

Dark Tales for Dark Nights

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
SOMETIMES THEY COME AT NIGHT	3
SOUL MATES	17
THE RIVERTON BIGFOOT	35
MAYHEM AT THE HENDERSONS	55
HENRY	59
THE GIRL FROM IDLEWOOD	67
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	84

INTRODUCTION

The stories you are about to read are the results of a collaboration of two people who met because of a love of a great story.

Both having the desire to write for many years, something seemed to be lacking in the task for both of us until a friendship lead to the first collaborative work called "Henry". Having written one short story and already hatching ideas for a few more, the fire was rekindled and Mysterious Ink was forged.

The short story called "Henry" and more are included in this collection. But for now we would like you to sit back, relax and enjoy reading these as much as we loved creating them.

SOMETIMES THEY COME AT NIGHT

The cold water running on my hands and through my fingers was beginning to numb the bout of shakes that had started a short while ago. As night began falling outside, the feelings of worry and anxiety returned when the dreaded darkness began creeping around my cabin in the deep woods.

Years of carpentry had made my large hands powerful with a hammer, yet they trembled in fear now, as they had for so many previous nights. Bent over the sink, I distracted myself for a few moments as I stood washing the last of the vegetables I'd gathered from my garden.

I needed to keep busy in order to distract myself from last night's disturbing events. A heaping serving of stir fry for supper would surely fix my emotional malaise and maybe even comfort me long enough to rest tonight. Relaxation had become a thing of the past in the last few weeks.

With an intent focus, I washed off the dirt from the fresh carrots and chopped them up into long thin diagonal slices. I continued on to wash and prepare the celery, broccoli, cauliflower and a handful of tasty wild mushrooms that I'd foraged from the forest nearby. My pan welcomed these delicious ingredients, making them dance upon its surface in sizzling unison.

Reaching for the sesame sauce, I noticed the red onion, lonely on the counter, it waited to be cut in thin slices

and added to the fiesta in the pan. I obliged and for a few moments the knots in my stomach dissipated and I actually felt normal. This didn't last long.

As I picked up the chef's knife from the wooden block on the counter, I saw my own reflection in the shiny wide blade and scared myself. In all my forty-two years of life, never had I seen such deep and dark circles under my eyes. Tired and beat were the words that came to mind. Seemed fitting, I had never before been this scared until this past week. Each night had brought about stranger and more frightening events than the previous. Last night however, had been the one to top all the others. I wondered to myself if they would come back tonight, and if they did, how worse could they become?

It wasn't like I just let them come for me. During one of their first visits, I had tried to escape from the cabin and into the nearby village. They just followed and taunted me with their glowing blood red eyes. Trying to understand what they were saying was pointless. I had screamed out at them several times, demanding to know what they wanted with me. Their only replies had been more of their strange incoherent sounds and rushing towards me as I ran away from them.

I cut the beef into thin strips with the sharp chef's knife. My eyes glazed over as my mind wandered through the haunting events of the recent past. I added the beef strips to the hot pan. The loud and sudden sizzling of the cold meat against the fiery hot temperature made me jump and reinstate the paranoia that had been sitting idle for the past few minutes. A long night was in store, I could sense it before I even sat down in my chair at the kitchen table.

* * *

Satisfied with a tasty meal my tired body sank deep in

the comfort of my old recliner in the living room. My eyes felt heavy but sleep would not come. I put another log into the wood stove that sat a few feet away on my left. The fire brought about natural warmth, soothing my aching body as well as my mind. I reached down to my side table for something to read and came across the copy of *The Great Gatsby* that my friend Harry had brought over during his last brief and dispiriting visit. Oh, I knew he'd been genuinely concerned about me when he came over, but something in the way his eyes peered through me made me feel like I hadn't convinced him at all.

The last time I had seen Harry had been exactly one week ago today. Early last Sunday morning, I was awoken by the sound of tires crunching gravel. This was a sound I didn't hear very often since I had moved here this summer. Not much traffic came by this deep in the woods, especially not up to my cabin.

Harry had come by to check in on me as he had noticed that I had been quieter than usual and he said I seemed overtired on the job the week prior. We both worked for MacCrombie Construction Ltd, and had known each other since joining the company seventeen years ago. We often went fishing together and occasionally enjoyed a game of pool. Yes, Harry had become one of the very few friends that truly gave a damn about my well-being. When something was up, Harry knew it right away. This was why his visit came as no surprise to me. When my wife had decided to leave me three years ago, Harry had been the only one that I had told.

When our house sold, I bought this cabin on the outskirts of Anchor's Point, a budding town of about fourteen hundred souls. Harry had been one of the few to know where I had relocated. I knew if I could trust someone with my secret, he would be the one. A good friend, I felt sure that I could share my experiences with my buddy in complete confidence.

Unfortunately, my efforts to explain my weariness and

worry were met with a pair of disheartened eyes and a look of pity. I simply could not come up with any evidence to support what I was claiming. The scratches I had heard so vividly the night before should have left some kind of markings on the door. There were none. The loud banging sounds made by whatever creature that had stood on the front porch should have left some kind of prints in the dirt surrounding my cabin. No tracks were left behind. A few small tracks, possibly made by raccoons, led off into the woods, but that was all. No, my story just didn't seem to add up to Harry.

As I became insistent on what I had seen and heard, Harry withdrew a bit and suddenly it became clear to me that he thought I was losing my mind. He handed me a few *Outdoors-Man* magazines and a copy of *The Great Gatsby* and suggested I try doing things to keep myself busy. As Harry's Ford pick-up created a cloud of dissipating dirt, I swore to myself then that I would somehow get evidence and prove to my friend that I wasn't going crazy. There really was something in these woods that came alive at night. They were strange and terrifying creatures that looked like they were from another dimension. They were real and I would just have to prove to him that they were.

Now tonight, my eyes finally closing at the end of the first chapter of F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel, my head swam in a foaming sea of fatigue and fright, a deep azure wave that slowed down with the hands of my watch, as I felt my body become limp with deep rest.

* * *

My heart must have stopped, if even for a fraction of a second, as my eyes flew open to see nothing but the outline of the wood stove standing nearby. It cast off a red hot tint in the small living room, creating long shadows in the neighbouring kitchen.

My sleep had been unexpected, and though my body had needed the rest, it was now fully alert as it heard a long and wailing howl coming from just outside, probably a few yards from the front of the cabin.

I jumped to my feet, the greatness of *Gatsby* now face down on the old floor boards. My socked feet crept ever so lightly towards the kitchen. There came another long howl that seemed longer and much closer than the first. My body now drenched in a cold sweat, my stomach full of knots, I kept my eyes fixed on my front door window.

Past the table, the soft glow of the full moon's rays drenched part of the kitchen floor through the small window above the sink. I tried to stay out of this glow. As dim as it was, I couldn't chance them knowing I was moving in closer. I was determined to catch some kind of evidence tonight.

My feet carefully edged away from the moonlight that formed a puddle on the floor, and I backed my body against the kitchen counter on the far right. My right hand slid along the counter as I moved ever so slowly, keeping my ears open for any indication that they had gotten closer.

Suddenly, just a few feet in front of me, a bright white light shone in through the small window above the sink. The accompanying noise made my ears ring loudly; such was the disturbing level of grinding sound. I instinctively dropped to my knees, now crouched just a few feet off the side of the sink and the source of light that was still pouring in through the window.

On all fours, my eyes were nearly level with the top of the kitchen counter. They fell upon the thirty-two ounce Estwing framing hammer that I'd laid there after work on Friday. I reached up with my right hand and grabbed the tool just as the light disappeared again, as fast as it had arrived. My eyes readjusted to the darkness, but I was already on my feet again before they did.

I moved quickly past the sink and counter and stood

just to the right of the front door. My body slightly angled, I silently waited. A few moments passed with nothing but the sound of the strong wind outside. The silence, usually a welcomed thing, made my skin crawl with sheer terror.

Something was out there, I could feel it. It was waiting, staring at the front door. I turned my head slowly to peer over my right shoulder at the kitchen window over the sink. There, batting away long brown wings was the biggest moth I had ever set eyes upon. It was as big as a crow!

It fluttered about, covering at least half the window. It seemed to gain speed as its wings flapped harder and faster. As it hit the window pane, its body emitted an electrical current between the glass and itself, creating a blue glow about it every time it did so. I crouched down to the floor holding the hammer in my right hand. I covered my eyes with my left one as a sudden pain sheared through my temples. Just as I uncovered my eyes and looked at the floor in front of me, I noticed a long shadow in the puddle of moonlight that had beamed down from the front door window.

I stared in shock and held my breath as the shadowy figure stood just outside my door, peering inside my cabin. It began making garbled noises, a mixture of what white noise and an underwater current might sound like if combined. It sounded like it was trying to communicate, but the more I tried to understand what it was saying, the more the creature's speech was broken. A few times I thought I made out a word, but it was so garbled I couldn't be sure. Suddenly, the shadow thing moved away from the front door and the moonlight returned its full beam onto the kitchen floor.

Then, a sudden loud bang came from the side of the cabin, and a long series of shrilling noises came from the same direction. My body shivered uncontrollably in fear. I quickly stood up and looked out the front door. In the driveway danced about half a dozen shadows, their outlines making them easy to spot but from this distance, I couldn't make

out their appearance, thankfully. I sunk back down onto the floor, waiting for the perfect time to make my move. I didn't want to chance running outside and being faced with several of these creatures at once. So I patiently waited, crouching down by my counter top and cupboards.

The sudden scratching at my back door made me jump and yelp out in fear. It was louder than I had ever heard it before. It became deafening as it grew louder and louder. Not only was my heart racing at this point, but my ears began to ring as the scratching gave way to gibberish in a language I had never previously heard. The voice was high pitched and divided in two, the scratching itself now morphing into deep penetrating stabs on the back door. Cackles of hideous laughter permeated the living room and drifted to the kitchen, where I stood immobilized in my crouched position. They mocked and taunted me for what felt like hours, until my legs grew tired, but my fright did not.

I sat with my back to the counter, hammer in hand, gripping the handle with whitened knuckles and my eyes wide open. Eventually the scratching faded away and the diabolical voices followed suit. The dimness of the room stood still, and my breathing slowly returned to normal. My body began to relax a bit and the grip I held on the hammer loosened. I closed my eyes for a moment, fatigue carrying my consciousness into a light slumber.

* * *

It felt like an eternity had passed when I awoke drenched in a cold sweat, my back against the kitchen cabinets. I held my breath, listening intently in the dark cabin for any strange noises that might have brought me out of my slumber. For the first few moments everything was silent. Then the moment of my deliverance finally came.

As I scanned the windows of my cabin, I felt relief wash

over me as I saw nothing out of the ordinary. My body ached and my joints popped as I slowly stood up and grabbed hold of the hammer that had slid away from my hand and onto the cold floorboards. My body felt cold as a shiver passed through it, encircling me as I turned around to face the living room. My eyes grew wide and I gripped the hammer with a powerful hand.

Standing there beside my recliner just in front of the wood stove there stood a large figure. Cloaked in long black rips and layers of flowing darkness, a demon stood at least six feet tall, its eyes glowing a deep pulsing red. It stared intently at me, waiting for me to make the first move.

From deep within me, a strong primal urge, anger and fear mixed together, came up in one swift moment. I screamed as I began running towards the demonic presence that had invaded my home. I ran straight at it, demanding my life back, letting it know that I was taking control again. Just as I reached the dark figure, its eyes glowed bright and it abruptly vanished in a cloud of blackness. The figure now dissipated, I ran straight into the wood stove where the demon had been standing. Searing pain swept up my forearms, the skin charring as I fell onto the stove. I could feel my flesh melting, could smell my skin burning from the contact with the hot metal.

Quickly I got up and looked around the cabin for the demon. Outside, a noise was roaring, the fires of Hell that the demon had unleashed into my world. I stood in the living room, my breathing rapid and my heart racing, but no longer out of fear nor panic. I was now completely infuriated and blinded by rage.

I ran outside, letting out a long guttural scream as I burst out the front door. The cold night air was a brief shock as it cooled off the drops of sweat that had formed on my forehead. I felt a chill running down my back under my drenched T-shirt.

Several of the giant lightning moths had gathered and were flapping their wide brown-spotted wings above my head. At my feet were creatures with glowing red and yellow eyes staring up at me. One of them brushed my leg and began to make strange noises, stepping in between my legs. My left foot came down hard and firm, pinning it on my front porch. It twitched violently underfoot, so I pushed down as hard as I could until I felt bone crunching and I could see an oozing slime coming out of its wide gaping mouth.

I could hear the demon now, raving as it watched me killing its vile offspring of evil. I looked up. In my driveway, I could see the large hole in time and space from which spewed forth the demon. It stood just in front of the bright red glow of the embers of Hell from which it came. It uttered its loud bemoaning and screamed up incantations of which I could make no sense. It came rushing towards me with its long bloodied claws outstretched and ready to tear into me.

Blinded by fury, I mirrored the demon and rushed towards the dark creature of the night, my hammer held up high over my head. I brought it down hard upon the demon, smashing the hammer into its metal-like carapace. I pounded away at it, blow after blow, my fury giving me strength, until the demon was no longer uttering its evil conjurations. Suddenly, a large amount of warm green moss grew over the entity, covering most of it. The glowing red eyes peered dimly from the ground, until they faded out completely as the moss took them over. The earth took back what it spewed forth, and it now lay hidden under a thick coating of moss.

I could still hear the roaring fires of Hell, as the death of the demon had not closed the open gate. The dark shadows seemed to come alive with fresh new evil spirits lurking in every corner. The moths seemed to be approaching me again. I could not fight them all off, there were too many, and my body was tired from the struggle with the demon. I had to escape this now and get help!

The door to the pits of Hell blocked my path up the driveway, so I cut through the forest. I would find the road from there. Running as fast as I could, I felt the huge moths' wings flapping against the back of my neck, which made me run faster still. My legs were tired and my head swam in vertigo but I had to go on...to get help...before more demons came out...couldn't...let them...out.....

* * *

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