

PROMPT: You're sure that someone keeps tapping you on the shoulder. But when you turn around, there's just empty space.

## Tahis

by Nishith Chakraborty

“So, are you saying I am going crazy?” I said to my best friend, Jen, in an annoyed voice.

“You know I am not. I am just saying you have a creative mind, and you can't deny the fact that you watch too many horror movies. Maybe it's time to watch a little less of that, maybe just for the time being.” She said in a concerned voice.

It all started when I moved to the city for my new job a few months ago. I got a great job, and my company arranged my accommodation in this fancy high-rise that I could never even dream to afford. I was so excited, so was Jen, as she had been nagging me to move to the city for a year now. When I moved in here, I couldn't believe the views from my balcony, so breathtaking! However, on my first day while I was unpacking, I felt a tap on my shoulder. When I looked back, there was no one. I was a little spooked, as I was all alone in the apartment, Jen went out to grab some dinner for us. But I ignored it, maybe it was excitement, or maybe I was too stressed from moving.

Almost 3 weeks passed by without another incident. So I kind of assumed that the tap incident was all in my head. But one night when I was watching TV, I felt another tap. I turned around. Again, no one. It happened again after 2 weeks, and then it started happening more frequently. Being an expert on horror movies, I started to think if this was demonic, but here's the thing, nothing else happened except for this tap. No weird noises, no misplaced stuff, no shadows as you would expect in a paranormal situation. Well, there was one thing, after a few tap incidents, I started hearing a whisper whenever I felt the tap on my shoulder, but it was so faint that I was not even sure that it was even a sound.

This taps and whispers, now happening almost every other day, started driving me crazy. I started inquiring about the place. I thought there might be a possibility that this place might be

haunted. I asked around, even talked to my colleague who used to live here before me. Turns out she lived here for 5 years without a problem, and moved out when she got married. I also asked my neighbors, with whom I chatted every now and then in the hallway, or in the mail room, talked to the super. I was subtle, of course, didn't want people to think that I was crazy. However, apparently, there had been no reports of any unnatural incidents in the building, and people seemed to live there for years. The only incident that was slightly interesting was a suicide in apartment 27B 4 years ago, but the guy was mentally unstable and jumped from his apartment balcony. But I didn't live in that apartment, not even on that floor. And a family had been living in that apartment since then without any problem.

Now I started getting worried about my mental health. Was I going crazy? Although I have had no history of mental illness, I can't ignore this. So I asked Jen to stay with me for a day or two, to see if she felt something. On the first day, nothing happened. But the next day, I heard the whisper and also felt the tap. Jen was sitting right next to me on the couch, feeling nothing, seeing absolutely nothing. So I couldn't really blame her for thinking I was going crazy, but it annoyed the hell out of me.

"I have been watching these movies as long as I can remember, Jen. So why am I starting to hallucinate suddenly?", I replied.

"I don't know, I am not a psychiatrist. Listen, I know you don't want to listen to this right now, but maybe you should consult someone, Bree." She had a point. I sighed, "I will think about it."

I did think about it, and decided that it would be best if I saw someone about it. I started going to the therapy, but I didn't notice any visible change over a few weeks. I just assumed, maybe these things took time to work. In the meantime, the taps were still going on and the whispers were getting louder, but not loud enough to understand what that voice was saying.

One morning, as I was coming back from a morning walk, I saw the super cleaning out some stuff. As I asked him, they were removing some stuff from the store-room. Stuff that had been there for some time now, and no one seemed to claim them. Those were stuff that people left when they moved out. I saw something in the cart Walter, the Super was moving, that I found really intriguing. It seemed like a

diary, a really old one. And as Jen says, I have a knack for weird stuff, like knowing people's deepest secrets, I asked, "Whose diary is that? Can I have a look?"

"I don't see why not. I don't think anyone will be pissed," Walter said.

I took it, a very simple diary. I checked the name, it belonged to a Certain Mr. Ron Wyatt. “Hey, who is Ron Wyatt?” I asked Walter.

“Oh you know the poor guy in 27B? Died 4 years ago?” Walter replied.

He didn’t need to say anything else. My curiosity took over, what was going through that mind? Was I going the same way? I took it.

I tried to read it, but most of the things didn’t make any sense. There were words and phrases scattered here and there. No wonder the guy was mentally unstable. What was I expecting? I sighed.

I continued the therapy, but the taps were still going on. I was not even sure when there were actual taps and when I was imagining it. Even people talking around me sounded like the whisper I was hearing with the tap. What was worse was that I felt like I went in a sort of trance whenever I heard that whisper, it was not like I was being controlled, but more like I was meant to be somewhere else. I was fed up, I needed help, and if my therapy wasn’t helping, I might as well do some research. I tried searching different things on Google, that led me to nothing. I tried searching for taps and whispers, Google thought either I was crazy or possessed by a demon. I didn’t look into the mental illness stuff, because I was already seeing someone, and she was supposed to be very good in her field. I was looking for some “other” explanation. But most of the things I found seemed ridiculous. Firstly, no one just felt taps and whispers, there were so much more, and like people flying and seeing demons, and secondly, usually other people experienced that too. In my case, it was just me, the place didn’t seem haunted and no one really felt anything except for me. After hours of search, I was about to give up. Right then, I found something interesting.

It was part of a book that my search led me to. It was about different legends around the world. I saw a name that seemed very familiar, Delangor. I couldn’t remember where I had heard that name before. Suddenly I remembered, I looked into Ron Wyatt’s diary, I found the word several times in there. How could the name be in his diary, when he died 4 years ago? And the book came out last year, and it was not really very famous. I ordered the book.

I waited impatiently for the book, and once it arrived, I started looking for the part with Delangor. Apparently, Delangor is a very remote village in South-East Asia. It used to be the home of the native clan called the Rawal. The legend said that around 150 years ago, some Dibalos (their version of Satan) worshippers performed a ritual in the village, so the son of

Dibalos could be born. After a few days, as the son was about to be born, local people and the priest found out about it. They killed the unborn fetus, but the spirit of the fetus started to haunt them, killing them one by one. To stop him, the priest had to do something, but he was not able to kill it. Instead, he confined the spirit within a house. That was pretty much everything I got from the book.

The next thing I did was to check Ron Wyatt's diary. I was curious to know how he came to know about this place. I found several mentions of this place, also some other scattered words – Jupiter, free, full moon. It didn't really make any sense, it just felt like a dead end. I felt hopeless.

However, my condition was not getting better, and it was affecting my personal and professional life.

The thought of going crazy was not easy to handle. So I started more digging. I looked up about Ron Wyatt – Google search, social media, talking to the building super – you name it. Although the internet couldn't help much, talking to Walter kind of helped. Although he might have thought I was crazy, but hey, what did I have to lose? I was going crazy anyway. So I was persistent and made up some crazy excuse to get some information about Ron Wyatt. It seemed like he didn't really have anyone close, his emergency contact was his sister, with whom he was not very close. But I thought I would give it a shot anyway.

I visited Ron's sister. Obviously, she was not willing to talk to a stranger, so I told her I was doing some research about the psychological condition Ron was going through, and I needed information about what might have acted as catalysts for his condition. I don't know if she believed or not, maybe she just didn't care. I got some background information about Ron. It was not much, but at least better than nothing.

I continued with my investigation, finding nothing for days. I was restless, I tried to find every little detail. I didn't even know if Ron's condition was even relevant to mine, except for the fact he was mentally unstable, and I might be going the same way. Maybe my obsession with Ron's past was another indication that I was in fact going crazy. I just acted on my instinct, believing our conditions were somehow connected.

One night as I was almost asleep, I felt the tap again, and the whisper. This time I could make out what it was saying. It was not something I was familiar with, but I thought the whisper said "taxis". I knew this didn't make any sense, but none of these made any sense anyway. I didn't understand what it meant, but I felt goosebumps, and also an urge to walk. I ignored it. However, I couldn't sleep anymore. I started with my Ron research again.

I found one of Ron's ex colleagues, Lucas. I gave the same excuse of research, and I should mention that I have my ways to get information out of people, call it a gift. He was reluctant at first, but he talked to me anyway. I showed him Ron's diary to check if any of the words meant anything. As he was turning the pages, his eyes got stuck at one page. He looked at me and said, "Jupiter, did he mean Saul Jupiter?"

That got me curious. "Who is Saul Jupiter?" I asked.

"Some guy, died almost 8 years ago. He killed himself, jumped from the office window." Lucas said. "Why did he kill himself?" I asked.

"No one really knows. He was a pretty private guy. Everyone thought he was happy, had a family and all. They even went on a trip to Asia right before he died. But maybe you can't say what's going on in a man's head." Lucas replied.

I had to know, "Was Ron close with him?"

"No, Ron didn't even know him. He joined this company long after Saul died. But he started inquiring about him before he started becoming sick. I never knew what that was about." Lucas seemed sad.

I came home and started thinking about all that had been going on. All I knew Saul and Ron killed themselves, both jumped from a high-rise. But how were they connected? Were they even connected? Because as I talked to Lucas, no one really faced any abnormal incident after Saul died, dismissing my theory of something paranormal. If Ron's condition was paranormal, why no one else experienced anything before him? But why was he inquiring about Saul anyway? Because he was going crazy – that was an obvious answer, and I was heading the same way. I felt dizzy. I decided it was time to get some sleep. But then the tap again, and "takis". This time I felt dread, but I also felt more drawn towards it, as if I was ready to give up control. I couldn't sleep that night.

Reaching a dead-end on the Ron research, I started a new one about the Rawal clan and the legend involving them. I went through every article on every website, read a few books that have something even remotely related to this. I also emailed Zach Goldstein, the author of the book I bought before, and asked him a bunch of questions related to the legend and my condition. He didn't reply, maybe thought I was crazy, or maybe I was not serious. However, the information I gathered from different sources was something like this: the priest of the Rawal clan did confine the son of Dibalos in a house, but the spirit wanted to have a body to harness its full power. In order to have a body of its own, the spirit needed 17 sacrifices. But

those sacrifices had a certain criterion, which no one was sure about. Some local people also say that the spirit was not confined to the house anymore, it broke free years ago. But how?

My condition was getting worse day by day. I started skipping work, ditched Jen's calls. I was feeling taps and whispers a lot, and was feeling like I was losing control. On the other hand, I wasn't sleeping at all. My therapy wasn't helping. One night I heard the whisper and felt the tap, and started walking. I gained sense after a while and stopped, and panicked. What was I doing? Was I losing control over myself?

I decided it was time to leave my apartment, haunted or not. I was just looking for some mental peace. I moved to a new place, didn't care about the lease as it was provided by my company anyway. After moving to my new place, everything seemed fine. I didn't feel the tap or the whisper in almost 2 weeks. I was kind of relieved. I started sleeping well, it was just a matter of time before my life became normal again. Maybe my previous apartment was haunted after all, or maybe my therapy was working, I didn't know. But I was happy that I didn't experience anything abnormal anymore.

Even after 2 weeks of moving, I wasn't unpacked fully. So I decided to finish unpacking. As I was doing that, I found my files on Ron and Saul. Although the tap incidents stopped, I was still wondering what was connection among Ron, Saul and me? I started flipping through the pages of Ron's diary, suddenly finding the page where "full moon" was written. Some thought suddenly came to my mind. I checked my birth date, and found out it was a full moon. I checked Ron's date of birth, was a full moon too. And we were both born in October. Now my hands were shaking as I looked for Saul's date of birth from the file I got from Lucas, checked it, was a full moon too, and October. Was this the connection among us? Was the criterion for the sacrifice to be born on an October full moon? I was mortified. But I was still not sure how a legend from South-East Asia would end up in the United States. I tried to take a deep breath, and relax. Maybe it was all behind me now, I really didn't need to worry.

I came back from work, talked to Jen after a long time. She was really glad that I was doing good after my move. I also called my mom after so long, I was glad things were looking good for me. After I hung up, I checked my e-mail. There was a new one, a reply from Zach Goldstein, the author I emailed before. I was curious, so I opened it. "Dear Miss Turner,

I hope you are doing well. Thank you for your interest in my work, this legend is indeed very interesting. I am sorry I couldn't get back to you sooner as I was travelling for work.

You're right. There is not many information about this legend. I usually travel to the place of the subject and try to find out from the locals, and visit the places to find out any relevant information. I didn't include all of the information in my book as it was about the origin of different legends, not just this one. Here's what I know about the legend. As you know, the priest confined the spirit in a house, but the locals believe that it broke free after 25 years it was confined. Some guy was found dead about 5 miles from the village, it seemed like he jumped from the cliff. It is believed that the spirit possessed the guy to break free, and when he died, the spirit was confined again to the place of death of the guy. But the question arose, why it didn't possess anyone in the first 25 years, even though many people had been there. That's where the theory of the certain criterion came into the picture, maybe it was just people with certain criterion, but no one really knows what exactly. After the first incident, there had been some more deaths over the years, after that it was a dead-end. No one really knows what happened afterwards, or about its whereabouts. So basically, the spirit could only move by possessing certain people, and when it kills the possessed, it remains confined to the place of death, until it finds someone new that matches its criterion.

Hope that answers your question. Let me know if you have any other questions.

—Zach

P.S.: You wanted to know if the word 'tahis' means anything to me. I think it might be a word from the native language of the Rawal clan, it means 'Jump.'"

I froze after reading the mail, just then I felt a tap on my shoulder.