out of his lungs. It was paralyzing. The type of thing he could only conjure in an unconscious dream. He didn't notice until it dawned on him. He hadn't taken a breath since laying eyes on it.

Sitting back up, he took a giant, but silent gulp and slowly lowered himself back onto the floor, but it was gone. The thing that had assaulted his reality was missing and the low groan of the swaying vessel was echoing again.

Slowly, he slipped out of the stall and over to the body on the floor: Sade. He has covered a black, viscous fluid and presumably his own blood, but without any visible wounds Joseph

wasn't sure. Not waiting for the creature to return, he picked up Sade, fireman style, onto his back.

Joseph barged into the room with Sade over his shoulders just as Ismael was jumping off the top bunk. Out of breath and still weak with free, Joseph's legs gave way and they fell onto the floor.

"What the hell..." Ismael choked out as he came to his knees at the sight of Sade. Joseph got up and threw himself against the door. Closing and locking it in one swift move before collapsing once again, out of breath and pale, with his back against the door.

Ismael shot him a look. "Joseph! What the hell is going on out there?!"

Joseph didn't say a word. So instead, Ismael gave his full attention back to Sade. He flipped him over onto his back and got the full effect of the confrontation. His eyeballs themselves were bathed in a black fluid that seemed to be continuous burning into the whites. The veins in his face and neck, enlarged and protruding from the skin as if trying to escape. Despite the fact he could've been mistaken for dead, each individual vein pulsed in sporadic intervals as if each were connected to its own pump.

"Call... the other... rooms.", Joseph croaked out as he got up. "Tell them to stay in their rooms... and lock the doors!"

Ismael stumbled back and crawled up to the phone on the wall beside the bunk bed. The dial tone rang.

*Brrring...*

*Brrring...*

But as it rang, from the mouth of Sade, the same sound echoed back. Muddled, his throat rang.

*Brrraang...*

Both Joseph and Ismael looked at the body now on the other side of the room, as it slowly brought it self to a sitting position. His nose and mouth started flowing the black viscous fluid that covered his eyes.

It snapped its neck so it looked directly at Ismael. With a loud pop they heard its neck break and droop as it screamed the dial tone back at him.

***BRRRA-***

It stopped midway as it started coughing. A bulge started to make its way up his throat and onto its lap, it coughed up a severely degraded liver, blood, and green flem.

As it continued to cough, up came intestine, followed by unnatural bending of bones and the subsequent breaking of said bones.

By this point, Joseph had crawled into a corner facing away from the sight while Sade and Ismael kept eye contact, not able to look away, but visually bawling his eyes out.

But then came the voice of Sade from the abomination his body has become.

***“HEEELLPPPPP MEEEEEE!!!!”*** He screamed in agony.