



MIDNIGHT AT WAVERLY HILLS

By

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At least it had stopped drizzling. A minute before, Brad had thought he'd heard a scream, but then decided it was just the fierce March wind screeching through the old sanatorium's busted out windows.

Waverly Hills had closed down in the 1960s – once the “White Death” that was tuberculosis had been eradicated. Now the supposedly haunted hilltop structure was on the National Register of Historic Places. Teenagers were no longer allowed to trespass for the purpose of getting high, making out, or doing damage.

But Brad's rich, pretty girlfriend was used to getting her way. Earlier that evening, Jessica had bribed the security guards into taking a break around midnight. She was supposed to meet Brad here at the front entrance, below the gothic-looking stone tower.

And she was late. Had the ghost-hunter extraordinaire gotten cold feet?

Brad sincerely hoped so. He took a deep breath of cool, moist air and glanced around

nervously as the sound of footsteps and rustling dead leaves reached his ears. He aimed his flashlight down the covered walkway to his left – and felt both relieved and disappointed.

It was Jessica.

“I thought you’d chickened out.” He gave her cold lips a light smack.

“Not a chance.” She pushed open the heavy wooden doors and stepped aside. “You can lead the way. I lost my flashlight.”

Brad did so reluctantly.

The decaying interior reeked of mildew. The once lovely woodwork in the lobby was covered with obscene graffiti, and on the marble floor, murky puddles of water lay between piles of plaster and debris.

The preservationists are going to have one hell of a time restoring this place, Brad thought.

“Thousands of people died here,” Jess whispered.

“Not hard to believe.”

“It used to be beautiful.”

Brad didn’t care. He wanted to get the ghoulish tour over with.

He aimed his flashlight up the twisting main staircase. “Where we headed - Room 502?”

“Yeah, we can go there first.”

Something small and sharp hit Brad on the back of the neck, then bounced off and landed on the step behind him.

“Cute.” He leaned over and picked up the vintage bottle cap. “Just remember, babe – if I turn and run, you’ll be left in the dark.”

“That wasn’t me, Brad. It was probably the spirit of a child. Lots of sick children were treated here, too.”

“Whatever.” He tossed the bottle cap aside.

Brad slowly moved up the dilapidated open stairway, holding Jessica’s hand. Shadows danced around in the sudden moonlight. Dark shapes seemed to reach out for him at every creaking step and turn.

He quickened his pace, dragging Jess behind him until they reached the fifth floor landing. Actually, there was no fifth floor – they stepped out onto the windswept roof. Room 502 had been built below the now empty bell-tower, and had been used to house TB patients who were mentally ill.

It was where a distraught young nurse had hung herself in 1928.

Jessica stepped past him into the ice-cold room. “Can’t you feel the sadness?”

Brad figured that was a rhetorical question. He was feeling more uncomfortable by the second. He tiptoed around the litter on the floor, following Jess and keeping her in the beam of his flashlight. The wind howled around them like a million banshees. Despite the numbing cold, he broke into a sweat beneath his denim jacket.

“Jess, come on, we’d better head downstairs.”

“Okay. There’s one more place I want to show you. It’s on the first floor.”

Jesus H. Christ. How’d he end up with such a creepy girlfriend?

Brad knew what Jess wanted to see – and he’d been hoping she’d forget about its existence.

The Death Tunnel, or “body chute,” was located at the rear of the building. It was a 500-foot tunnel that led to the bottom of the wooded hill, where cadavers were delivered to the crematorium, or picked up by hearses for burial.

The bodies were dropped a hundred feet using a stretcher mounted on rails.

Brad stumbled after Jessica down the first floor hallway. He felt drops of water hit his face, mixed with bits of plaster. Trusting the roof to hold them up had probably been foolish.

And they weren’t getting any smarter. They should’ve left for home by now.

The opening to the tunnel was in the wall straight ahead.

Brad leaned over and pointed his flashlight down the concrete shaft. The rails and stretcher had long since been removed.

A bat flew out of the tunnel and over his head. He jumped back with a startled yelp.

“Jess, hurry up and have a look. I’m not spending another minute in this hellhole.”

“But I don’t want you to leave, Brad. I’d miss you – just like Nora missed all her patients when they died.”

“Not funny.” Brad whirled around – and his heart nearly stopped cold.

Jessica stood there, smiling, blood running down her face. The right side of her head was caved in.

“I got here early and just had to have a look around. Nora convinced me to stay.”

Brad’s knees wanted to buckle as he saw another figure step out of the shadows – a woman in an old-fashioned nurse’s uniform. Her head was tilted funny and there were rope burns on her neck.

“Yes, say you’ll stay with us, Brad,” the apparition said, its raspy voice echoing off the high ceiling. “Join our family.”

Brad’s throat was closing up – he couldn’t scream. The flashlight slipped from his numb fingers and clattered to the floor.

The beams shot out in a wide arc, illuminating more of the hallway. Coming up behind Jess and Nora was a legion of half-naked entities, including several children. They had pasty-white skin and sunken eyes. Blood dribbled from their mouths.

They shuffled towards him, blocking his escape. There was only one way out.

Brad took it.

THE END