

DREAD WATCH by Jared Agard

EXCERPT

The man held it out to me. It swung back and forth on its gold chain as I moved closer. The air around me became thick like cement, slowing me down as I approached the dangling gold. I reached for it, gravity fighting me back.

Just as my fingers were inches away from wrapping around the sleek body of the watch, the man slipped it back into his suit coat pocket.

I charged at him. He couldn't leave. I needed the watch.

His body faded, almost transparent. I could see the watch, beating like a heart, through his suit coat. I reached for it again, but his body dissolved into a hissing black puddle. The group of children evaporated into pools of silvery water. The puddles seeped into the floor and disappeared without a trace.

I dropped to my knees. They couldn't leave. I had to go with them.

I needed the watch!

I tried to shout after them, beg them to stay. My jaw loosened, like it had been welded shut. My voice croaked out unintelligibly. A blast of orange light cut through the haze. I shielded my eyes.

"Come on, Caleb!"

I blinked and sat up in my creaky bed. I was in my room, but there were no dark mists or old men. Just my mom flicking the light switch on and off like she usually does when I don't respond to her first and second wake up calls in the morning.

"Get up! You still have to go to school today," my mom said from the doorway, her finger still on the light switch. Raindrops pelted my window, obscuring the gloomy sky outside. There was no way I was going anywhere.

"I can't go. Too much emotional trauma last night."

"You will go, young man, and you will apologize." She waved a finger tip at me.

"Mom, I'm not apologizing. Those guys are jerks. They deserved what they got."

"I think you deserved what you got, too." She planted one hand on her hip and shook her head.

"That eye of yours doesn't look any better. Put some ice on it before you leave."

"I'm not going to school, Mom."

“Get up, NOW!”

“Fine,” I grumbled. I sat up and rubbed my eyes.

“Ouch!”

Even barely touching my eye hurt like crazy. Blake had gotten me pretty good. Despite my shiner, the memory of Blake’s face when he had met my ghost made it all worth it.

I kicked the blankets off of my feet and stumbled to the bathroom to examine the damage. My eye was surrounded by a crimson-splotched purple ring. It looked a lot worse than it had last night. When my mom had shown up to get me, I told her the truth about what I’d done. She would’ve found out anyway, and I was kinda proud of my prank despite its tragic ending. So, I told her everything and she came unglued.

I splashed water on my face and looked into my own eyes. My brown hair was flattened on one side and standing straight up on the other. I almost laughed at my reflection, but I couldn’t. There was a lingering feeling of dread, a cold shadow in my heart.

I remembered the dream. And the watch.