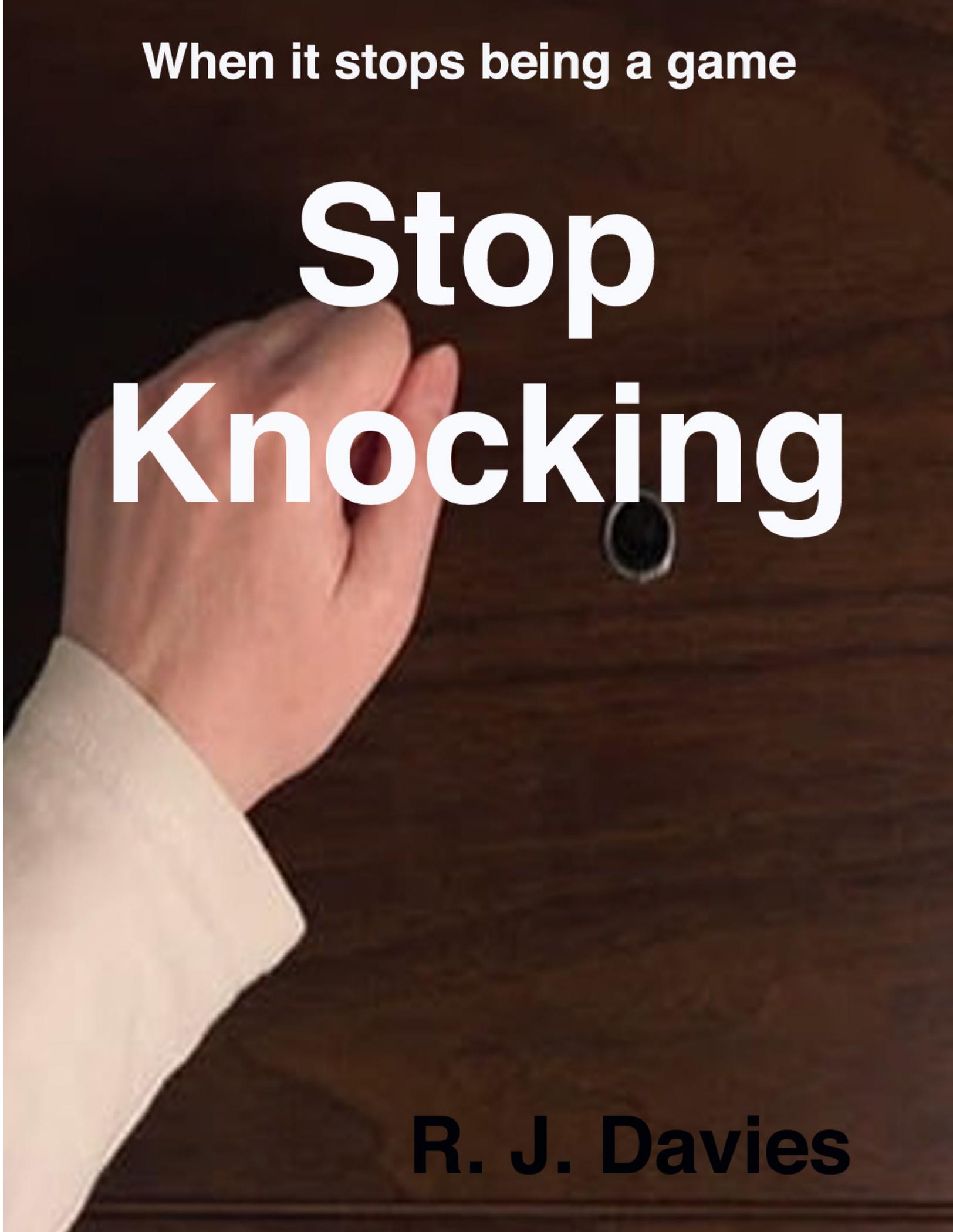


**When it stops being a game**

# **Stop Knocking**

A close-up photograph of a hand in a white shirt cuff, positioned as if about to knock on a dark brown wooden door. A small, circular hole has already been made in the wood, and a dark object is visible through it. The background is a solid dark brown color.

**R. J. Davies**

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# Stop Knocking

**R. J. Davies**

All day long some kids were playing pranks. It wasn't unusual that they would knock at the door and run away. Normally it would be once or twice. Today they were in the mood to be annoying ... and that indeed they were.

Brandon wanted to catch the little buggers, if he saw them running and could put the face with the knocker he'd call their parents. He knew everyone in the building. He also had everyone's number and name on a list. He didn't need the list because he knew them all by memory. Brandon served in the army and had an excellent memory. It was like a game he could tell you what he had for breakfast two weeks ago as well as three months. Then again for breakfast he always had the same thing cornflakes, one slice of toast and peanut butter and coffee to wash it down. His needs were simple. Looking out the window he saw the little buggers playing ball passing it back and forth. Little Tommy got excluded again, he always got cast aside by the other kids. Tommy was small for his age and the boy just was not as athletic. Brandon didn't think the child had one athletic bone in his whole body. In fact, Brandon doubted the child could spell the word. In addition to being small he was a little slow, his older sister always looked out for him but she was impatient at times and that's how Tommy got left out of many activities.

Tommy sat on the curb and watched. Brandon didn't think he minded just watching anyways. It looked like it was later in the afternoon the sun was getting ready to set in the west. Brandon wondered if his favourite show was on tonight. They were all reruns but

that was okay. He loved Matlock. The mysteries were all old and solved. But as he was getting older he noticed there was that theme that migrated to other areas of his life too. People ... the people he knew were so predictable their conversations felt empty and unfulfilling. Too many conversations that were no longer prevalent ... stale like the air in his apartment. With that thought fresh in his mind Brandon tried to open the window. It was stuck again. No matter how hard he tried he could not get the damn thing open. After a few tries he gave up.

Brandon waved at Tommy who was looking up and watching him. Tommy waved back.

Then there was a knock at his door again! Insolent fools! Grabbing his cane he hobbled over and opened the door. He was welcomed by the empty hallway. Only the one florescent blue light flickered, casting weird shadows on the old cheap cracked green paint that was peeling off the walls in various areas. Shivering he didn't like the hallway today. Most other days he felt indifferent to it. Not today. It felt wrong, creepy and out of sorts. Stepping back inside he closed the door and locked it.

"Damn kids," he grumbled as he headed back over to the window trying again he struggled as he tried to open the window. Finally, he just gave up on the notion once more. There was another knock at the door. He was getting too pooped from running over to the door the last time. Yet, the thought of the little shit getting away again.

Frowning he decided he was going to catch that little door knocker even if it was the last thing he did tonight. Grabbing one of his kitchen chairs, he dragged it down the short hallway and parked himself by the door.

Heaving a big sigh, Brandon knew the satisfaction he was going to get from catching the kid was great. Grinning like an idiot he tried to suppress the maniacal giggle that bubbled up from his throat.

Waited ... he could wait all night. Hell he was ... 98? Shit he was so old he couldn't even remember how old he was, but he knew he could wait. All those years in the army had taught him that.

The knocker didn't disappoint him. The knocker knocked once. He flung the door open, "Ah ha! You little fucker!"

An empty hallway, he didn't expect that! Then there was a knocking on his door again. His eyes grew wide as saucers. He looked behind his door holding his breath. No one was there. Looking back to the outside then inside. Another knock rapped on his door.

"What the hell?"

"You called darling?" an old familiar voice cooed.

"Carol?" his first wife stood out in the hallway. Tall, frail, she had on a nice dress, with her hair and makeup done. He blinked and rubbed his eyes. She brushed pass him and into his apartment.

"I thought you were dead fifteen years ago?" he slowly closed the door behind her. "I was at your funeral."

"I did, welcome to your afterlife darling."