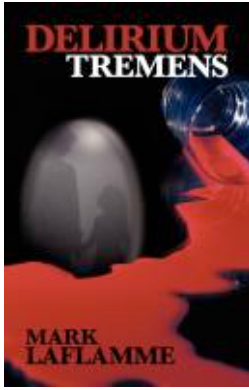


DELIRIUM TREMENS

The image features a dark background. In the upper right, a clear glass is tilted, pouring a vibrant red liquid, likely wine, which flows downwards and spreads across the bottom half of the frame. In the center-left, a soft, circular spotlight illuminates the silhouettes of a man and a woman standing close together, possibly embracing or holding hands. The overall mood is dramatic and evocative.

**MARK
LAFLAMME**



Stephen Boone has a problem. If he doesn't stop drinking, he will die. But for this washed-up writer, it's not so simple. Along with the sweats and shakes of alcohol withdrawal, Stephen sees dead people - ghastly images of the future where men, women and children are about to die horribly. Now he's a suspect in a gruesome murder. Jailed, he'll have no choice but to face sobriety and the terrors that come with it.

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TITLES BY MARK LAFLAMME

The Pink Room

Vegetation

Dirt: An American Campaign

Asterisk: Red Sox 2006

Box of Lies

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ISBN 978-1-61434-462-9

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Printed in the United States of America.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.
2011 First Edition

10.

Boone awoke to the sound of the chickadee outside. Such a haunting sound, like a ballad. Something by Harry Chapin, maybe. Or Janis Ian. Three sharp notes, the first long, the final two short.

Weeeeeee wee weet. Weeeeeee wee weet.

For Boone, it shook loose memories of childhood, the first days of spring. Waking up in the morning with a tingle of excitement, knowing that school would soon end and all the days of summer would be his.

Weeeeeee wee weet... Weeeeeee wee weet.

The sheet was snaked around his upper body, under his armpits like a hoist. His head was stuffed beneath a pillow, face jammed into the bare mattress, the fitted sheet having pulled free. He sensed the first light of morning beyond his eyelids, and the sensation brought hope. The stores would be opening their coolers. There would be soothing of nerves that felt even now like live wires.

He lifted his head and knocked the pillow to the floor. He opened his eyes.

The girl was crouched on the mattress beside him. Her eyes were wide and her gaze seemed to burn through him like a laser.

“Momma,” she whispered. “Momma, wake up. Please, Momma. You’re bleeding.”

Boone’s mouth fell open with a smack. The girl was inches from his face and she was naked. Her flesh was covered in gore and it glimmered like bloody tinsel. He could see a long incision from the girl’s belt line up to the solar plexus. The wound had folded open, like pages in a gory book. Her face was smeared in blood. Her hair was dyed red with it. Her arms showed more wounds and they too were thick with blood that was almost black.

“Momma, pleeeeeeeeeeease?”

Boone was sick. He rolled toward the edge of the bed, opened his mouth to scream, spewed vomit instead. He flung himself from the bed and into the stream of his sickness, falling to the floor in a gush of it. The scream was thick and wet, but it was loud. The sheet tried to pull him back to the bed and he fought it. His knees slid through warm puke on the floor as he tried to right himself and inchworm toward the door. Instead, he tumbled forward and fell face first into the floor.

Boone screamed again, sure now that the little girl was crawling across the bed, blood-smear mouth curled into a vicious grin. With utter clarity, he saw her in his mind’s eye as she moved closer to him, grinning, viscera tumbling from the wound in her stomach.

He screeched and tried to crawl. But the weakness and dizziness sent him swirling through bright light, as though he were trapped in a kaleidoscope aimed at the sun. Something cool touched his bare calf and he was sure it was the bloody girl, who would tug him inch by inch into the darkness beneath the bed.

He fell onto his back, screaming and thrashing, and the sheet fell over his face. He lost his orientation – was he floundering toward the bed or away from it? – and screamed louder with the confusion. The intensity of his fear caused his heart to race again and blood pounded at his temples. His head slammed into something hard and he screamed louder still. He clawed at his face, ripping at the sheet that blinded him.

The terror and confusion on the floor went on for sixty seconds. But in the distorted, hall-of-mirrors way of delirium, Boone felt as though he thrashed and rolled, twisted and flailed for the better part of the day. In the end, he tore the sheet from his face, saw that it was the half-opened door he had banged his

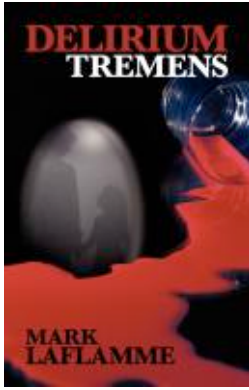
DELIRIUM TREMENS

head into, and lunged through it like a running back squirming toward the goal line.

He scurried into the kitchen, hands and knees squeaking on dirty linoleum. He was breathing hard and moaning over and over, horrified at what might be following just a few paces behind him. Overhead, dark shapes flitted through the air like bats. Real? Imagined?

No idea. He flinched from them as he crawled further into the kitchen. He crawled until he was underneath the rickety table and fell onto his side, whimpering and panting. There was pain in his chest and pain in his knees where he had scraped them raw. His body was as tense as a two-by-four, the horror unabated. Yet as he lay on the filthy floor, sweating, covered in puke, afraid that cool hands might grab him yet, a single thought played in his head like a rock and roll chorus at full volume: Alcohol! Alcohol! Alcohol! That psychic alarm shrieking so loudly in his head, his eyeballs seemed to throb.

Downstairs, an old man named Omar McManus had jumped awake at the first scream. A cranky insomniac, he'd called police at once. Now he sat up in his bed, seething and waiting for them to come and deliver the kind of service for which he paid taxes.



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