

DEAD AIR

by
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A Horror Short

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FADE IN

INT. PODCAST STUDIO - NIGHT

Rain hammers the windows of a cramped homemade podcast studio. The walls are covered in horror movie posters and half-eaten takeout surrounds the two microphones and laptops on the table.

On a monitor: DEAD AIR - LIVE | 2,147 WATCHING

A **camera** points toward the hosts; XAVIER, 30s, charismatic and confident behind a microphone and DALTON, 30s, his college best friend full of frat-bro energy. Xavier is already mid-story.

XAVIER

...and I wake up, and there's this guy standing in the corner of my bedroom.

DALTON

A guy?

XAVIER

Tall. Skinny. Wearing a black suit and some weird old hat.

DALTON

Sounds like your Dad.

XAVIER

My dad was five-eight in heels. This guy was almost touching the ceiling.

DALTON

(laughs)

You heard it here first, people. Sleep Paralysis Abraham Lincoln is real.

XAVIER

(laughs)

What makes it creepier is that he always wanted to play hide and seek.

CHYRON OF TEXT: LIVE CHAT

- It's a Lincoln Demon. | Evidence? | Never happened!

DALTON

So how did you survive?

XAVIER

(winks)

I had a really good hiding spot.

Thunder rolls outside. The lights flicker inside. Xavier looks toward the camera.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

For everyone just joining us, welcome to Dead Air, the Stormy-Night Special Episode where we listen to your scary stories throughout the night.

DALTON

Number is on the screen. Call us, scare us, or just lie convincingly as we wait out this unprecedented storm.

He presses a button. An eerie sound effect plays.

The **call light** blinks red. The boys brighten.

XAVIER

Looks like we've got another story!

(taps the board)

Caller, you're live on Dead Air. What's your scary story?

CALLER 1 (V.O.)

Yeah, um, I've got a ghost story for you.

Dalton hits another button. An exaggerated ghostly moan fills the studio.

XAVIER

Okay, let's hear it.

CALLER 1 (V.O.)

A serial killer used to dump child victims in this playground near where I grew up.

If you go to the playground after dark, you'll see the swings move on their own and small shadows running about.

XAVIER

Not sure why I would find myself at a children's park in the dead of night but still a good story.

Xavier disconnects. The studio lights flicker again; longer this time. Another call light blinks. This time, Dalton leans over and answers.

DALTON
Welcome to the podcast, new caller!
What's your story?
(silence for a beat)
Any time now. No pressure.

Dalton glances over to Xavier and shrugs.

XAVIER
Is someone there?

They lean in. The sound of light breathing is heard, then a small voice whispers:

BOY (V.O.)
There's someone in my room.

Xavier and Dalton exchange amused looks. It's just a kid.

DALTON
(mocking)
Is someone having a nightmare?

Xavier throws a pen at Dalton as he chuckles off mic.

XAVIER
What's your name, kid?

BOY (V.O.)
Henry.

XAVIER
Hey, Henry. We appreciate the support but I don't think your parents would like you talking to strangers on the phone like this.

BANG! BANG! BANG! A violent pounding erupts on Henry's end. Dalton's smile vanishes.

DALTON
What the fuck was that?

Xavier glares at Dalton and mouths the word *language*. Dalton shrugs.

HENRY (V.O.)
I locked him in.

XAVIER
Locked who in?

HENRY (V.O.)
The man in my room.

Another BANG! This time a low, ghastly moan follows it. Xavier looks at Dalton and his soundboard, unamused.

DALTON
I swear to god, that wasn't me.

HENRY (V.O.)
He's trying to break through.

XAVIER
Henry, do you know this man?

HENRY (V.O.)
No. I don't like his face...

DALTON
(intrigued)
What's wrong with his face, Henry?

The lights in the studio flicker once again. Static is heard on the other line, then...

HENRY (V.O.)
He just keeps *smiling*.

DALTON
Right. Okay, hang tight, Henry.

Dalton mutes the microphone to the livestream.

DALTON (CONT'D)
This is fake.

XAVIER
I don't know. He sounds really scared, man.

DALTON
Yeah, and he also said that there's a man in his room. Very similar to *your* story.

XAVIER
What about the banging?

DALTON
I don't know. TV left on or maybe there's more than one of the little shits playing this game.

HENRY (V.O.)
Hello?

Dalton shakes his head and mimes for Xavier to hang up.

Xavier turns the livestream audio back on.

XAVIER

We're here, Henry. Look, bud, if this is a joke, it's a good one but it needs to stop.

HENRY (V.O.)

It's not a joke.

DALTON

Okay. Why haven't you called the police yet?

HENRY

I did. They didn't believe me.

Dalton looks at Xavier with an *I told you so* gleam. Xavier relaxes.

XAVIER

All right, this has been fun but we're going to move on to the next story, Henry.

HENRY (V.O.)

No! You have to help me!

DALTON

The jig is up, Henry. You're just using Xavier's story as your own.

HENRY (V.O.)

No, he's here! You have to believe me!

XAVIER

Okay, what color are the man's eyes?

HENRY (V.O.)

(beat)

...black with white dots.

CRACK! Something splinters on Henry's line. Then, a muffled moan pierces the airwave.

XAVIER

Henry, you need to get out of that house.

DALTON

(to XAVIER)

You really playing along with this?

XAVIER

This isn't a joke, Dalton. Try to call the police.

Dalton nonchalantly pulls out his phone and begins dialing. He holds it up to his ear; frowns as an automated recording tells him the call can't be completed.

DALTON

Phones are down.

Xavier curses then starts to think. Dalton becomes nervous.

DALTON (CONT'D)

What the fuck is going on, X?!

XAVIER

It's the man, Dalton. The one from my childhood.

DALTON

Abe Demon?! X, quit pissing around, man. That was a bit for the show.

XAVIER

It's not a fucking bit! It actually happened and now it's happening again... Where are you, Henry?

HENRY (V.O.)

My parents' room. Under the bed.

XAVIER

No, I mean what's your address?

HENRY (V.O.)

I don't know.

XAVIER

You don't know your address?!

HENRY (V.O.)

We just moved here!

Thunder claps outside. The sound of a door breaking off its hinges is heard on Henry's side.

HENRY (V.O.)

(scared)

His hand is through the door!

A loud alarm fills the podcast studio. Xavier and Dalton both look at their phones; a local emergency alert fills the screen:

SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY. TRAVEL RESTRICTED.

Another crack in the door. Whatever is on the other side is almost through.

XAVIER

Henry, listen to me. We're going to get you out of there.

HENRY (V.O.)

How?

Stricken with fear, Xavier starts to ramble. He looks to Dalton for assistance. Dalton furrows his brow and leans in close to the mic.

DALTON

(firm)

Henry, you need to find something to protect yourself.

HENRY (V.O.)

I have my Minecraft Pickaxe.

DALTON

Better than nothing. Got anything sharper downstairs?

XAVIER

Or can you make it to the front door?

HENRY (V.O.)

I can try...

Small feet pound across carpet as Henry races downstairs and navigates through the house. The banging intensifies. The sound of a doorknob rattling is heard on the other end.

HENRY (V.O.)

It's locked! I can't open it!

BANG! One final eruption is heard, then the sound of heavy footsteps descending the stairs.

XAVIER

Hide, Henry!

We hear Henry shuffle away in the background. The footsteps get louder and louder...

Until they stop.

Silence.

HENRY (V.O.)
(whisper)
He's not on the stairs.

XAVIER
Where is he?

HENRY (V.O.)
(beat)
I don't know.

Henry's breath gets short as the silence lingers. Then, a faint breath joins his. Dalton and Xavier exchange horrified looks.

HENRY (V.O.)
I think he's right behind--

Chaos ensues on the other end. Henry screams. Furniture splinters as if something barrels through it. *Something* wails as the pandemonium rises.

Henry grunts and struggles. Then, *SHNK!* Something sharp pierces flesh. The sound of small feet running, a door slamming, then nothing.

Silence for a long beat.

XAVIER
(beat)
Henry?

HENRY (V.O.)
(breathless)
I'm here.

DALTON
Are you outside?!

HENRY
In the basement. I think I stabbed him.

DALTON
That's great, Henry!

XAVIER

Is there a window in the basement, Henry?
Can you see outside?

We hear Henry shuffle once again.

HENRY (V.O.)

It's just a lot of rain.

DALTON

What about a street sign?

HENRY (V.O.)

I can see our fence.

XAVIER

Fence! Okay, what color?

HENRY (V.O.)

White.

XAVIER

That's good. And do you know the color of
your house?

HENRY (V.O.)

Blue.

Xavier goes still. He ponders for a bit.

XAVIER

Henry... I grew up in a blue house with a
white fence.

HENRY (V.O.)

Our fence is broken.

XAVIER

What do you mean?

HENRY

It's missing pieces. Near the driveway.

Xavier is stricken with fear. It can't be. It's
impossible. His eyes search for a distant memory as he
speaks with Henry.

XAVIER

Hey, Henry? Do you see a wooden door
under the basement stairs?

HENRY

Yes.

XAVIER

Is there something carved on that door?

HENRY

Yes. A circle. With lines inside of it.

DALTON

What the fuck is going on, X?

Xavier mutes the stream microphones.

XAVIER

I think Henry is living in my old house.

DALTON

Oh, come on! There's no fucking way.

XAVIER

We can literally go there right now.

Dalton stares at him for a beat.

DALTON

What do you mean we can go there right now?

XAVIER

It's five blocks away.

BANG! The basement door on Henry's end trembles. They freeze for a beat, then Xavier unmutes.

XAVIER (CONT'D)

Henry?

HENRY (V.O.)

(scared)

He's back!

The pounding resumes.

DALTON

Can you get out that window?

HENRY (V.O.)

It's too high!

DALTON

You need to find another place to hide, Henry! We're coming to get you!

HENRY

Okay!

Henry moves. We hear the sound of a small door opening and shutting on Henry's end.

Dalton jumps from his seat, grabs his rain jacket and heads for the door.

DALTON
(to XAVIER)
Which way?

XAVIER
Take a left on Washington Street and it's five blocks down. Blue house, white fence missing two planks!

Dalton bolts out of the studio. Thunder rumbles as he disappears into the sheets of rain.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
Henry? Dalton is on his way. But you're going to have to be really quiet until he gets there. Okay?

HENRY
Okay...

Outside, the basement door collapses. Heavy footsteps descend and stop outside of Henry's hiding place.

Silence. Then, a soft motherlike voice comes through.

SMILING MAN (V.O.)
Henry? Are you hiding from mommy?

Henry's breathing stops.

SMILING MAN (V.O.)
It's okay, honey. I'm home now.

HENRY (V.O.)
Mommy?

XAVIER
Henry, no!

Henry screams. Violent movement is heard on the other line. Something smashes against the wall. Henry's screams peak then abruptly stop. Then the sound of soft chewing is heard.

Xavier sits petrified by the sounds.

XAVIER (CONT'D)
Henry...?

SMILING MAN (V.O.)
(Henry's voice)
...Xavier?

Xavier's eyes widen with fear.

SMILING MAN
(chuckles)
Found you.

Glass shatters on the other end. We hear the sound of Dalton shuffling inside.

DALTON
I made it!
(beat)
Xavier...
There's nothing here.

XAVIER
(whisper)
Dalton...get back to the studio.

DALTON
This place is abandoned. Doesn't look
like anyone has been here for years.

Xavier looks toward the studio entrance as thunder rumbles outside.

BANG. BANG. BANG. The studio door rattles. Xavier shoots up and backs away to the far wall.

DALTON (CONT'D)
Hey! Can you hear--

The lights flicker then shut off. Xavier is cast into complete darkness. He fumbles for his phone and turns on its flashlight.

The front door slowly creeps open. Xavier points his phone's light toward it. It's cracked open. The sound of the storm pours into the studio.

Something tall stands in the corner near the door. Xavier doesn't dare look at it.

Xavier crawls toward the open door.

SMILING MAN
(in HENRY'S VOICE)
Xavier...

XAVIER
(to SELF, fearful)
Don't answer it...

He continues to inch towards the door. He's almost there.
He reaches out a hand, touches the knob, then his phone
dies.

The door slams shut.

CUT TO BLACK

Xavier's screams are muffled by the roaring storm
outside. Then...silence.

DEAD AIR