

BOO!-FO

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The BUFO Halloween Issue

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Boo!
By Alex Tang

Boo!

Just Like Sleeping

By Olivia Thomas

Was this such a bad place to be? The sky calls. The trees rise upwards, stretching into the endless blue above. Birds flitter across your eyes every now and then, calling across to each other and perching on recently bared branches. They were already used to your presence. They knew you were harmless. Shadows from the gently dancing treetops with the last of their leaves cast occasional shade across your open eyes.

The earth underneath you is soft but cold and the late-October frost bites your skin but not unbearably. It means you will rest here longer. You can feel the decaying leaves between your fingers, the different shades of orange, gold and red decorate the ground, patches of brown semi-concealed underneath. The clothes picked out for you adorn your body as decoration – the black lace makes you itch. The weak, morning sun above you gently heats your skin along with the warmth around your neck.

The wind cuts through the birdsong every now and then, whistling in your ear. The branches scrape against each other, creaking and aching. You can hear the crunch from a nearby visitor, no doubt a forest creature. A deer would be nice to see. The birds fly away, leaving empty skies above you, the cold blue now sitting empty above you.

You wonder how everything went wrong, fleeting thoughts crossing your mind. You recount the events of the morning. The way they came for you, the way the ruse slipped and how it was all over as quickly as it began. It was nice while it lasted, but were you *really* stupid enough to think you would get away with what you were doing forever?

You are sore. You are hurting. Your back throbs from where they kicked you. Your face is swollen from where they hit you. Your head feels hollow. Your neck aches.

The cold air burns your nose, but you can smell the forest floor, the earth, the wood. You can smell metal. You can smell blood.

A bloodcurdling scream cuts through the calm. A gunshot ends it.

18th Fear

By Isabella Folio

The night before her eighteenth birthday, the girl dragged her chair to the dark corner of her flat and clutched a steak knife in hand. She managed to sit still for three minutes and eighteen seconds, then uncrossed her legs and crossed them again. Rubbing her thumb up and down the knife handle, her gaze flitted around the room, first to the blue-gray door, then to the hallway across from her, then to the left side window filled with a sliver of moonlight. She could see her whole square-shaped living room from this niche.

Above her head, a board creaked, and the girl jolted in her seat. Was that the wind? The building often made loud noises; that wasn't anything new. She blew out a breath and shifted in her chair, hand tightening on the knife. Only the faint whine of sirens filled the air.

Weeeee-oooooh. Weeeee-oooooh.

Yoo-hoo, yoo-hoo, come out and play.

Holding her breath, the girl slid her phone out of her pocket, a surge of adrenaline bolting through her when the LEDs lit the screen. No, too bright; it almost matched the starlight.

The girl shifted in her seat, shaking her foot awake. Another creak split the air and she cringed, her breath catching in her throat. The breeze ruffled the papers on her desk and pricked her skin as it wafted in through the window like the cold fingers of a long-forgotten monster. She watched clouds drift across the sky and remembered the time she had cloud watched with her mother years ago.

The clouds are so big, Mommy, she had gasped, lying in the tall, weed-filled grass. Her mother's hands had felt cold as they gripped hers. Is it going to rain?

Go inside, sweetie.

She had stood up, tugging at her mother's hand.

We have to go before it rains.

Go in without me; I'll be there soon.

A distant *thump* sounded, calling the girl back to reality. Had she imagined that sound? Was she hearing things? Her therapist used to tell her she needed to work on her paranoia.

Happy thoughts, she instructed herself. She would be fine; she always was. In fact, she should probably put the knife back in the drawer because she didn't need it; she was seeing ghosts, just like she had for the past six years.

Had that shadow moved or was she hallucinating?

I am not crazy; I need to start acting like it.

She blew out a breath, then another. The shadows were just that—shadows. Figments of imagination to be dissolved in the moon's illumination. They couldn't hurt her.

Hands sweating, she started to loosen her grip on the knife and pushed herself out of her chair. Her heart jumped as something scraped outside the window, but she made herself finish standing up. She would be rational, just like the police captain had insisted the third time he'd visited her flat, just last month. No use in getting worked up.

Before she crossed the room, she let the moon's rays fall on her. Everything felt better when you stood in the light. She would turn on the light switch, then put the knife in the drawer and go to bed.

Outside, a cloud crossed in front of the moon, smothering its light. The girl dropped the knife halfway across the room, and one final *thump* sounded through her flat, mere seconds after it landed. The moon stayed behind the clouds.

Will You Retry

By Alex Tang

He woke up with throbbing temples. For a second he lay in bed, waiting for his eyes to focus and the memories to come back to him -- that sleepy, blank oblivion must have crept up on him in his sleep.

He groaned as the headache thudded on. The whole body was feeling sore now. Sometimes people woke up without recognizing their own bedroom. He must have had a rough night's sleep, and a few more minutes was necessary for the comforting sense of familiarity to come back to him.

It was taking longer than he expected, though. Five minutes must have passed, and the ceiling looked as strange as when he first opened his eyes. It must have been the headache, he thought as he massaged his temples, sinking the fingers into his skull if he could.

His fingernails were scraping against some cold, smooth surface, click-clack click-clack.

That could not have been his head. Muscles tense from this realization, he sat up. The sound of something sliding off his head and colliding against the floor overpowered the loud crack his spine produced. He cursed from a parched throat.

The white, helmet-shaped apparatus lay spinning on the floor, a porcupine with all its nodes and protrusions. He picked it up, keeping an arm's distance and ready to drop it at any time.

Wipe™ was etched into the surface with some fancy corporate font, just noticeable enough if he squinted his eyes. He decided to try the knobs. The helmet started to glow with an expensive looking blue -- a major deterrent against dropping it the way he had intended.

The headache refused to subside, pulsing stubbornly along the peculiar rhythm of the blue light.

He decided the nightstand seemed like a reliable place for the helmet. He would then try to locate the bathroom. Some cold water should help with the headache -- at least, that was the plan. On the nightstand, a neon green note rested on top of what looked like an instruction manual.

What's your name?

What's his name? He would have shook his head if it wasn't for the migraine -- apparently he might have blacked out last night and had a fling with some trickster (who owned a twin bed and, rather unscrupulously, left him to his own devices). Who on earth left a note like this? The name is--

He rushed towards what he hoped was the bathroom. Bracing himself over the cold porcelain sink, he confronted the unfamiliar face in the mirror.

You don't remember, another note observed from the mirror frame.

The tap exhaled feebly. He was going to use some water to douse the headache, so naturally he would not get any. The man in the mirror masked his age with fossilized dishevelment.

He shuffled back into the bedroom. His head was killing him. What's his name? He inquired the nightstand.

Set mode to Wipe and secure apparatus over head. Unless specified, recent short-term memories will be removed. Horizontal positions are recommended for the procedure. Side effects such as nausea, migraine and general discomfort are expected, advised the instruction manual.

He groaned out of pained confusion, and scoured the thin manual for a remedy.

In case you were wondering, the Wipe is irreversible.

This must be some sick game. Why would they strap a glorified helmet to someone's head and wipe their memory? He stared at the note, gritting his teeth.

His identity would be of no use if he was to die from a crippling headache this very second. He decided reluctantly that water was now his priority. The other door should lead to the living room, or at least a hallway.

Bottled water is all you've got. Eat whatever's left in the cupboard if you want, but I doubt you're in the mood right now. Feel free to prove me wrong.

He stood in front of his cupboardful of newly-discovered sustenance and dumped half a liter of ph-balanced water onto his head, all the while staring defiantly at the piece of note that clung to the cupboard door. He would have gladly eaten half a piece of the compressed biscuit too, if all the chewing and crunching were not grinding his head in half. On the bright side, whoever wrote the notes was nice enough to leave all the lights off and the curtains closed. He imagined the sunlight burning his neurons and decided to keep the room dark for now.

He might have fallen asleep by the kitchen island. When he woke up his headache evaporated along with that half a liter of water. Darkness still shrouded the room, and no time seemed to have passed. He downed the remaining bottle of water.

There were no more signs of the neon green notes. He decided that he no longer needed the patronizing guidance, but some rummaging was indeed necessary. The note-writer must have left something for him.

It really can't get any more generic than Jason, the flamboyant green remarked as he pulled open the drawer, *but at least you own an apartment.*

He dug out the plastic card from under the note. A young man smiled from the rectangular driver's license. He rushed past the kitchen, the bedroom and the glowing helmet with the ID in hand and nearly slipped on the bathroom tiles. They were the same person. His hair was longer now, greasier, but not even that, or the chapped lips, or the dark circles under his eyes could convince him otherwise. Jason. It was a rather generic name.

He should look around for something about himself. What if the notes were lying? If they could wipe his memory, why didn't they put him in someplace random while they were at it? The neighbors must know him if this was his apartment.

You might want this.

He saw his own gaunt reflection in the smeared lenses of the gas mask. What were his neighbors going to do, tear gas him? He scoffed and pushed open the door.

The smell of sulfur saturated the apartment hallway. He left his coughs echoing as he slammed the door shut and yanked the gas mask off the coat hanger. Patronizing bastard. Not knowing where the trash cans were, he tore the note from the doorframe and chucked it towards the living room sofa.

He half expected to see someone checking the hallway for bodies since he sounded as if he was choking on poison. The building remained deathly quiet.

He started knocking on every door, all the way down the hallway. Someone would eventually answer, and some might recognize him.

His knuckles were red and burning when he noticed the window by the very last door. The sky was bloody behind it, red and burning.

I can tell you the sky didn't look like this.

He silently agreed. It should be blue, or grey, or orange, or anything other than this. That much he knew. An issue of the newspaper was sitting on the windowsill.

You're welcome.

He sat on the windowsill and started reading. The window was welded shut anyway. The sky casted itself onto the paper, red on black. He felt his eyes burning.

He poured half a liter of water on himself just for a headache. All water reservoirs were contaminated three days after the incident. The global population was projected to decay exponentially.

His breathing was ragged, echoing in the gas mask. That bastard, why didn't they tell him about all of this?

He stumbled onto the street, ignoring the skeleton slouched against the wall. There must be someone left -- not many, but there must be someone. Someone must have holed up somewhere and lived through this. He would see someone sitting by the window eating a can of beans or something.

He made sure his screams penetrated the mask and carried through the silence. Then he couldn't scream so he invaded a convenience store. A gentleman mummified with half a bottle of water in his hand, murky and venomous. He wrestled the hand open. The bones snapped like branches. It was better than nothing. If he looked around more surely he would find something lying around.

The shelves were empty and rusted. A radio lay dead on the counter. The batteries drained a long time ago. When was the paper issued again? What was the date?

He walked back to his apartment in dead silence. He should ration whatever he had left in the cupboard until he finally starved. There was still a stack of neon green notes left on the kitchen counter. He started writing.

You don't remember.

He went to the bathroom and stuck it onto the mirror. Now two identical notes mocked him from the mirror frame.

He remembered to put all the notes back where he found them and made sure the curtains were closed.

He set the mode to Wipe and put the helmet on his head.

Living the Dream
By Conor O'Sullivan

Dreams can be nightmares.

Soil For Dying Flowers

By Broden Windsor

You loved that tree down the road
In winter the ice carved the intricate trunk's design
In spring the dew drops would fall and kiss
your nose
In summer the shade sheltered you from the insistent heat
But in fall, you hated that tree
You hated the way it sagged
The way the leaves would cry under your shoes
And the way the ground froze
No longer accepting you into an embrace

You invited me to that tree once
Before the fall hit
You wished you could lay under that tree forever
And fall asleep
Maybe then you'd love fall
The leaves would cover us
Become our blanket
And together we'd let our bodies decay with the seasons
Turning into soil that would allow the
flowers to sprout
Your fantasy ended as the leaves fell

I leave dying flowers at that tree
The one that will hug you forever
As the leaves begin to fall
I wonder if you hate them
Or if you enjoy the warmth that they provide
Maybe then, the soil that you have
become
Will remain in that summer embrace.