

Panic
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Scott Kimak is a social studies teacher for the Harlingen Consolidate ISD and a kung fu master, teaching martial arts for nearly forty years. Recently, he turned to writing, and his short story *The Voice from the Dark* was published in issue #89 of *Black Petals Horror Magazine*. His first major novel *I call him HIM* will be released to the public next month. He wanted to be a part of this writing series to meet other Valley writers and exchange ideas. Mr. Kimak lives in Harlingen with the love of his life, Diana, and their four wonderful children.

Blood . . . slithers down my arms, searching for my fingertips, gathering there until it forms. Then the droplets grow until they can hang on no longer, slipping from my fingers and plummeting to the cold, tile floor beneath me. They strike the surface with a resounding echo, reverberating through my frame. My body shakes. A cold winter chill seeps into my bones, waking me from my stupor.

I look at my hands, trying to find the color of my nail polish, but all I see is crimson. Blood is everywhere. I am dipped in its color, drowning away any picture of what I once was. My stare pushes past my hands, and I see her lifeless body before me. The red liquid still seeps from her skull, finding its way into the grout lines, spreading its hideous hue across the entry to my home.

I collapse to my knees, slamming my hands on the floor. The tears roll down my cheeks, and I see them drip into the bloody mess that only hours ago was pearl white. The tears try to spread. They so badly want to clean the misery away, but they cannot win. Instantly, they are absorbed by horror.

*I thrust my head back and scream at the Heavens, "Oh my God, what have I done?"
How could this happen to me? I try to calm my breathing, gather my thoughts, and think back to the events from the past week...*

Monotony, the tedious boredom crashed in like the waves from a dark storm. Day after day, Mary spent her time alone, glued to the television, switching channels across the various news networks, but they all painted the same grim picture. Tens of thousands were infected, and every day the number grew. Some predictions said that 200,000 people might die from this horrible disease.

The gloom was driving her crazy. She would force herself to change the channel to something funny like *Impractical Jokers* or *Ridiculousness*, but no matter how hard she tried, the news drew her back in. She was addicted to their depressing tales, and fear was replacing her

own rational judgment.

Since the news of her boss's death, she had tried to focus on her new responsibilities, but the television had become a magnet, and she couldn't refuse the attraction. The number of infections and deaths were always posted in the upper right-hand corner, tormenting her to watch as they continued to climb. She had to do something to get her body moving and take her mind off the growing panic that seemed to be taking control. She started making masks again, but as she peered at each of them, it just reminded her more of the virus.

Would these masks even stop the disease? What if it was already in her house, hiding somewhere unnoticed? If I touch the contaminated area and then rub my eye or wipe my nose...

She had always been somewhat of a clean-freak. Sylvia would tell her she was obsessed with hand-sanitizer. She had never taken her seriously, but now her friend's words rang true as she grabbed a bottle and practically bathed in the substance. Looking around, she knew what she had to do to alleviate her fears.

Mary began to clean. Every spare minute she wasn't listening to CNN or FOX news, she was scrubbing her apartment with Clorox. Meticulously, she wiped the kitchen counters and stovetop. She dived into her tiny bathroom, cleaning in between the toilet and sink until her fingers were numb. Finally, she plentifully soaked her tile floors with disinfectant chemicals, swishing the mop into every little crevice.

She had just finished mopping the floor near her entryway when the doorbell rang. The noise startled her, and she nearly slipped, grabbing on to the hard, oak picture table to steady herself.

Who was at the door? What if they have the virus?

Silently, she stood frozen as the doorbell rang once again, but then she heard her friend's voice, "Mary, it's Sylvia. Let me in."

Instantly, her panic floated away. Her best friend was here, and she wouldn't be lonely anymore. Sure, she spoke to her on the phone every day, but that wasn't the same as having someone to actually hold on to. Maybe that was why she was feeling so crazy. She just needed someone to hug. Quickly, she tiptoed across the wet floor and flung open the door.

"What took you so long?" Sylvia blurted with a broad smile as she rushed inside.

Mary returned the smile, and saw her friend start to slip on the tile. Quickly, she grabbed Sylvia, and ferociously pulled her in close. She wouldn't be alone anymore. For one moment, everything seemed fine, but in an instant it all changed to darkness.

Sylvia's warm cheek was touching her neck when Mary heard the cough. Instinctively, she shoved her friend back, fearful she would be infected. It almost seemed comical, as Sylvia started to flounder, her arms wildly swinging like she was trying to do a back-stroke, her feet finding no traction. Mary just stood there and watched, fearful of contracting the disease. She

could have grabbed her if she only would have made an effort.

Sylvia's feet went out from under her completely, and she fell toward the corner of the picture table. Mary's mother had warned her often the table was an accident waiting to happen. The movers had dropped it and chipped off the rounded edge, leaving it razor-sharp. Why hadn't she listened to her mom?

The sound was deafening, as her dear friend's head slammed into the table. Instantly, blood splattered against the wall as Sylvia began falling until she again hit her head, this time on the unmoving tile. Steadily, a pool of blood spread out across the floor.

Immediately Mary dropped to her knees, cradling Sylvia's head to try to stop the bleeding, but it was too late. Sylvia stared at her with dead eyes.

"Wake up. You can't die," Mary wailed as she rocked her friend back and forth in her bloody arms for several minutes.

Absorbing the scene in front of her, she gently laid Sylvia's head down and stood up.

What do I do now?