

Why I Don't Go Near Mirrors

By Reaper

Everyone knows the urban legend of Bloody Mary. I'd first heard of it when I was in elementary school from my friend Derek. The idea is that you and a friend go into a dark bathroom or bedroom and look in the mirror and say "Bloody Mary" over and over again and conjure her ghost to appear in the mirror. The story scared me when I was young although I naturally scoffed at the idea when I became older. At one point in middle school I had even tried playing the game with Derek once, but aside from making our eyes sting we never saw anything that looked like a ghost in the mirror. I had then figured that it was just a scary story kids tell each other to have more fun at sleepovers. Nothing more, nothing less.

I had always been one of the more intelligent students and I consistently got good grades in school. My naturally curious mind gravitated towards medicine and even in high school I read as much as I could from medical journals and college level biology textbooks. My dream was to become a practicing physician one day, or maybe if I became really good, gain the coveted title of diagnostician. An endless supply of medical shows helped fuel my ambitions. I knew they were essentially bullshit but I couldn't help feeling good when I could figure out a diagnosis in House MD faster than the characters in the show could, which I could do often.

The medical knowledge I'd collected had some other less practical applications. I'd also been able to shed some light on what really happens to people who are brave enough to go through with that old Bloody Mary story. The key is to know what happens to the human eye when you stare at anything in low lighting without blinking. The medical community has a term for what happens when you do that. It's called retinal fatigue and although it isn't dangerous, it can cause visual distortions and potentially throw off test results while examining a patient's eyesight.

While I was in grad school I thought that this medical insight into the Bloody Mary story was nothing more than a nostalgic chuckle, but that was before I met my friend Sam. Sam was going for a graduate law degree with hopes of becoming a defense attorney. He and I shared a dorm and I was pleased to discover that Sam was quite amicable. We found that we had similar tastes in music, movies, and activities which certainly helped our friendship along.

One of the things I found out about Sam was that he was and had always been very superstitious. Sam had heard about Bloody Mary when he was a kid as well, but he admitted he'd never actually played the game. This gave me an idea for how to play a good practical joke on Sam. Thinking back to when Derek and I had played, I recalled that although we never saw anything in the mirror, it was because we hadn't known what to look for. My idea of Bloody Mary's ghost in those days was some glowing spectral women who would appear in the mirror and light up the room with her presence. Having a more concrete understanding of retinal fatigue and the effects it caused I knew exactly how to present the story to Sam.

That night I decided to bring up the childhood game.

"No way man," he'd said.

"So you still believe in ghosts? You're a graduate student" I'd teased, "At least you can say you've had the courage to do it at some point in your life."

Sam sighed, if there was one thing he hated it was the implication that he was a coward. I could tell he didn't like the idea but had resided to go through with it if for no other reason than to simply humor me.

"What the hell, probably nothing will happen anyway. How does the story go again" he asked?

"Well, that's the thing is most people have never heard the real story." I said, dropping my voice in a spooky manner.

"You see, the real Bloody Mary was a woman who was once the Queen of England in the fifteen hundreds. During her reign she was well known for her blood lust. She executed hundreds of people, mostly protestants, who were then burned alive at the stake. She liked to personally oversee the executions because it's said that she hoped that by seeing enough death she could figure out death's secrets and either become

immortal or be able to return from the grave”, I said.

Sam was visibly shaken by this story. His normally flushed complexion had become pale and there were beads of sweat standing out on his forehead.

“But she died anyway”, Sam asked?

“Oh yes, she eventually died from an illness when she was in her forties or fifties”, I said. “But, either her overseeing the executions or possibly her alleged dabbling in black magic may have afforded her a way back. That's why it's said to be possible to call her to your mirror. But unable to come back from the grave properly, she becomes enraged and tries to drag the living person into her dark world out of jealous anger because they have the one thing she wants but cannot have anymore: life”, I said.

Sam gulped, his eyes wide. I could tell I had gotten him good and scared.

“So what happens when you call her into the mirror”, he asked?

“Well, it's important to have someone around who can turn on the light. Turning on the light sends her back to her dark realm instantly. To call her you have to stare into the mirror at just one point in your own reflection and begin repeating her name. Bloody Mary... Bloody Mary... over and over again. It sometimes takes a few minutes. You can't blink or look around. What happens is you'll slowly begin to see her dead and rotting corpse replace your own image in the mirror. If you become too frightened have someone else turn on the light. Having someone else around is important because otherwise she can entrance you and you won't be able to do it yourself. The longer you look the more powerful she becomes until she's able to reach through the mirror and grab you.” I claimed.

I was completely bullshitting Sam of course, I knew the effects of retinal fatigue and what it would do to his image in the mirror. If all went well, Sam really would see what looked like a rotting corpse replace his image. The story itself was mostly true from research I'd done online years back, although I'd taken some creative liberties in spinning the tale to Sam. It worked too because Sam was thoroughly shaken. That was important because I understood retinal fatigue will only get you so far, you need to really be scared and have your imagination working overtime to take it the rest of the way.

“Are you ready to try it”, I asked?

Sam gulped and got to his feet.

“Okay, why not. It's not like anything is really gonna happen”, he said.

He was trying to sound and look brave, but his efforts were betrayed by his pallid complexion and a slight tremble in his hands. Sam and I moved to the bathroom which was only dimly lit by a night light situated to the side of the toilet and proceeded to stare into the mirror. I kept my hand on the light switch ready to flick it on if Sam started freaking out.

Sam stood in front of the mirror and began to say the name.

“Bloody Mary... Bloody Mary... Bloody Mary...”, he repeated over and over. It went on this way for about a minute and then his voice became notably higher and his eyes began widening in horror. Thirty seconds after that he stopped saying the name. He stood there for a second or two and then screamed so loudly and shrilly it hurt my ears. I flicked on the light more out of instinct than anything else, but Sam bolted from the bathroom knocking me to the ground as he fled.

“Oh my God! Oh my God!” he screamed over and over as he collapsed onto the couch. “I saw her! I really saw Bloody Mary! She took over my image and she really did look just like a corpse!”

Sam was practically in hysterics, which was pretty funny considering he was a young adult and aspiring lawyer. Despite that though he was also my friend so I decided to let him in on the joke.

“No Sam, you didn't see anything but your own reflection”, I chortled.

“What do you mean? I'm telling you I saw her ghost for real”, he nearly shouted!

“Sam, you had retinal fatigue which caused your vision to distort and see your own reflection as a corpse. That story I told you got your imagination going and I essentially told you what I knew you would see in the mirror due to the retinal fatigue of being in a dark room and staring at your reflection like that. I'm a med student and I know about that kind of thing” I said, smirking at Sam.

Sam slowly lowered his hands from his face and looked at me with dawning comprehension.

“Dude, you're a dick”, he said.

We both started to laugh. Sam was laughing with relief that he really hadn't just seen an actual ghost and I was laughing because my practical joke had gone so well.

"Gotcha man, dude your reaction was epic! I wish we'd gotten it on camera", I howled!

"Oh Lord Jesus, I nearly crapped my pants! I swear I'm going to get you back for that one", Sam said, still laughing!

We had each gone to bed that night in good spirits. The next day was a long one. On top of my regular courses and homework load I had to work on a pathology lab that was due in two days as well as study for my exam in Bio-science. So I had no choice but to study in the library until late in the evening. Sometime after ten when I attempted to return to my dormitory, I found that I was unable to get in.

Police and campus security had surrounded the building, barring me from entering my dorm. When I told them who I was and asked what was going on, they explained to me that my friend Sam was dead. He had been murdered in our dormitory bathroom, the result of an apparent strangling. They also said that he had blood all around his throat, but Sam didn't have any cuts on him so it didn't appear to be his blood.

The police also asked me if anyone besides Sam and myself had a key to the dormitory.

"No," I'd stated. "We're the only ones who have the keys. Sam carries his on his key chain and I have mine on me right now."

"Well that's very odd", the police officer said. "He'd tried to call 911 but he was cut off, and emergency services had to break down the door because it was locked from the inside. The type of lock you have is the kind that can only be locked from the inside or with your key on the outside. There are no signs of forced entry either which means somebody must have used a key to access the dorm."

I was booked and taken into questioning since I had the only other key, but my alibi for being at the library at the time of death checked out and I was released. Sam didn't have any enemies, and to this day the crime has gone unsolved. Aside from being strangled with some unidentified blood around Sam's throat, the only other clue as to what happened to him was a look of pure terror that was frozen onto his face at the moment of his death.

I moved out of the dorm but I've never forgotten Sam or what I think may have happened that night. Did he try to play the Bloody Mary game again, but this time with nobody around to turn on the light? I couldn't see him doing that... but what if he really had seen her ghost in the mirror that night? What if once you summoned her...she could come back when you were by a mirror in the dark? I can't really say I know anything for sure. But from that point on, I've slept with the lights on, and I've never gone near a mirror again.