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CAUSALITY JANE

It's not the darkness in my room that frightens me. The unidentified sound floating up from somewhere deep in my house doesn't set my poor heart panicking. I'm not terrified as I try not to notice my barely open closet door. It's the potential that gets me. It's what could be there. The more you think about it, the more likely every possibility becomes as the shadows thicken and every stray noise or movement forces you deeper into your fear. The scariest part, to me at least, is that you'll never know what is or isn't there until you go have a look for yourself. Unless it comes looking for you, of course. The rumors about my good friend Liz's house took their dear sweet time reaching me. They were just whispers of things, ominous hints, and I brushed them aside fairly easily. Liz and I were close, so close that people even mistook us for sisters, and were there any dark secrets about her house, I would have known. Like me, she was a storyteller, and storytellers just don't hide that kind of thing.

That is, unless it's serious.

As luck would have it, I ended up spending an afternoon at Liz's house to work on some project for Biology class. I had only been over to her place once or twice before, which even at the time I considered strange for best friends like us, but to a kid like me who had spent a good part of her life in apartments and military housing, the place was a dream. At just under 50 years old with 2 stories, 4 bedrooms, a massive basement area, and an equally huge backyard, the house was phenomenally beautiful. Sure it was a little too dark, but the weather was appropriately stormy, and that'll make any place more than a little spooky. Liz's sixteenth birthday was a few weeks away, and we got onto the topic of what the party would be like. She and I had a reputation of being little party animals, and therefore we had to make this party as awesome as possible. I suggested using her massive basement, what with its pinball tables, TV, and stereo system.

"No parties in the house."

Ah yes, the parents. They could be pretty troublesome for us wild teens, but I told her not to worry. If we could conjure up a few promises of no drinking, no smooching, and the like, we would get our party. Heck, I was already figuring out what food to bring. "It's not my parents." And that was how I got her talking.

Tick-Tock

Four years ago, Liz and her family had moved from their smaller, older house across town to the current one. At first no one sensed anything out of the ordinary. There were no creepy feelings, no moving shadows down the hallways, no nothing. Strangely, it was Liz's baby brother, Sam, who picked up on whatever was in the house long before anyone else did.

Liz and her parents started noticing that as soon as they left Sam in his playroom he would start talking to someone. Sam had made a friend. His friend's name was Tick-Tock. Why Tick-Tock was never really clear, but apparently he was a little shy. It took a few weeks for Tick-Tock to feel comfortable "talking" to Sam in other rooms of the house with other people present. They chocked it up to Sam playing with his first imaginary friend.

One afternoon, Liz was studying in their living room while Sam played with some of his toys. He was chattering away to no one in particular, and Liz wasn't paying much attention to him. It

was when he suddenly went silent that she looked up. Sam was standing in front of her, transfixed by something on the wall behind her. As she watched, his eyes followed the thing as it moved up the wall and along the ceiling. Of course, when she looked there was nothing there, but he was so still and so amazed by whatever the hell it was that she felt shivers scurry down her spine.

"Sammy, what're you looking at?"

"Tick-Tock."

Indeed. From that point on Tick-Tock was no longer a friend. Sam couldn't be left alone for five minutes without him screaming bloody murder. He stopped sleeping through the night, and her parents had to move him back into their room for a bit. His toys would turn on and off by themselves or go missing and turn up in the weirdest places. Sam and their cat, Jabberwocky, continued to watch things move along the walls, sometimes in unison.

Ok, so that was creepy, I'd admit to that, but it could also be explained. Sam was a little kid, and who knew what made them do the things they do? Some of the toys were hand-me-downs and could have been screwing up like old toys tend to after awhile. Jabberwocky might have been watching dust or whatever it is that fascinates cats. "I guess so, but Jaber had other things to worry about."

Jabberwocky and the Bandersnatch

"Bandersnatch" was the name affectionately given to the critter that lurked around the little shed in their backyard. Tools would go missing, wood piles would be scattered every which way, friends and family alike would see a small shadow curled beneath the old elm tree or darting around a corner. Liz spoke of the Bandersnatch like a pesky family pet rather than a possibly undead being, and it never sent out threatening vibes to any of her family members, with the exception of poor Jabber. Jabberwocky hated the Bandersnatch and the Bandersnatch hated Jabberwocky. They loved to torture each other. Liz's father was forever rushing out to break up extremely vocal catfights only to find Jabber hissing and spitting into the darkness. Jabber's new pastime was chasing some unseen thing around the shed, darting this way and that before retreating to the safety of the porch. If Jabber ever chased anything with flesh and blood, it had some kind of camouflage, because no one ever laid eyes on it.

The only time the Bandersnatch ever really frightened Liz's family was after Jabber ended up on the receiving end of a minivan and had to spend some time at the vet for surgery. Right around sunset, a long howl/growl/moan could be heard coming from the shed. Now, I forgot to mention something: Liz's father always kept the shed locked, just in case, I don't know, tool-snatching aliens invaded. Nothing could have snuck into it because not ever Jabber could find any suitable holes. In addition to that little fact, there was also the issue of the howl going on for a good 3-4 minutes straight and sounding, if anything, like a large wildcat or possibly a crazy person. The pitch and volume varied, shifting erratically unlike the call of a frog or most animals in distress. This was just low and angry and feral. After it finished, Liz's father, armed with his hunting rifle, ventured out to unlock the shed and found it absolutely empty. To this day, they claim that the Bandersnatch was calling for Jabberwocky, angry that he wouldn't come out and play.

So these stories were nice and all, but I still failed to see what the big deal was. So her

brother freaked out, so something had made a nest in the shed, so what? I demanded a real reason as to why the party of the century could not be held in the perfect spot! I pressed her for more information on the house, and reluctantly, she continued. I would get my answer alright. This was only the beginning.

The rain had stopped by this time, and I knew that if I was going to get more out of Liz, I'd have to get her out of the house. I proposed a stroll around the block to stretch our legs and give me a chance to view the shed. She happily agreed. For the record, I was expecting some sort of ancient wooden monster, but the shed was actually very well kept, padlocked, and sealed tight. No sightings of the Bandersnatch for me, unfortunately. As we strolled along, Liz became more emotional. It was as if she had been keeping all these stories bottled up inside of her for the longest time and now they were bursting out. Up next were the upstairs bathroom and the mirror.

Cue Theme from Psycho

The master bedroom had its own master bath, but the other two bedrooms upstairs had a bathroom situated between them. The bathroom was terrible. Liz always felt like she was being watched in the shower, handprints had a strange habit of appearing on the mirror for no reason ("No, I will not show you."), and she and her mother had both been physically tripped while bathing her brother. Could they have slipped on the wet floor? No, apparently this was a hand shoving them face first into the tile. The lights also had a habit of turning off on their own during inopportune times, leaving whoever was unlucky enough to be in there in complete darkness. At one point Liz was home alone, lounging in her room. She distinctly heard the sounds of water running, complete with pipes clunking and such. After a bit, the water turned off, and someone or something started splashing and messing around in the bathtub. Liz slowly got up and stepped out into the hallway.

"Mom?"

If only. The only response was more splashing, still audible in the hall. The bathroom door was cracked open and the light was on. With a display of more guts than I could ever have mustered, Liz crept up, reached out, and pushed the door open with her finger tips. As the door swung up, Liz got ready to bolt at any moment. The bathtub was completely empty.

Mirror, Mirror

I don't mean to take any glory away from the famous TacoCriminal's blood mirror, but this bad boy could very well have duked it out for supremacy, were they ever given the chance. The monster hung in the hallway. It was old and had evidently been left by one of the former tenants (though no one would claim it). The damn thing actually had a few gauges in it (or if you used your imagination they could almost be scratch marks), but what would be powerful enough to beat that thing up like that is beyond the realm of my imagination. Still, mirrors have a habit of being spooky, right? No big deal.

"Have you ever actually looked at the glass?"

What? Well... No, now that I thought about it, I had never really looked into it. In fact, I found myself walking as far away from it as possible, my shoulder always brushing against the opposite wall. Apparently no one looked directly at the mirror, and it took

them years to figure this out. When the bright idea of confronting the mirror ever popped into their heads, they suffered a full blown panic attack, hyperventilation and everything. Everyone in her family had nightmares about shit coming out of that thing, stuff I won't even go into because it'll give me nightmares. In fact, I'm blasting loud, upbeat, obnoxious music as I type this.

The thing was evil. I apologize for my vagueness, but that's the only word I can think of to describe it. No one had the courage to take it down, and for all I know, when Judgment Day rolls around, it'll still be hanging there. Really, who knows what slinks around on the other side of mirrors? Sure, it's just a little reflecting light, but tell that to all the stories and legends and whatnot. No, I never looked directly into that mirror, and you better believe I'm damn glad I didn't. I firmly believe I would have stared straight into hell.

If memory has blurred or will blur anything about these events, it won't be this. The memory of the two of us standing there with the house looming before us like some kind of sleeping giant is burned into my mind. It was as if the house were challenging us, and I was about to make a witty comment when I realized that Liz wasn't paying any attention to me. She looked smaller, you know? Sort of sunk into herself. She was staring up at the highest window of her house, the one that reminded me of an angry, black eye.

"It's the worst part. I don't know why, but it is."

The Attic

I guess you'll have to take my word for it, but Liz's family was a rational bunch of people. They decided early on that they were going to stay in the house, both out of stubbornness and lack of money. They had filed the ghostly activity into two groups: "Creepy but Generally Harmless" (Tick-Tock and the Bandersnatch) and "There's Nothing We Can Do about It So Why Worry" (the upstairs bathroom and the mirror). As time passed, they got used to it, as most people do in such situations, and even started to joke about the oddities of the house.

Then the attic started up.

It began with pacing. Liz especially would hear something shuffling around at night, the ambling, wandering footsteps of something big. It usually traveled along a set path, but occasionally it would stop just above her head. On these occasions, she swore she could almost hear mumbling, though that could have been all in her head. After about a week of these sounds, Liz and her father gathered up the courage to go up and investigate. Their family only used the area closest to the trap door for storage, so the rest of the attic was bare except for the few remains that the other tenants had shoved near the little window. Incidentally, this was also the area where the shuffling took place. The closer they got to the window the colder it got (strange when everything else was baking during a pretty vicious heatwave), and they became more and more uneasy.

Next to the window they found piles of old junk, the most notable of which were a heavy, locked trunk and an old rocking chair. They found absolutely no evidence of vermin, and the thick layer of dust hadn't been disturbed in the least. After one more quick look at their surroundings, they quickly escaped down the stairs and securely shut the trap door behind them. For the sake of brevity, I'll sum up the attic like this: It

started with shuffling, then scratching on the trap door, then wailing, and finally someone on the other side of the door would call out people's names and whisper. Her mother was so upset about the whole thing that she called their church to ask for help. I'm not sure that their preacher really believed them as they weren't exactly regulars at the church, and all he could suggest was to put up crosses in the house and read a few verses from the Bible. The crosses slowed down the activity, but apparently they had a habit of disappearing after awhile. The spirits, whoever or whatever they were, were there to stay.

You know that voice in the back of your mind that says, "This is not a good idea"? Well, I don't have that voice. I live to put myself in situations like this, and when I was younger I was five times worse. I was going to live forever, right? Nothing could do me any serious harm!

Now, you know that one scene in horror movies, the one where you're in the audiences thinking, "Walk away! Just walk away right now!" Yeah, this was that scene. It took me awhile, but I finally got her to agree on a small sleepover to find proof that these ghosts existed. There was a story just begging to be told here, and I was going to grab it. I was stupid. Oh man was I stupid.

The Sleepover

So now we come to the part you've all be waiting for: the sleepover. It took place after Liz's party (movie and dinner party, totally not as cool) and included Liz, myself, Katie, and Jessica. We were like the generic name squad. Here's what our amateur ghost hunting team brought to the house:

- 1) Flashlights - You'll see what happens to those.
- 2) Tape recorder - Batteries died and we had no more AAA
- 3) Junk food - Consumed to give us strength against the spirits
- 4) Caffeine - Did more harm than good. Keep reading and you'll understand.
- 5) Ouija Board - Because the Parker Brothers are obviously the masters of the occult

Oh yeah, we were set. We chose Liz's room as our base camp, and spent a little time getting a tour of the place and playing in the basement. Liz's parents and brother were in the house as well, but they stayed out of our way, allowing us chill and do girly things. Obviously, they had no idea we were here solely for the ghosts. If they had, we never would have been allowed to have the sleepover. Now, you have to give me some credit. I said, "No frikin' way!" to the Ouija idea. I don't like those things, I never have, and even I could see that busting one out in that house was bad news. Still, my friends pointed out that we were there to find ghosts, and I was stupid if I didn't go all the way. Even Liz was calling me a chicken, so I finally gave up and joined in.

We sat on the basement floor between the entertainment area and the foosball table (see the map I drew up). We brought out the tape recorder and pushed play but promptly found out that the batteries were dead. We pointed fingers and blamed stupidity, but after reading incarna's thread, maybe it wasn't our fault. At any rate, we didn't have a spare set of AAAs, and asking Liz's parents would have been too risky. We decided to proceed without it.

There was plenty of giggling and horsing around. We had "Elvis" make a guest appearance, along with "Ur Mom." Nothing much came of it, but I can't help but feel

like our insults and mockery stirred something up. We soon abandoned our divining for video games and Mountain Dew. The real fireworks weren't going to happen until much later that night.

* * * * *

"CJ, are you awake?"

No, go away.

"C'mon, I have to pee, and I don't want to go alone!"

I shot Katie a pretty evil look, but the truth was that I hadn't been sleeping too well (bad dreams), and I really didn't care about escorting her. I grabbed my trusty flashlight, as we crawled out of our sleeping bags and made our way as silently as possible into the hall.

I don't really know how to say this, but the house had changed. The shadows seemed unnaturally thick, and things were almost too silent, as if all sound were being muffled by some invisible barrier, I my pitiful flashlight just didn't seem to want to penetrate the shadows. Katie was so spooked that I had to argue against standing in the bathroom with her. In the end, she left the door cracked, and I stood on the side farthest away from the mirror and the trap door. Things were going fine until my flashlight died. I started to shiver as the temperature dropped, and that's when I heard it.

Footsteps, but not coming from the hallway. These were shuffling steps moving from directly over my head to the trap door. The shadows at that end of the hallway seemed to deepen, and I decided to keep my eyes locked on the space directly in front of me. Next came the scratching. When animals scratch, the sound is usually lighter and fast. This was heavy and slow, obviously the sound of nails on wood. It repeated a few times before I told Katie to hurry the hell up and get out.

"I'm coming! Will you chill out already?"

Easy for her it say. She wasn't the one out here with the demon in the attic. It was at this point that time seemed to slow down, and I heard the sound that still haunts my dreams from time to time.

"Pssst..."

Oh no. No, no, no, that was not coming from the attic.

"Pssst! Hey! Come here!"

This was a sick joke. It had to be. Ghosts did not talk to people, especially not me!

"Look, just open the door. C'mon, please, please, please..."

Fat chance, buddy. I started singing a song in my head, hoping to make the voice go away.

"I know you're there!"

OPENTHISDOORRIGHTNOWBEFOREICOMEDOWNTHEREANDTEARYOURFUCKINGHEADOFF!"

I don't know what the voice was. It could have been a joke, I guess, but it was a really, really sick one. I don't know if any of you have ever had the pleasure of being near someone who is truly unstable, but there is a certain twinge their voices get when they are really off their rockers. This voice had that feral twinge, and something like that is really hard to fake well. Hell, I was fooled.

I heard the blessed sound of the toilet flushing, and Katie came walking out of the bathroom. She saw my face and asked me what was wrong, and I told her to listen, that something was in the attic. We waiting a few seconds, but before she could call me a liar, we heard a muffled bumping noise. In all my paranoia, I was sure it was the attic door being pounded in. "That's not the attic. That's the mirror!"

She was right. From where we were, we could just barely make out the mirror bumping against the wall. To say that we ran out of there is the understatement of the century. We shot down those stairs so fast, I swear we were flying. We only had a few moments to stand in the foyer and wonder what to do next before we heard the growling and moaning coming from down the hall. The playroom. The sounds were coming from the playroom. Determined to face whatever was tormenting us, I made my way to the end of the hall with Katie close behind me. We clutched each other's hands and opened the door, preparing to come face to face with the yowling demons infesting our friend's home.

It was Jabberwocky, pacing in front of the door. I'm completely against the harming of animals, but I swear I wanted to kill that stupid cat. I told Katie that he probably wanted to be let out as I nearly dragged her into the room. I think I was a little too optimistic. Jabber's fur was standing on end, and his ears were flat against his head. He was pretty worked up, and I was deciding whether or not I should get any closer to him when the door shut behind us. I asked Katie why she shut it, and, of course, she hadn't. Jabber made himself as small as possible as he crouched against the door, his pupils nearly engulfing the rest of his eyes. Everything went completely still, and I think I actually held my breath.

Then things went batshit.

Every single toy in that playroom turned on by itself. Teddy Whatshisface, Tickle Me Elmo, the robot dude who does math, all of them were yammering away. The little TV used to play kiddie videos turned on full blast and started to (hell, I really don't know how to say it exactly) manual fast forward through whatever tape was in it (I think 101 Dalmatians). Katie and I did what any red-blooded American girl would do in a situation like this: We screamed bloody murder and sprang for the door. I swear I almost had a heart attack when it refused to open, but thankfully Katie had the sense to turn the lock and set us free. We sort of collapsed in the back yard and started bawling for no reason. We just sat their clutching each other as the dew soaked our PJs, trembling and sobbing. I like to imagine that even back then I was not that big a baby. It's always taken a lot to make me shed a tear, and even something like that was not going to send me into hysterics. I felt like I was suddenly overcome with anger and terror and immense sorrow.

Let me put it this way: The next time I would cry like that in front of my friend would be a few years later in Katie's hospital room after she lost the fight to viral meningitis. (Right after she was accepted in LSU on an athletic scholarship too. Life's a bitch, know

what I mean?) Still, even in our pitiful state, we faired much better than the other members of our ghost hunting team.

Now, at that time I thought that our screams had just been incredibly loud. She was a swimmer and I had been taking voice lessons for about two years, so we had some lungs on us. This, however, was not the case. Our screams sounded loud to me because at that point Liz, Jess, and Sam all woke up screaming in unison. Jess was so upset that she bolted for the bathroom and vomited, and I'm not talking about a little dry-heaving either. Apparently this was the kind of soul-purging puking that makes you wonder when you last had that Chinese food. Also (and I can attest to this) she was covered in scratches.

Jabber was downstairs with us. The family had no other pets. If she inflicted those wounds on herself, what would make her do such a thing? Jess never told us. The most Liz's parents and later her own family could get out of her was something about a nightmare and not feeling very well. It was Liz, during on of our last conversations together, who finally told me. I can't explain it, but this part is always hard for me to tell, and what with that whole rule against drunk posting, the going is going to be rough from here on out. You'll have to forgive me if the writing goes to shit.

Liz had been through nightmares about the mirror before, but nothing like this. In her dream, she saw the mirror. She said it began to jump, much like it had before were made a run for it. Apparently a man had "spider-walked" out of the mirror. She said his arms and legs were bent at all the wrong angles, and he moved fast and jerky like in the movies when they mess with the film speed. He came into her room, got onto her bed, pinned her down, and started laughing like a maniac. As he laughed, he transformed into something that she refused to describe, but I suspect was pretty damn disturbing. Whatever it was, it had a mouth full of sharp teeth, and she woke up just before it could use them.

She was shaking as she told me this. She actually said, "I don't know what it did to Jess." As she wiped the tears from her eyes (and if I'm making this up, someone better refund me about a month's worth of sleepless nights) I thought I saw bruises on her wrists. It was at the point I decided, if you'll pardon my French, to never go back to that fucking house ever again.

So that's the story. What happened to us afterward? Well, rumors say that Jess became an insomniac and started taking medication after her sleep deprivation pushed her to a nervous breakdown. I can neither confirm nor deny this as she never looked any of us in the face again. Katie and I stayed friends long after this happened, but I told you about her earlier. Like I said, Liz and I had a falling out after this, I think because she and her parents blamed me for what happened that night, with good reason, I guess. I honestly hope they moved out of that house because whatever was in there was not going to stop. As for me, I moved (for the last time) at the end of the summer.

After all this time, you'd think curiosity might get the better of me. You'd think while visiting friends and relatives in that area, I might go look up that house, drive by a few times, maybe even ring the doorbell and ask if the current family happens to possess a certain antique mirror. However, there are some things even the wildest internet cowgirl won't do. Sometimes, it's just better to let things rest in peace.

SEANIQUA – HAUNTED HAY RACK

This is true. I have changed the names.

I grew up in Nebraska, in a rural community an hour south of Omaha. My friends and I really enjoyed Halloween. Around fall it was usually Jon, Justin, Brandon and I that would hang out. It was weird because, outside of Halloween time, we weren't really close friends. We all just had a soft spot for the fall season and Halloween especially, so we would find time to cause mischief that our parents didn't know about.

In elementary school, we would dress up and trick or treat just like any other kids. We'd sit around and tell ghost stories, watch Freddy Kruger movies we weren't supposed to, and generally be scared shitless.

In middle school we moved on to the classic small town practice of scaring kids who were trick or treating. It was generally all innocent stuff. Hiding behind bushes, following kids silently then disappearing, the usual. This was more or less a way to hide the fact that we still wanted to get candy from houses, because we did that, too.

In high school it got a little out of hand. Our freshman year was to be the last Halloween of hijinks, and we didn't have anything out of the ordinary planned. It was just supposed to be one last chance for the four of us to hang out and get candy.

Unfortunately that's not all that happened. Justin's parents got a divorce that previous year. Again, we weren't really close so we didn't talk to him about it. The rest of us knew he was having anger problems at school. He had been in fights for sure I remember, and he may have been suspended at some point. My parents actually didn't want me to go out that night because of this kid's reputation.

Not heeding my parents advice, the four of us set out that Halloween. It was 1999, Halloween was on a Sunday. Around midnight, we noticed Justin had been walking behind us for quite a way and he had run off somewhere. We couldn't see him anywhere around us.

Not wanting to call any attention to ourselves so late on a school night, we didn't look for him. We figured he was in a mood or something and had ran off home or to smoke cigarettes and drink with his older brother, who is another story.

Then we heard a voice we immediately recognized as Justin's coming from behind some bushes in an empty lot where we played football as kids. The bushes were rustling and we couldn't tell what was going on. He was mumbling something along the lines of, "Stop. Fucking stop. Keep your mouth shut."

We quietly argued amongst ourselves over what he was doing, then Justin must have heard us because he stopped speaking, and the rustling stopped. He ran away in the opposite direction from us. We went over to the bush and saw a kid lying on the ground wearing a Homer Simpson mask. He wasn't moving. We asked him if he was okay and he didn't respond at all, he didn't make a sound. We were all fucking terrified.

Brandon took the kid's mask off, it was Brad Smith, a 6th grader in our town. His face was covered with blood, his eyes were bloodshot and blackened. He had bruises all over the place. He was barely breathing because Justin, the stupid shit, had been strangling this kid to death.

To this day I haven't seen someone so fucked up by another person. He needed to go to the hospital.

None of us had cell phones. Brandon and I stayed and Jon ran home, because he lived the closest. Not too long after Jon left, an ambulance and two town cruisers came to where we were. The paramedics rushed Brad off to the hospital and the cops asked us what happened. We told them. One of the cops gave me a ride home, the other gave Brandon a ride home.

There was already a cop on the way to Justin's mom's house. Justin had actually just run back there and was sitting in the living room watching TV when he was arrested that night.

Brad died in the hospital, he was 12 years old. Murder. Justin was tried as an adult and put away for life, although it was likely he'd be eventually let out on parole since he was so young.

Edit: I want to stress that all three of us really tried to get this behind us. We didn't talk about it, the town stayed mum about it but I knew they were talking about it behind our backs. It was really hard on our families. My parents still refuse to talk about this.

The next year, I got a job at a local haunted hay rack ride. Coincidentally, Jon and Brandon chose to get jobs at the same place. We were admittedly pretty freaked out by this coincidence, but passed it off as just that. Since we knew each other we volunteered to work the same area of the ride, which was supposed to be a team of three guys who would hide and surprise the hay rack riders.

The job was an easy \$20 a night. We would wait around in a little wooded area on a farmer's land, the hay rack would come by, and we'd scare them. We brought cigarettes and beers to enjoy during the down time, it was pretty simple work and enjoyable enough.

But on Halloween night, we had a fourth member. I swear to you, this is the damned truth. The first hay rack ride went through at about 6:30 PM, as the sun was setting. We all sat on a few logs and cracked open a beer to share between the three of us. We shot the shit and tried not to talk about Justin.

We all noticed him at the same time. A figure standing 50 yards away at the edge of the wooded area, not looking at us. He was looking past us. None of us said a word, he just stood there not acknowledging us. The next hay rack started to pass by and we nearly missed it, we all got up from our logs and did a real half assed job trying to scare the kids on the ride.

After the rack passed, the figure was gone. We didn't see him again for a couple hours. The last hay rack was coming through, we did our job, and got ready to get the fuck out of there because we were all feeling pretty uneasy. We started making our way back to the entrance of the hay rack ride.

On our way back, we realized someone was walking behind us. We turned around. There he was again, the same figure as before. We were frozen.

He spoke to us. "Where's Justin?"

We didn't reply.

"Where's Justin?"

I said, "Justin's fucking in jail..."

He stood there and stared at us, turned around, and walked away in the opposite direction. We went to the entrance, all terrified shitless but almost in disbelief, we were thinking we got pranked by someone.

It was common knowledge in that town that we were the three that found Brad Smith the previous year. Some chickenshit kid knew that the three of us were working there and decided to scare us. We were absolutely certain of it.

We asked the farmer who ran the hay rack ride if he saw a fourth person with us that evening. He replied, "Sure, the one with the cartoon mask."

Red Baron posted:

I appreciate the courage it must have taken to write up all that, but what a fucking tease to get through all that and then have you say, "Nvm, no ending, too hard."

Sorry to the few people who replied to my story. I've been avoiding this thread since I wrote the first part of my story a few days ago. I'm realizing now that it probably wasn't cool to edit out the ending, so I want to explain myself and what happened.

The truth is that I experienced the deaths of two children when I was young. Here is my personal experience, which is the only way I can think of to convey the weight of what went on. I hope that will do Justin and Brad some justice. I feel like the original ending I had - just a line or two - didn't do that. While it had a severe impact on the whole town including myself, I'm more concerned with showing respect for the two kids who lost their lives.

Hopefully this is at least interesting to read.

The farmer thought there was a fourth person with us, which really bothered us. After he told us that, we stuck around, hoping to see the kid come up to the barn area, but he never did. We told the guy that the kid talked to us and was trying to scare us, so he dismissed it completely. He told us to forget about it and go home, so we did, hoping it was just some asshole who ran off after scaring us.

The next day, a rumor started circulating about Justin in prison. People were saying he had hanged himself during the night. Justin's parents put a funeral announcement in the local newspaper that week, confirming the stories.

I think Jon started telling people about our experience at the hayrack ride, because a couple people asked me about it. I lied and told people it was all made up, but really I just wanted people to stop talking about it.

For about a week I had a terrible recurring dream with Brad and Justin in them. After it happened twice, I decided to keep a dream journal to try to get over it. I threw away the journal a long time ago, but I saved the text, here it is copy/pasted:

I'm back in the field. No hay rack comes through. I am sitting on a stump. Brad is here. He has his back to me. He's standing next to Justin. Justin is dead, hanged from a tree. I am scared. I run back to the barn area. I'm back where we saw him before. I see the same scene with Brad staring at Justin, dead. I look away while I run. Everywhere I look I see Brad and Justin motionless. I go into the barn to talk to the farmer. There is no farmer. Justin is hanging from a rafter and Brad is standing next to him. I turn to run out of the barn, and Brad is standing in front of me in the same mask I last saw him wearing. I'm frozen. I start sinking into the ground. Brad is sinking with me. Chunks of the mask start falling off, like flesh off the bone. We sink further. Brad's face slowly starts to emerge from under the deteriorating halloween mask. His eyes and mouth are open. We keep sinking; the rest of the mask continues to fall off. I can smell it. We're up to our chins in mud and chunks of flesh. I'm up to my nose now. I see Justin being crucified. I wake up.

I had that dream every night for 5 or 6 days.

I went to Justin's funeral. Jon and Brandon didn't show up. The dreams stopped after that. I've gotten better about talking about it since then, but it's not a happy thing to think about. I've never had the dream again, thank goodness. I don't know if I believe in ghosts, but this experience continues to chill me when I think about it.

UNKNOWN POSTER - MUPPETS

Long ago when I was about four or five, I stayed over at my grandparents' house for the night. My Mom stayed over with me, because Dad was out of town on business.

Granny and Granddad quite enjoyed their television programs, and had a set in each of the two bedrooms in the house, as well as in the living room. I was still stupid enough to believe TV's flickering, mind-sucking images were pretty neat, so I was in heaven.

Night came on softly, as it only can when you feel safety and warmth around you. With one of Granny's home-cooked meals in my stomach, I had begun to feel the need for slumber. So, we all piled in the monstrous king-sized bed in Granny and Granddad's master bedroom, and soon we were all snoring blissfully.

I woke up in the night and sat upright, looking around. Something had disturbed my slumber. Granddad was still snoring rhythmically, and Granny looked like she hadn't budged an inch, so I sat back and prepared to visit the realm of dream once more.

Then the television turned itself on.

Now, I'm only 22 years old, but this was in the days when remote controls were the providence of the wealthy and debased. Granny and Granddad did not fit into any of those two categories.

To see a television turn itself on was an interesting thing. I sat up again to see what would come on.

At that time, the TV in my grandparents' bedroom was a black and white. I watched the white dot that had formed in the middle expand to full screen, but only the static of a

dead channel appeared.

Then, images began to appear.

I couldn't really describe them. They were sort of shadowy things at first, but they seemed to be — for lack of a better term — “scoping me out.” Slowly, an actual image began to appear.

Muppets! The Muppets were on! I was exalted, elated. I wanted to wake my grandparents up, but I then started to feel a bit uncomfortable about what was happening on the television.

Muppets did not usually have fangs as I recall. At least, not ones that looked so ... real and out of place in an otherwise standard Muppet-style mouth.

I realize this is sounding goofy. You were warned.

Well, uncertain about what to do, I decided to keep a close watch on the television.

The “Muppets” looked at me. It was common of course on Sesame Street and the Muppet Show for them to acknowledge the audience, so I wasn't alarmed so much by that.

I describe these things as Muppets because that's primarily what they looked like. Other than the rows and rows of unusual teeth, one looked vaguely Groveresque and the other sort of reminded me of Harry the Monster (don't know if he's even ON Sesame Street anymore).

The Groveresque Muppet leaned over and pointed at me, while whispering something to his companion. They looked at me in unison, whispering all the while in a strange, unusually guttural tongue. It sounded completely random, although it did somehow seem to follow the meter and pattern of a language.

I noticed when the Groveresque Muppet pointed, he had very long, distinct talons on his furry hands. This, too, was quite disturbing.

The Muppets began to dance, sing and cavort about in that strange language of theirs. It was sort of amusing, I recall. I began to feel a bit more at ease.

The Muppets motioned for me to come forward.

I shook my head.

The Muppets tried again.

I shook my head. I was beginning to feel frightened. If there ever was a way Muppets could look pissed, these guys were doing it. With all those rows of fangs, it wasn't pretty.

I should mention that all of this singing, dancing, cavorting horror that was going on seemed to in no way disturb my grandparents. This disturbed me as well, because these guys were LOUD.

I got out of bed and crept into the living room, being careful to avoid approaching the screen. The Muppet-things wore visages of absolute anger now, motioning violently for me to approach the screen. My attempts rouse my grandmother and grandfather were in vain; they would not stir.

I ran into the living room, crying. I collapsed in my Granddad's chair, buried my face into the fabric, and began to weep, certain doom had come for me.

I looked over at the television in the corner of the living room. It had already begun to turn itself on, the shadow-forms that had dissolved into the Henson-styled horrors already beginning to flicker across its surface.

I screamed, rooted to the spot. But as the scream left my lungs and two grinning, fanged faces burst into being on the television screen, faintly and then with increasing tempo I heard footsteps.

The things in the television looked worried, swirled into their shadow-forms and were gone.

The television winked out just as my Mother ran into the room.

After consoling me, we went to check on Granny and Granddad. They were both awake, and had heard me scream.

We all sat up for a while talking, and eventually the warmth and love returned to fill the chill in my soul. I went to bed and nothing more happened that night. Or any other night I stayed with my grandparents.

A waking dream? Probably so. But one that still fills me with terror.

I was awake of course, Mom will still assert, when I was in the chair. So, I did move somehow from the bed to the chair. Still, it gives one pause. What better way to snare a young boy than to show him something he loves, then pull him in unawares?

Whatever those two things were, I'm sure the Muppet-forms were not their natural shape. I'm sure the fangs and talons were part of it, though. If they're still out there, I hope they haven't had much time to practice those forms. If they could get them just right ...

I still wonder what would have happened — dream or not — if I had put my then-small hands up to the screen there in my grandparents' bedroom. Perhaps nothing.

And then again, perhaps it's better not to know.

ONIC

Camp Hell

Camp Hell is a boyscout camp in Iowa (Not the Real Name) It is located in a forest area near Des Moines. Being a good christian child, I was initiated into the cub scouts at a young age, and then eventually the boy scouts. I eventually made Eagle, but that has nothing to do with this particular story.

Our troop had decided that our summer trip that year would be to head to Camp Hell. There

we could do our lifeguard training, C.O.P.E. which is basically rock climbing, and other random fun things. I think I was 15 or 16 at the time.

We get all packed up and start the long drive down there. 6 hours later, and we reach our destination. We get all our gear out of the vehicles and start to walk down to our designated site. The camp is god damn enormous though. The walk from the parking lot to our site took 45 minutes. Talk about being hard on the arms and legs. We finally get there though, and get to see what our lodgings will be. Our camp site was about the 50 yards around. The tents we would be sleeping in were those world war 2, olive green pitch tents. Throw a couple of pallets in the bottom of them, and you're out of the mud for the most part.

I opened up my tent and was greeted with an ungodly amount of spiders. The majority were daddy long legs, and wolf spiders. Back then I still had my sense of smell, and let me tell you. That tent smelled like fucking spiders. It took me a good half hour to brush all of them out of it, and get my cot set up. I opened the back of the tent, and look down. It's on the edge of a ravine. There was a good 30 foot sharp drop off right there. Down in the bottom was a small stream and some rocky outcroppings.

I walked out of the tent and saw everyone gathered around the tent next to mine. I walk over to see what the fuss is about, and take a look inside. Sitting on the ceiling of this tent is the biggest wolf spider I have ever seen. The damn thing looked like a large tarantula. It was about as big as your hand spread out, and boy was it hairy. Someone jabbed it with a stick, and the thing plopped down with a thud onto the pallet. It then ran towards the back, and leaped out into the ravine. We actually watched it glide down into the woods.

So already we have an infestation of the oogly booglies in the camp. What I didn't mention was the noise. God damn cicadas were going off like crazy. It was one of their big years. There was an estimated 25,000 per acre I think they said. It was so bad, that when I later walked over to a small cabin, I saw that the entire side of it was cicada shells. You couldn't see a piece of wood on that thing because of all of them. The huge snails were cool though, they were all over the damp woods.

Anyway, after we got all set up, we headed to the main hall for the welcoming to the week of hell. There was some stupid shit speeches and other boring stuff that kids don't want to hear. We then dined on the finest baked beans and hot dogs.

Later that night we all gathered around this huge fire, in a semi-circle. There was about 1000 of us, so it was a big fire. Behind it was this huge totem pole with a platform at the top. I'd say about 50 feet up. Standing on the platform was some fruit cake in body paint screaming. Then shirtless weirdo's ran around us screaming with torches. I swear, the boy scouts organization is one of the weirdest in the world. After all the batshit insane stuff had died down, we were treated to stories of the camps history.

The main guy told us of all the people who had died at this camp, and of the weird creatures that lurked in the woods and lakes. The way he told the stories though was so funny, due to his crackly, whinny voice.

I think the stories ended at around midnight, and we were sent back to get some sleep. So, we get back to our campsite, and I'm pretty bushed, so I decide to head to bed. I crack open that tent, and flip a flashlight on, only to see that all the god damn spiders were back! Let me tell you, a week in that place will cure you of all your arachnophobia.

I didn't even bother with the spiders, I just got undressed, hopped in my sleeping bag, and conked out.

5 a.m. rolls around and I hear the blaring sound of reveille playing a few feet from my tent. Since when did I join the army!?! I got dressed and headed out for my first day of fun and festivities. The first thing on my agenda was C.O.P.E. So, I headed down to the designated area, which was a 2 mile walk through the woods. By the time I get there I'm soaked from all the dew. About 15 of us had signed up for cope this year. The first thing we do is go to climb the 100 foot tower, then repel down the back side. No big deal really, we had all done it before. So, we get our swiss seats tied up, and start going up in one by one...eh, it's nothing really to talk about. Nothing interesting happened on it my first day. So, I'll skip ahead.

My first day was pretty normal for the most part. Cope, followed by canoe safety, then some other stuff that I can't remember. That night was once again filled with spiders and 100 degrees plus humidity.

We had to get up the next day at the same time. This day though I had to go to the mess hall and prepare the table for breakfast. Queue me trudging through the woods at 5 in the morning. I noticed that the woods were dead quite for the most part, besides the common sound of rabbits or squirrels. The cicadas hadn't come out yet, so it was less annoying. It was still dark out, so I had a flashlight with me to guide my way through the trees.

I don't know what made me look up, but when I shined my light up at the tops of the trees I saw something. A large black image was leaping through the tree tops at a fast pace. It went directly over me, then off in the direction I had just came from. My light didn't carry on it for too long, but long enough for me to confirm that I had seen something strange. It didn't make a sound, which was pretty weird. I had already seen some strange stuff in my life at this point, so I wasn't really scared at all. I just kept moving onward towards the mess hall.

It took me about 30 minutes to get there, and once again I was soaked up to my knees in dew. Setting up the table only took about 15 minutes, and by 6 everyone had shown up and started eating.

After breakfast they sang songs about using the pancakes as toilet paper, and coffee for cuts. Really, boy scouts=weird.

After breakfast it was off to another uneventful day of cope. Then onward to canoe safety. Today during my canoe class, we had to go out into the middle of the murky lake, and sink my canoe. Then attempt to un-sink it. The only thing that worried me about that lake was the unusually high amount of large snapping turtles. Those things were mean too. I didn't want one of those taking a finger off or a chunk of flesh.

Our instructor demonstrated how to do it properly. He would sink his, then 2 other canoes would pull up and you would work your canoe to the surface, then kind of stack it on the other two so it could drain out properly. It seemed pretty pointless to me. Since if you're by yourself, you're not going to get it out from under water.

I waited until my turn, then I rowed out into the middle of the lake. I started rocking my canoe until it flipped and started to go under. The damn thing only sank about 5 feet down, so I was able to stand on it under water. The instructor sent out 2 guys with canoes as soon as mine was sunken. I had a good 10 minute wait though.

So, I stood there on my sunken canoe waiting for those slow ass people to work their

way out. I felt the canoe start moving from under my feet, as if a current was pulling on it. I kick my heel over the edge of a support beam in it to hold on. That stopped the canoe dead in it's tracks. Suddenly I felt something wrap around my ankle and pull me down. It pulled hard enough to submerge me completely, even with my life jacket on. I open my eyes up under the water and see these pale rotting hands fly at my face and grab my ears. A screaming face is then thrust into mine. I could hear the screaming perfectly, even though I was underwater. I start frantically trying to get away. I'm kicking and waving my arms as hard as I can. It seemed like an eternity, but the thing let go of me, and I was able to make it to the surface.

My life jacket bobs me up above the water line, where I proceed to cough and sputter. The guys in canoes show up just as I bob up to the surface, so I start trying to climb into one of their canoes as fast as I can. They won't let me though. "You have to get yours out before you can come back." God dammit! I told them something underwater had grabbed me, but they told me to stop making shit up and get my canoe out. So, I did just that while all the time wondering if something was going to grab me and drag me to my death.

I get my canoe out, and floating again, then speed into shore. When I get there, the instructor asked me why I was underwater for so long. I told him of what had just happened, and he said "Oh yah, that happens." That happens!? What the hell kind of place is this.

I went down to the showers to get cleaned up, but am greeted with a fat elderly man showering naked...so I waited. This place was giving me a serious case of the heeby jeebies. I eventually got showered up, and walked back to my campsite, where I planned on taking a nap. I layed down for a good hour, but couldn't get to sleep on account of all those damn cicadas going crazy. So, I decided to hang out with my buddies for a bit. They wanted to go explore the woods, so of course I went with. We all found some nice branches, and made them into walking sticks, and we were off. We found a path down the ravine behind our campsite and took it. We then followed the stream for a while. The stream turned into a small river with some fast current going down it.

I was checking out the little fish that will swimming around in the nice clear water, while my friends walked off further down the path. I was waiting for a friend to catch up anyway. I glanced over at a huge pile of branches that were hung up on a bend in the river. I see something weird sticking out of them. I walk over that way, and finally see what it is. A nice mangled torso slung up in the branches. Intestines were floating out of the eviscerated stomach. And it wasn't fresh at all. The whole thing was a pale white, and looked like it had been there for a while. I start yelling for them to come look at it. Nobody was coming yet though.

"Don't" That 's what I hear. I look at the torso again, and hear "Don't" A head then slowly cranes it's way out of the rushing waters, and stares at me. There is no lower jaw on the head, and the eyes are popped out of it. The lips are huge and purple. It says "Don't" Once again. I take off like a bat out of hell screaming my head off. I ran and ran, until I saw the friend that I was waiting for. He's yelling "what's the matter!" at me while I'm running up to him. I catch my breath and tell him that I had saw the torso caught up in the branches.

We bust ass back to the spot, and take a look at the branches. There's death there alright, but it wasn't what I had saw. It was a freshly killed deer this time. Still had all it's hair and color. He questions me as to why it was such a big deal. I explained to him the whole time, but he would just laugh and tell me to stop trying to scare him. He went on

to catch up with the other guys. I just headed back to the camp at a very fast pace. Behind me I could hear the word "Don't" echoing through the ravine. What does it mean? I couldn't figure it out.

No one else at the camp would believe me. They said it was either making up stories, or my imagination. Fuck, imagination. Last time I checked, people don't imagine ripped up torso's and talking severed heads.

I already wanted to go home. This place was too fucked up for me, and apparently other people had shit happen to them here also. I still had 4 more days to look forward to though.

That night there was a huge electrical storm. I'm talking big. There was so much lightning that it was brighter than daylight out. I was lucky enough to be in the tent 5 feet from the tall metal flagpole. Lucky me. The wind was howling at about 50 miles per hour. Everybody except a few of us had moved into the wooden shack that stored our fire wood. I was one of the lucky people that got to stay in the tents. The wind was so strong that it was untying the double knots that I had made to keep the tent flaps closed. It wasn't raining at all though thankfully. More and more spiders had decided to get out of the storm. By now my sleeping bag was covered in smooshed spiders from my rolling around at night.

I tried to get to sleep but the thunder was so constant and loud that it was just impossible at first. Then the talking started. "Don't!" That thing was yelling at me from the river. Over and over it would yell "Don't" at me. I flung the sleeping bag over my head to stop the noise of the thunder, wind, and talking. It was pointless though, everything got through. I must have eventually fell asleep, because before I knew it, it was daytime again.

Today, was the day I had been at first looking forward to, but now I dreaded it. It was the oh so fantastic "Survival Trial". We are given a tarp, a sleeping bag, a small shovel, a bucket, a book of matches, and our knife. Then we are supposed to go deep into the woods and make a campsite for the night. This was not a good thing for me, after all that I had went through.

First thing to do was try go find a good spot to set up. I headed over to the huge bridge that went over the ravine, and tried to set up under it. But saw someone else there, and they were getting peed on by people on the bridge. So, that was a no-go.

I tried a couple of other places. I was looking for a good, elevated flat spot, that was away from that river or stream or whatever it was. I found a good area that was about a mile into the woods. I to this day don't know how they got away with this stuff back then. Sending kids into the woods unattended, it's so unsafe. But oh well, what can you do. I'm sure they don't allow it anymore these days.

The spot I found was on the top of a little hill, with a nice big tree. So, if there was rain, it would all go down, and not pool up around me. I dug a small ditch which resembled a shallow grave. I covered the dirt in it with pine needled and dry leaves. I set my sleeping bag in it. I used the tarp as a makeshift tent.

I was proud of my campsite when I was done. It looked pretty damn good. I then went off and gathered a decent amount of firewood. I dug a tiny pit, and lined it with rocks. That was where I would have my fire. I found a nice flat rock that I could use for cooking and set it next to the fire. Then, I went down to the lake and pulled up the lines I had set

earlier. The lines had 6 baited hooks on them, and I had thrown them into the water along the shore. Most of the hooks were full with mediocre sized rock bass, but I kept them. Part of the survival course was catching and eating your own food.

Night rolled around and I had eaten my fish that were cooked on the flat rock in the fire. I sat there alone, smoking about a half a pack of ciggs that I couldn't touch until I was alone. At least that was one good thing about this survival crap. It was a calm night. The storm the night before had blown all the bad stuff away apparently. There was only the sound of crickets and the crackling fire. I sat there, enjoying my fire and nicotine for quite a while. Then I noticed that all the crickets had stopped chirping. Well, isn't that the best sound ever. When they do that, it means something is about to die. I had this happen later on in life, but that's part of another story.

I looked around into the dark woods, but my small fire didn't light up much. I heard the crunching of dead leaves and sticks off in the direction behind me. I figured someone must be out checking on us survivalists. I called out "hello?" and waited for an answer, but got none. The crunching kept going on off into the distance, away from me, and soon faded into nothing. I thought it was someone just being a prick.

I rolled my bag out into my shallow grave...man that sounds bad doesn't it. I hopped into the bag, and snuggled in. It was actually quite comfortable. I was pretty surprised with how well things were turning out. It didn't take me long to fall asleep.

I woke up some time later. My eyes opened and I stared into the face of something. I was still very groggy so I just looked until my eyes adjusted. It was some sort of beast. It was just inches from me. The thing had stuck it's head under my tarp and was eyeballing me...kinda. It had no eyes. Imagine a deformed wolf, with no eyes, or eye sockets. It was huge, and white. It inched closer to my face till it was almost touching. I'm trying my hardest not to move or scream my head off. It starts to smell me. It's hot stagnant nose breath wafts over my face. The smell is terrible. It smelled like the essence of death. It sniffed for a few seconds then started to growl slightly. The growling got louder, and louder, until it whipped it's massive head around and looked over it's shoulder. I move my eyes over and see that it's looking at something.

What it's looking at is...fuck I don't know. It was like a tall skinny human being that was hunched over. By tall I mean about 9 feet tall. It was naked, and had no mouth or arms. It was looking right at me. The growling turned into snarling. I could see the wolf things mouth open. Inside were several sets of teeth, like a shark would have. The wolf type thing turn around roared at this humanoid thing off in the distance. The tall thing started backing up slowly, while the wolf thing was walking at it slowly. I'm laying here with the biggest amount of fear and what the fuck rolling through my mind.

In an instant the wolf thing leaps into the air and slams into the tall thing. The tall thing starts writhing around on the ground. I could hear muffled screams coming from it's non-existent mouth. The wolf was snapping and biting at it. I could hear flesh being ripped from bones, followed by the crunching of bones. I fucking black out at this point. I couldn't take that much shit in one sitting.

I wake up and look at my wrist watch. It is 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Fuck! I had been sleeping for a very long time. I get up and remember what I had seen. Was it all a dream? Apparently not. There is black tar like stuff splattered all around my camp. I could only assume it was blood from those things. There was huge patches of dirt kicked

up, and a tree was snapped in half not more than 10 feet from where I was sleeping. It was a tree about the size of a leg.

I decided the shit must have actually happened, so I got my shit packed up and ran back to the main camp.

When I got back I was greeted with a lot of "where the hell were you?". I explained to them that I had overslept. I found some of the other guys that had done the survival course, and had a word with them. I asked them if they had anything strange happen to them during their stay in the woods. Only one person said that he had seen something lurking around in the dark. He said it was shaped like a dog, only a lot bigger. The other people seemed uneasy, so I don't know if they were telling the truth about noticing nothing, or if they were hiding something.

At 5 p.m. I headed over to my cope class for the biggest fun we were going to have. That would be the 2nd longest zip line in the world. Or it was at the time, I'm sure there are some bigger ones by now.

To get to the zip line, you have to climb up this wire ladder onto the top of a light pole. Then grab onto one wire, and walk across another wire to the other side, which is another light pole. It's about a 20 yard wire walk. At that point you get yourself hooked up and take off. I don't even remember how long it is, but it's a long damn way to the other end. You fly over the ravine and a ton of forest. At the other end are your fellow boy scouts ready to stop you. There's a bunch of bed mattresses nailed to trees too. Well, that's comforting.

I had to wait an hour before it was my turn because someone chickened out, and had to be forcibly removed from the pole. It took me 15 minutes to walk to the line start from the end, so that kinda shows how long a distance it is.

I get up the ladder, and make my way across the wire. I get hooked up to the line, and kick off the platform. The zip line takes off like a bolt of lightning. I'm soaring over the land, and it is just kick ass. I look down as I pass over the ravine and see a mass of thousands of bodies writhing around. They are reaching up at me and screaming. I throw up all over myself.

I get to the other end, and am shaking terribly bad as they catch my line and help me off. They pass it off as me being scared, and the rush getting to me. It wasn't though. I had enough of this place, it was too much now. I waited around at the end for the instructors girlfriend to come down the line. We got radioed that she had started, but she never showed up. What the hell happened to her?

Turns out that she got above the ravine, and her hair flew up into the pulley and got caught. It half way scalped her. That was a very bad thing. She hadn't tied her hair back and put it under her helmet like she was told to. A rescue guy had to climb out to the middle where she was stranded, and cut her hair so she could get moving to the end. She was passed out from what I would assume to be pain and blood loss. It was all bad, and I'll never forget it. She lived fortunately.

Later that day, the other instructor fell off the tower, and his line didn't catch. He shattered both his legs. He was about 40 feet off the ground at the time, trying to show off. Shit was going sour awful fast.

These 2 things happening in one day got cope canceled for the rest of the trip.

I skipped the rest of my courses that day, and just hung around the mess hall. I wanted to be near some kind of civilization, and that was the closest I could get at the time. Night rolled around, and I was back in the tent with my buddies, the spiders. I didn't mind them by now. They didn't bite me or anything so it was no big deal. There was something wrong with me the whole trip though, I couldn't take a dump no matter how hard I tried. It wasn't constipation, I just didn't have to go. It was weird. I'm just letting you guys know I was having trouble pooping.

I lay there in bed, wondering what was going to fuck with me tonight. I soon dozed off and was met with nightmares of epic proportions. I don't remember what they were about, but I know I had them. I woke up from them in a cold sweat. And it was freezing cold in that tent. It was about 90 degrees when I fell asleep, now I could see my breath. I was shivering in my sleeping bag, wondering how it had got so damn cold. I go to flip on my electric lantern, but it wont turn on. Batteries must be dead.

I hear the tent flap behind me head start to open. I turn my head and look over. Through the flap comes the head of the tall skinny thing. It cranes it's foot long neck and stares right at me. There is black tar stuff oozing from cuts that riddle it's face. It looks at me for a few seconds then starts talking.

It says "Come with me. You must come with me." I actually said "No" It's face moves closer to mine, and it keep repeating it's phrase.

I'm in absolute terror. The thing suddenly starts howling in pain. Like a man would. It's then jerked back out the tent. I say jerked because it looked like something pulled it out. I hear thrashing going down into the ravine. Followed by a roaring noise and now screaming. I curl up into a ball in my sleeping bag and close my eyes shut as tight as I can get them.

I must have fallen asleep because I woke up to the sound of the trumpet at 5 a.m. Today was the day we leave. I was so fucking happy to leave that godforsaken place. I had all my shit packed up by 7 a.m. and I was waiting out by the van. I said fuck the ending gathering and waiting in the parking lot. Everyone got back an hour or so later, and we took off. As soon as we left the parking lot I had to take a dump. My bowels knew what was going on.

That's it. There is your story guys. I hope you enjoyed it. Now I have to get to bed, I have work way too early tomorrow.

Corn Crib on Haunted Mound

Cheesy title, but it's a good story. The farm I live on is quite old, as some of you know. Around 100 years old to be exact. My great grandfather owned this farm, and 4 others a very long time ago. He was forced to sell 4 of them during the great depression, but came out of it with money in his pocket, unlike most people. This farm was passed down to my grandfather, then his father, and then me. So there is a lot of history on this place.

Anyway, the farm includes the original corn crib. For those of you who don't know what a corn crib is, just imagine a building that looks like a barn. It is about 40 feet tall, it has 2 sides that are devoted to corn storage. They are like big bunkers, where whole ear

corn is stored after the harvest. The middle of it is a big drive through gap. There is a grain elevator system running from the ground, up to the top. And at the very top, there are big holding areas for various grains. So basically, you could pull your wagons into the corn-crib. Open a hatch on the ceiling, and let the grain flow out with ease. It was a very good setup back in the day.

These days though, the corn crib is an old, decrepit building. I have been meaning to have it burnt to the ground for a long time now, but I never got around to having the fire department demolish it. It is old, and missing boards off the sides where the corn ears are held. I keep an old skid loader parked in the middle. The upper part of the building is still in great shape though.

The first thing that I found really weird about this building is the lack of pigeons.

Pigeons run rampant around these parts. They inhabit anything that could be considered shelter. The beasts live in my machine shed, nursery, old confinement building. They will not go near the corn-crib though. It's just so weird. It would be a perfect shelter from the elements.

Alright, enough of this boring back story shit that most of you probably skipped anyway.

My first problem with the corn crib happened when I was around 8 years old. This thing was like a jungle gym to me. There was boards draped around in it that I could swing from, or walk across. And if you crawled up the latter all the way to the top, you could get a perfect view of everything.

So, I was out there one day, playing around in it. When I decided to venture to the top. This was not something my dad wanted me to do. It was very dangerous. I started to make my way up the ladder, which is about a foot and a half wide, so it's not an easy climb.

I get up about half way, and hear noise bellow me. I kind of peak over my shoulder and see nothing. So, I keep moving upwards. I felt a hand wrap around my ankle and pull me down very hard. I start to fall. Not such a good thing. Underneath me was piles of sheet metal. I frantically grab for the ladder as I plummet to the cuts and boo-boos that waited below me. I finally get a grip on a rung and stop myself from falling. At that point I'm pretty much in tears. I'm shaking as I'm trying to get out of there.

I made it out and went to the house. My father asked me what the hell was wrong. There was no way I could tell him what I was doing in the corn crib. I didn't want to suffer the wrath of his belt. I don't remember what I told him, but it wasn't what I was doing. I had no clue what had happened in there. In the end I just put it off as me slipping, and my mind playing tricks on me.

I still played in it whenever I could. Being on a farm in Iowa... there just wasn't much to do. Years flew by, and I stopped playing in it. I did however start using it for better activities. Shooting pigeons.

Pigeons. I hate the things. They shit all over the buildings they get in, and drag nest crap with them. They just make a big mess out of anywhere they inhabit. So by the age of 15 or 16 I think, I had taken to shooting them from the top of the corn crib. It was a perfect deal too. I could sit at the very top, look right out a window towards the hog nursery.

Which they loved to live in. They would pop out of the vents on the top and bask in the sun. That's when I would pick them off with an old 22 rifle. Then it was off to the fox hole by my creek, where I would leave the pigeons for the hungry fox and her pups. Heartwarming in a twisted way huh.

So, one day I was up there. Picking off pigeons, having a grand old redneck time. I was doing great, everything was peachy for late fall. Then it got humid. going from 50 crisp degrees to humid in an instant is weird. Most of the shit I read, people say it gets cold. Well, I don't know if ghosts are choosy or what, but it gets humid around here in my experience.

So, there I am, sweaty now while wondering what is going on. I feel the 2x12 I'm sitting on hop up. Like if someone had picked up one end and dropped it suddenly. This wasn't a good thing. It was a good 12 foot drop to the bottom of the grain bins up top, and I was on a board set over the gap. I set my rifle against the elevator, and look around. There is nothing near me. Then it happens again. This time I get tipsy and have to grab the board with both hands.

Fucking thing started doing it really fast now. As if someone had hold of one end and was banging the board up and down. I was filling my pants by now. I just held on for dear life. It seemed like it went on forever, but it stopped after about 20 seconds. As soon as it did, I jumped over to the ladder and made my way down.

After I got down, I realized I had left my rifle up there. A mint condition Remington Nylon 11, that my dad had given me from when he was a kid. No way was I letting the frost that night get to it. So, I was forced to go back up the ladder to retrieve it.

I reach the top, and go to grab the rifle. It was fucking gone. I just stood on the ladder in shock. The thing couldn't have fallen anywhere. I get up on the board that I was sitting on, and cautiously walk across it, while holding the beam above me for assurance. I go near the 2nd grain bin, look down, and theres the riffle, propped up in the corner of it. Well, what the mighty hell!?! I do not trust those grain holders. There's no real support under them. So, I really didn't want to walk on it, or put weight on it. I didn't have much of a choice though. I pulled the old makeshift ladder out of the first grain bin, and lower it into the 2nd one. I slowly make my way down the ladder. I reach the bottom and put weight on the floor. It creaks a bit, but seems solid enough.

I start slowly walking towards my gun, and reach it just fine. I pick it up and examine it. Everything on it is fine. I empty the round out before I sling it over my shoulder. I turn around just in time for the ladder to hit me in the fucking face. Imagine if you will; Someone is up where I just came from and pushed the ladder off where it was leaned against. That is what happened, but it clocked me. Now I'm in this grain bin, bleeding out of my forehead like a stuck hog, I'm pissed off, and scared. A nail had caught me right below the hair line. I still have a scar/bump till this day on the spot.

I set the ladder back up and scrambled back up it, to be met with hot horrible breath in my face. Goosebumps raced over me, but there was nothing in front of me. I quickly hauled ass back down to the main floor, making sure to step on a fucking nail in the process. At that point I'm more or less, hopping across old sheet metal and tires. I get out, and just lay on the ground panting and in pain.

One trip to the hospital later. I have 3 butterfly stitches in my forehead, and a nice

tetanus shot. That corn crib seriously fucking hates me. My father brings me back from the hospital later that night. We pull into the drive, and the corn crib is worse than when we left. One of the huge doors on the front of it is laying on the ground, and the other is twisted off to one side. He pulls up to it and shines the trucks lights on it.

We get out, and I hobble over to it. It looked like the door that was laying on the ground was ripped off out of the metal slide it was in. After further inspection we could see that the metal it was mounted on was bent outward. As if someone had ran a vehicle through it and pushed the door out. We were both baffled. My father chalked it up to the age of the corn crib. I on the other hand knew this wasn't anything natural. I didn't feel like standing near this thing anymore that night, so I went inside and tried to sleep as best as I could.

Many Years Later:

I was outside in the summer grilling. Cooking up some good Iowa Chops. I'm not one for cooking with stoves and ovens, so I mostly live on a grill diet. It's around 10 o'clock at night. It was a great night too. Stars were shining, there was no wind, and it was about 72 degrees. It was perfect. I'm standing there, taking in the good atmosphere when I hear this noise. It came from the corn crib of the damned.

The building is around...50 yards from my house, so I look up over the grill at the building. I see nothing out of the ordinary, but that noise is still persisting. It sounded sort of like a raccoon, or some other large vermin. I hate raccoons, skunks, opossums, whatever. All those things could have rabbits, which I don't want around my farm. So, I kept my eye on the corn crib.

This noise just kept going on, with a few breaks in between. Then the screaming started. Oh god, that noise. It was like the critter that was in there was getting sliced open by a dull blade, but mixed with the sound of an old woman screaming her lungs out.

Something started banging around in there. As if concrete blocks were being thrown against the walls of the building. I grab my big light and shine it up into the only window near the top facing me. I see two glowing eyes for just a half a second, then they whip down back into the building.

OH WHAT THE HELL!

Those eyes. They glowed a bright white. Heres the really fucked up part. The light I was using was some 1,000,000 halogen spotlight. It lit up the side of the corn crib like daytime, but that window was just pitch black. Save for those horrible eyes. The noises didn't stop after I used the light. That shit continued for a good minute. I was very antsy at that point to say the least. I didn't know what to do. Should I run inside and cower, or stay out here and make sure whatever is in the corn crib doesn't steal my pork chops!

So I stayed with the food. Cooked it as normal, but kept my senses at their peak. When they were cooked, I shut the grill off and walked inside. Each time I got through one of my 3 doors leading into my house I felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand, and had an adrenaline rush. It felt like something was about to grab me whenever I had my back turned. I'm sure you all know that feeling.

I know that I ate some of my food, but couldn't stomach it all after what I had just

witnessed. The next day I went to the corn crib to investigate. By this time I had taken all the sheet metal out, and replaced it with the skid loader, some old tires, and other random items. It was still bothersome to get to the ladder, but I made it. I cautiously climbed it up to the top, and peaked around inside.

Blood, everywhere. Like if you had water balloons filled with blood, and threw them against the walls. I looked down into one of the grain bins, and there lay the remains of something in several pieces. I think it was a raccoon, but I'm still not sure to this day. It was kind of, charred black. It was caked in blood, and was mutilated beyond recognition.

I look around at all this blood. I didn't think you could get that much out of a small animal. Well, I was right. I look in the other bin and theres a pile of dead animals. They all looked about the same.

At this point I'm thinking the chupacabra or some shit is living in the my corn crib. I am in no mood, or good state of mind to clear the remnants of animals out of the building. I just make my way out of there, and stay the hell away from it for a while.

Still, every night I go outside I can hear what sounds like fast, skittering footsteps in the building. Also agonizingly long scratching noises, and what sounds like celery breaking. That breaking noise just echoed throughout the farm.

I'm a complete fucking moron. Because I went back inside that cursed building a few weeks later. The light was on inside of it. This single bulb that is 30 years old was turned on. How in the hell does that work. I don't even have power running to the building anymore. This should have tipped me off. But nope, I'm pretty dumb like that. It was at night too. Oh Goody!

As soon as I get inside of the building the light goes off, and I hear quick running in the upstairs part. I leave. Fast. No way am I getting drug upstairs and slammed against walls, till I'm a red stain. I back away from the corn crib, and towards my yard light. Something at the top catches my eye. I look up and see that the old glass globe around the lightning rod is glowing. This really beautiful color. Something I've never seen before, and still haven't seen to this day.

I'm just standing there, mesmerized by this glow. I couldn't pry my eyes away from it.

"Hahhhksssss" Whispers in my ear.

I whip around and see nothing. I'm doing a full 360, but there is nothing around me. "Enough of this shit", I say to myself. I started screaming and cursing at the top of my lungs. I was getting pretty sick of this scary shit. I went on a pretty rage induced tangent for quite a while. Until my yard light went out and it turned complete pitch dark. Oh good, a mercury light goes out on a whim. It sure was my lucky night!

I walked back to the house. Not ran, I walked. I heard shit behind me, clomping after me. I didn't turn around. I just kept swearing up a storm. The noise would get right up behind me then stop. then about 10 feet later it would repeat. I got to my house, opened up the first door and shut it. My 2nd door opened for me. Oh dandy! I get into it, and close it. The 3rd door was locked. I had to kick it down, which was easy, with how old it was.

As soon as I got inside I felt at ease. Whatever was fucking with me must not have followed me inside. The inside ghost that I still deal with was probably territorial or something. He gets to fuck with me inside, while the other gets my outside time. After that night, nothing much happened for a while. I would still hear the random noise from the corn crib, but nothing too big. Friends that I would have out would hear stuff, and get a little freaked out. None of them wanted to go into it, no matter how plastered we were.

One night however, we sort of saw what was in there. We were standing around the good old grill at about midnight. It was a severe case of the drunken munchies that drove us to grill top sirloin. It was a calm early fall night.

We all stopped talking because the banging had started in the corn crib. My one friend asked if there was an animal in it. I told him to wait and see. So we watched intently. Instantly the one door left on the front flew over to the side and out came this huge black figure. It was hauling ass towards us. Imagine if you will, a buffalo running full speed at you. That's what I would compare it to. It got within 20 feet of our scrambling asses, before it took an immediate turn right, and plowed into my cornfield. You could see corn stalks bending in the moonlight as whatever it was took off through the field.

I went from shitting myself to laughing at my friends, who were terrified. I had somewhat gotten used to this shit by now, so it wasn't much of a surprise to me. They all left shortly afterwards though, for apparent reasons. I kept an eye on the crib that night though, but didn't see the thing that came out of it return.

The morning yielded an great thing. The field had a nice path cut through it. The path was about as wide as a large SUV, and went in about 30 feet then just stopped. Real nice of that thing to wreck my perfect field so close to harvest.

That was the last major incident with the corn crib. Since then I just hear noises, and see a moving shadow in the window on top, but that is about it.

So there you have it. The story of the corn crib. I hope you enjoyed it. I have plenty more to tell. And an update to the story about the asshole ghost in my upstairs. I'll do those some time soon here.

Pictures!

So, I trudged my ass over to the corn crib, through the blistering wind. And thats what leads us to the first picture.

This is the beast itself. Around 100 years old, and still standing. At first glance, you might be thinking: "That doesn't looks safe to go inside of" Well, you're right, it's not. If you look at the very top, you can see the lightning rod, with the glass globe around it. That's the thing that was glowing that one night.

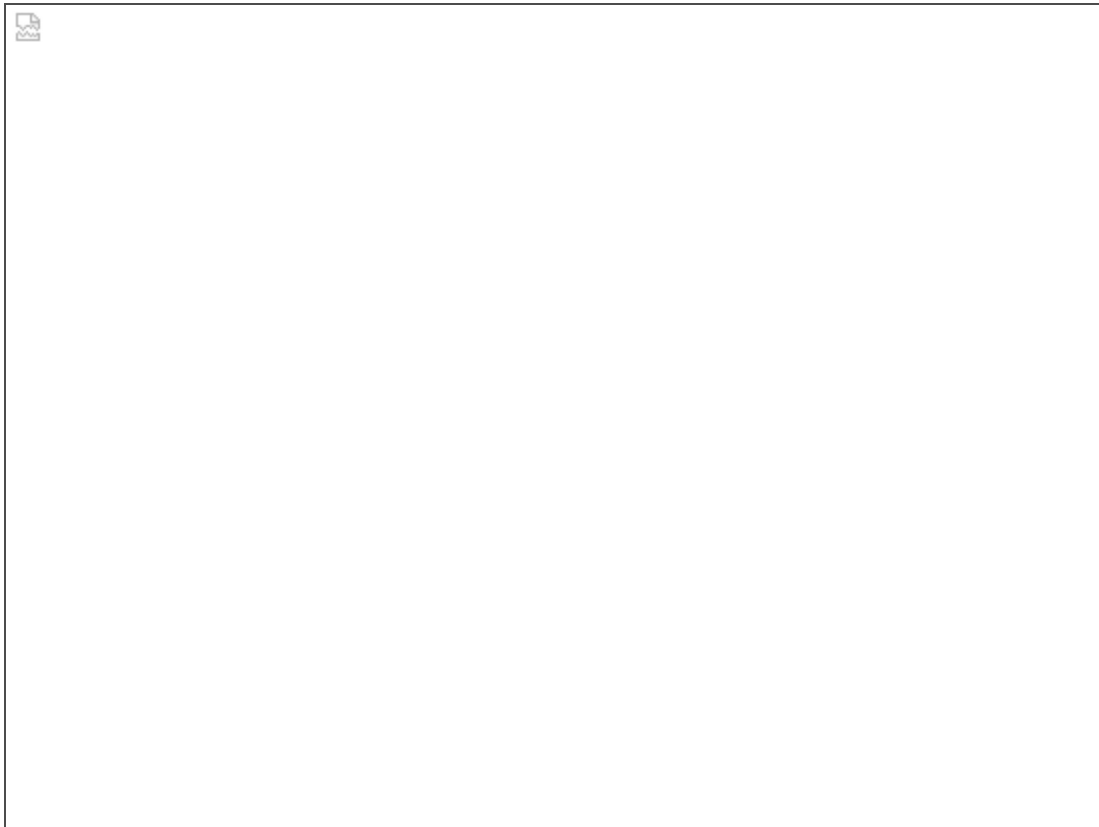
Also, notice the door that is on the front of the building. As you can see, it is split in half. One section is sitting in the middle of the opening, while the other is barely hanging off to the side. That blackness up towards the top is the window that I saw those eyes in, and that I still see stuff moving around in.

Here is a side view of the corn crib. You see that large opening at the top? That is my destination. That is where the bad shit happens.



Well, guess it's time to move on to the next picture.

Here is the inside of the ground floor. As you can see it is very messy. It is full of crap like, old tires, boards, a metal grain bin, and a skid loader cage. The vertical Grey things you see are the elevators that tote the grain up top. In between those is where the ladder is located.



So, I cautiously made my way through the crap and to the ladder. I tilted the camera up, so you can see what I have to climb. I notice that there is now a board above me, perched between two other boards. Upon closer inspection, I can see that it has been ripped from the wall at the top.



I made my way up the ladder to the top, and whipped out the camera to start taking pictures. No go. The brand new batteries were dead. That's when the swearing started. It's not easy or safe to get all the way up there, and it was fucking cold and windy. So, I made my way back down, and spent a good half hour looking for new batteries. I ended up having to steal some from a flashlight

I made my way back into the corn crib, and to the top of it.

The first picture from the top is of my trusty old 2×12 board that had a jumping fit while I was sitting on it.

As you can see, it is covered in snow, and is over the gap between the grain bins that I would talk about.

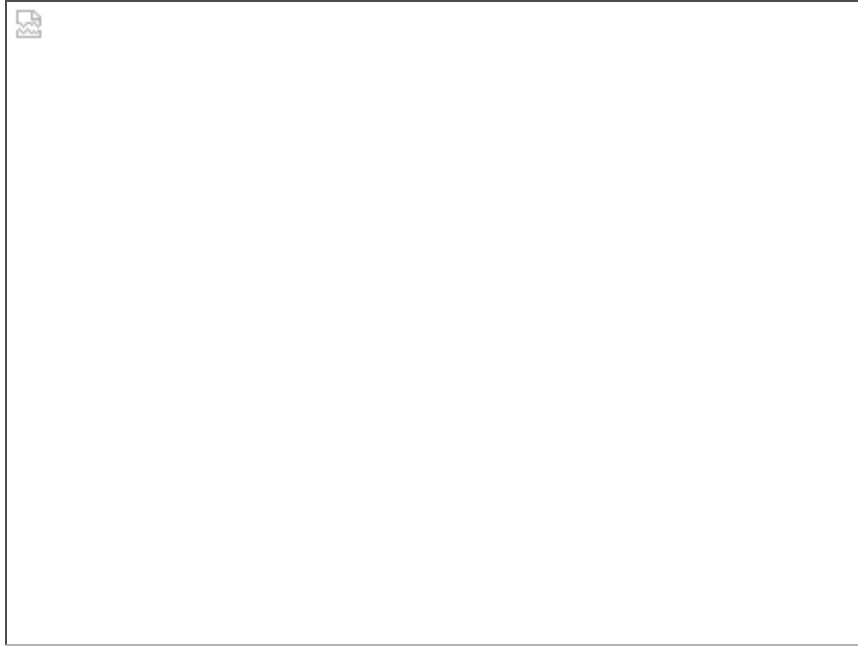
Also, while I am taking these pictures I am standing on a single ladder rung that's not too big as you will soon see.



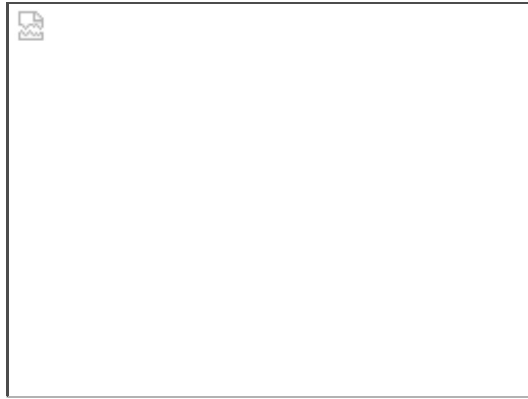
Well, I plopped my ass down on the 2×12, since it seemed sturdy as ever. I then snapped a picture of what was directly below me. I'd have to fall through all this shit if I slipped.



I peaked out of the window at the very top, and snapped a picture of the view outside. That red building is where I used to shoot the pigeons that polluted my farm. The top of that yard light pole you see, is about 35 feet at the peak. So you can sort of gauge how high up I am.



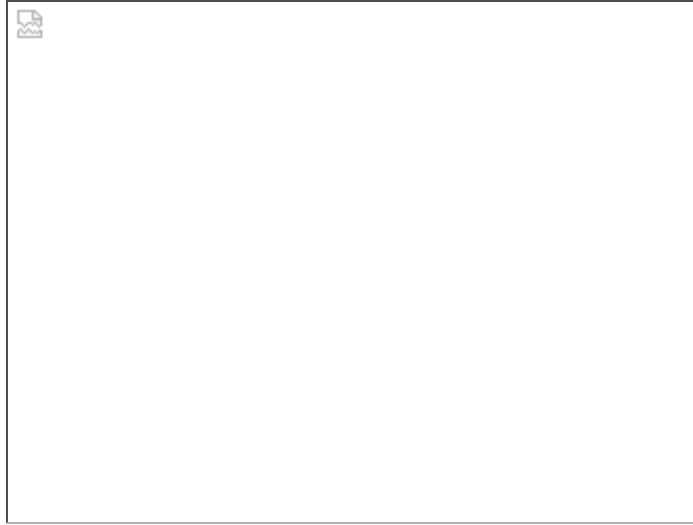
I swing over and take a picture of what I'm holding onto this entire time. The ladder just isn't really that big at all.



I look upward, and see the light poking through the ceiling of the corn crib. At this point, the very top is about 10 feet above me still. You could continue up the little ladder, but I wasn't going to do that. It's only nailed to the side of the rickety old elevator.

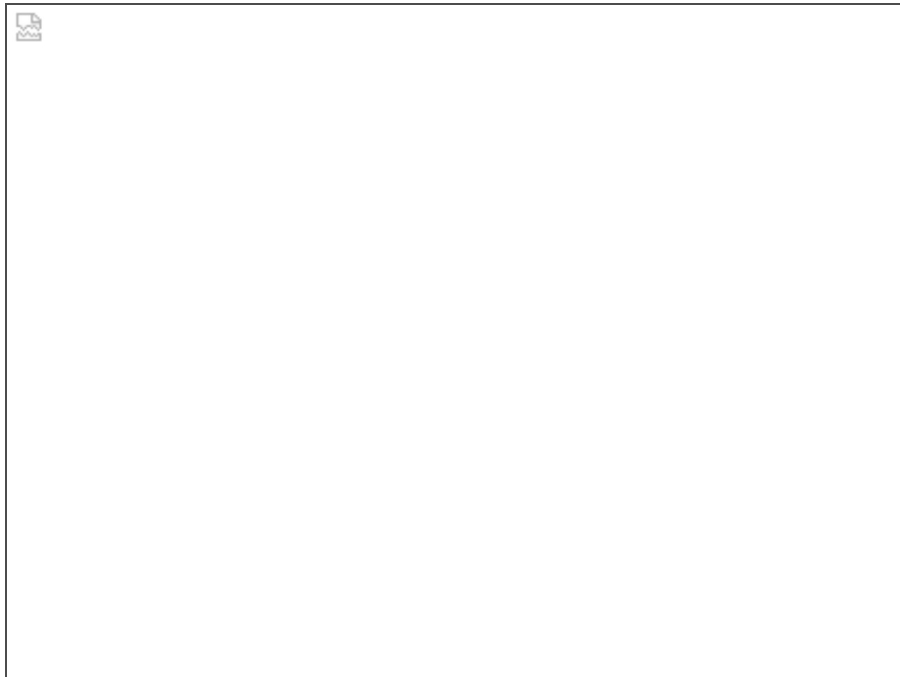


Speaking of the elevator, here it is. It is a simple design. Small metal buckets on each side of me. They operate with a belt and chain, that attaches to a wooden pulley. They have gotten quite rusty over the years though.



I muster all the testicular fortitude that I can, and grab a hold of a chain swinging in front of me. While holding onto it, I lean out over the first grain bin in hopes of taking a picture.

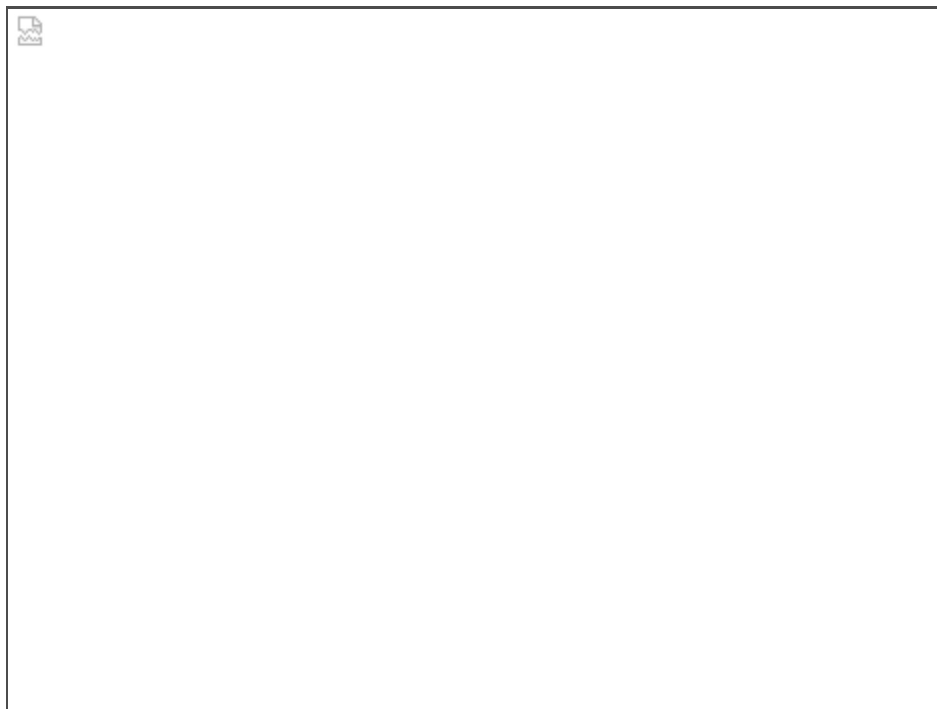
As you can see in the picture, the bottom is covered in snow, about 2 feet worth I would estimate.



I glance down and see something odd. To me it looks like a bunch of blood splattered onto the snow below me. What makes this strange, is there is no evidence of animals in the corn crib at all. No footprints, feces, or nesting. The splattered stuff in the picture is spread out over a 10 foot square area.



I glance over to the right, and notice something sticking out of the other grain bin. It's the dastardly ladder that smacked me in the face that horrible night. As you can see there isn't much to it. It's a bunch of old boards nailed to a couple of 2×4s. Here is what bugged me. The last time I was up here, it was sticking out of the other grain bin, the one with all the blood or whatever in it.



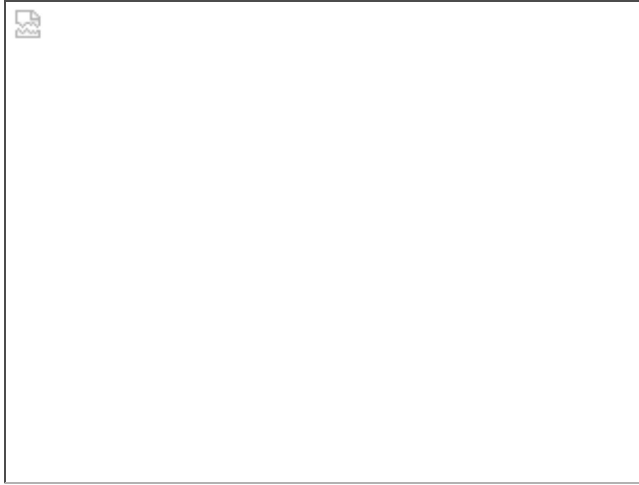
Upon further inspection of the grain bin with the ladder in it, I see some things. Also, take notice that I'm standing on that old 2×12 at this point. Not fun at all. Anyway, the shovel that is in the bottom was not there. I have been looking for that shovel for about a year now. How it got up there, I don't know. I also notice that the window is busted out and laying on the floor

of the bin. The last time i checked, the window was fine. There wasn't any glass missing out of it, and it was still mounted in the window up top.

The white round thing thats sitting next to the shovel is what caught my eye next. It's a skull of some kind. Probably from one of the animals that got thrashed up there. Now, do you see all that black chunks of whatever? That is the charred animal remains that I was talking about. Most are still hidden under the snow, but as you can see, there is still some visible.

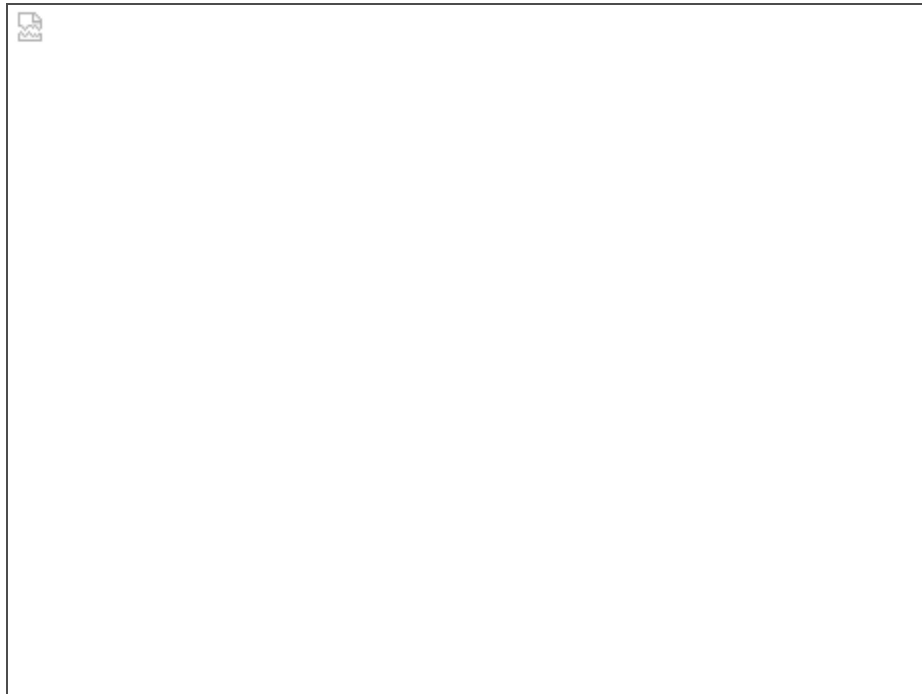


Next I kind of hung over the side of an old plank, and took a picture of the holding area in the corn crib. Each side has these. They used to house entire ears of corn. Now they are used for storing old firewood, and other such things. You can see though, why I called it a jungle gym though. There is all sorts of stuff for a kid to hang from/play around on in it.



Before I left the corn crib, I made sure to walk over to the one end, and take a picture of what I call "The Den". This is in the upper part, and I won't go in there. I never have, and probably never will. Right when I got close to it, I heard creaking in there that wasn't caused by the wind. It sounded like something slowly pacing around.

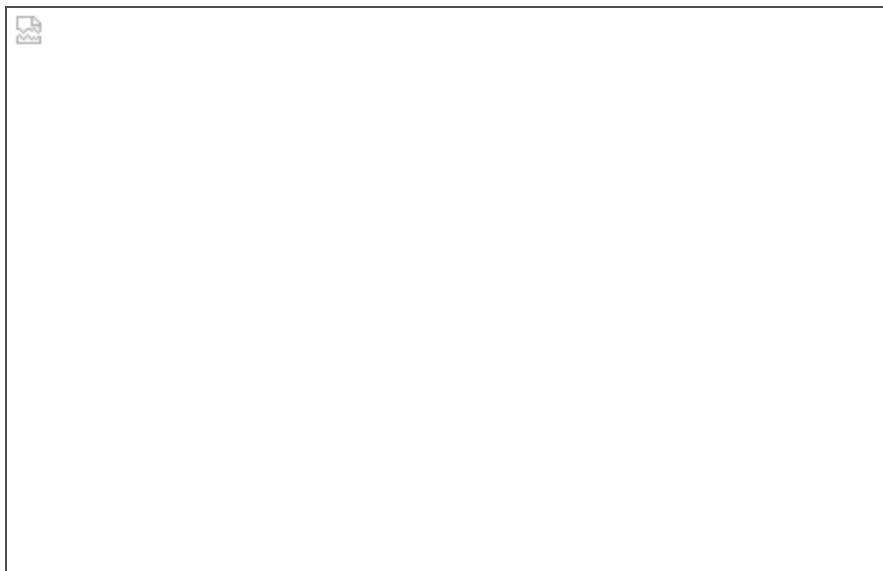
I quickly snapped a picture. You see that. It's really fucking dark in there! The rest of the corn crib is always lit up on the inside, but not that space. It's been pitch black in there, for as long as I can remember.



Well, there you have it. That is the corn crib in all it's glory. This post more or less turned into a "rural exploration" but oh well. If you have any questions, feel free to ask them. I might even develop enough balls, to take some pictures in there at night.

But before I leave...

Fan Service.



The Faceless Thing

The thick stench of fetid feces and stagnant urine filled my nostrils as I scooped another heaping mound of filth from the ditch. Sweat poured from my brow as I plunged the shovel yet again into the mire. Sewer problems again. My farm uses an ancient system to handle my bodily fluids and grey water. A system of old clay tile and cisterns that drained into the ditch is how it functioned. The problem was that in the late fall or early winter, when the snow falls the ditch gets packed with snow. And the whole thing backs up. The last thing I wanted is another winter of plunging the drain in my basement floor. So, I shoveled most of the afternoon.

Soon I had a path cut down the ditch, and cleared out around the exit tile. I then lowered my treated lumber into the pit and built a pitched roof over the exit in an attempt to keep open space under the snow. If it worked, then I could take showers longer than 5 minutes at a time. A luxury that I did not have the previous winter. Content with how my work turned out I crawled out of the ditch. Muck clung to my boots as I walked towards my house.

The freezing rain had just started, and was not welcome. I had to drive truck in the morning, and the last thing I wanted was slick roads. As I approached the house I noticed that my outside door was open. Curious, I peaked into the porch and saw nothing disturbed. I must have left the door open when I made one of my many trips back to the house. I walked down to the basement, grabbed a plunger, and went to work like a porn star getting payed triple overtime. The flood waters had not moved in 3 days, and it disgusted me. The sooner I conquer this beast, the better. The plunger ripped into the stagnant pool with absolute ferocity. After 10 minutes of plunging the waters had lowered none. Enraged, I stormed out into the freezing rain, cursing the chaotic god that had brought such misfortune upon me. The problem wasn't so much the inconvenience of the situation, but the solution. I needed to dig a 6 foot wide 3 foot deep hole in frozen ground to get to the cistern cap. I began work.

2 hours later dusk was upon me, and I had pulled the concrete cap off of the cistern. 20 feet below me lay a cracked open tile, full of rubble and dry as a bone. There lied the problem. I ran an old style band snake down a gutter into the hole. I jabbed at it as hard as I could, but nothing gave way. It was just too stuck. Furious, I went to the garage and grabbed my extension ladder. This wasn't going to be fun.

I extended the ladder down the hole and descended into the bowels of the earth. Upon reaching the bottom my feet sunk into the warm mud. I had forgotten that I was well below the frost line. Now that I was closer I was able to properly assess the situation. It seemed that some of the tile had collapsed, causing a backup into one of the other cisterns. I reached my

hand deep into the tile up to my elbow, fishing for answers. I felt the obstruction, it was indeed tile.

Laying curled up in the fetal position to let my arm get deep enough, I grabbed at the blockage. I could almost get it, and my absolute rage helped me to ignore the discomfort. I lunged my arm forward and got a hole of some of the tile. It was then that I felt pressure on my elbow, as it was pulled in the other direction. I could feel the grip of bony fingers digging into my arm. I was stuck in a bad sort of way. I pulled and yanked on my arm as much as possible, but I was locked in. There was nothing I could do. Roaring with anger was all I could do in the end. after a matter of seconds the grip loosened and I pulled my arm out.

I caught my breath and rested for a moment. Not wanting to reach back into the pipe, I climbed the ladder and got my short snake. I descended the ladder again, and caught a glimpse of movement in the pipe. It looked like pale flesh flickering through the pipe. Fucking thing.

Once I got to the bottom I thrust the snake deep into the whole and cranked on that fucker good and hard. I heard a clunking noise and pulled the snake out. Black water and filth poured from the blockage. I had just enough time to grab the debris as it rushed through the pipe. I had to rapidly ascend the ladder, or be stuck knee deep in filth. On my way up I chuckled at the thought of what the thing in the pipe was going through right now. I pulled the ladder out of the hole just as the water line had reached 2 or 3 feet. The cistern before the one I was in is a HUGE old rock-wall type. Easily holds 1,000 gallons, but is inaccessible. Now the stagnant water poured from it.

The freezing rain had not made it easy to climb out, but I made it out unscathed. I rushed to the ditch, and saw that water was nearly trickling out. My face began to redden with rage, but an instant later water gushed from the exit. I had don't it. I had conquered the vile sewer system. All that was left was to reset the lumber over the top of the exit, and I would be able to call it quits.

I slid down into the ditch and began dragging the heavy treated plywood onto the 4x4 frame. Right as I was getting it placed I heard gurgling cries coming from the pipe. I laughed hard as I sunk the deck screws into the wood. My work was done, and I would be able to take a long, well deserved shower.

An hour later I had the basement floor scrubbed clean with bleach, and my clothes soaking in detergent. I walked proudly to the shower, and turned it on. I could let it warm up this time! The shower is in my basement, which can get mighty cold in the winter. So, letting the water warm is quite a luxury. I hopped in the shower and scrubbed the filth away.

10 or so minutes later I was relaxing under the hot water. I closed my eyes and just enjoyed the refreshing feeling. I opened them after a bit and saw nothing. The lights were out in the basement. Bewildered I shut the water off and listened. I heard nothing but the water dripping off of me. I called out to see if anyone was there, but there was no response. Must be a breaker or the freezing rain had outed the power. I stepped out of the shower and blindly walked towards the breaker box. I fumbled for the flashlight I keep next to it, but it was not there. God damnit, I was fucking cold and wet, and didn't want to deal with this shit. I walked back to the shower to grab my towel, but it wasn't there either. What, the Fuck.

Some asshole had to be fucking with me. My father I presumed. This wouldn't be the first time he dropped by my house and scared the shit out of me. I yelled his name a couple of times, but got no response. No towel, cold, wet, furious. I heard creaking above me. The 120 year old floor joists were creaking and groaning from the weight of someone upstairs. Fuck, he must have dropped by and shut the lights off on me, not knowing I was downstairs. So, I hustled up the steps and glanced out the window on my way up. My yard light was not on, which meant the power was out due to the ice storm. I got upstairs and called out once again, but got no answer. The first thing I did was go to my bathroom cabinet to grab a towel, since walking around cold and naked was not as much fun as you might think. Thankfully the towels there were not missing. I fumbled my way into my living room and grabbed the telephone to call the power company to report an outage. Phone lines still work when the power is out thankfully. I called them and got a message that it had been reported and crews were out. So good deal

Now, where did the flashlight I had just go. I had just set it next to the phone, but now it was gone. What the Christ is going on. This is the most inconvenient time for the power to go out. Fuck it, I would just deal with it.

I grabbed some clothes from my basket and put them on in the pitch dark.

I could hear my floors creaking once again, this time not more than 5 feet away from me. I froze and held my breath. The sound was that of someone shifting uneasily over a creaky spot in the floor. I took a step towards the noise and I stopped. But the breathing started. Very shallow breaths, sounded like they were from the nose. I stood motionless, not knowing what to do. The breathing stopped shortly after it started. I didn't know if that was a good or bad thing. Then I heard a creak, then another. It was getting closer. I slowly lowered myself down to my knees. I crouched there motionless. The sound stopped right in front of me. I could feel something there, but could not see a thing. Deep breaths this time. Fast and deep. They got louder, and louder. They were directly above my head. I reached out and felt for something, but hit nothing. This seemed different from anything upstairs. This was just weird, and kinda unsettling. As I pulled my hand back I felt breath on the top of my head. I sprung up quicker than I thought possible. Blood rushed to my head, and by the time it cleared I heard or felt nothing. I reached around me and found my flashlight and turned it on. A quick survey of the room proved it was indeed empty.

My windows lit up from headlights. I opened the blinds and looked outside. The electric company truck was checking the transformer outside of my home. The only reason I knew it was them was the flashing lights on the boom truck. After a few minutes they pulled away. I guess it wasn't mine that tripped the power. The light from the vehicle was gone now sadly. I contemplated getting in my truck and heading into town, which still had power. But decided against it in case the power company called my home phone. I plopped down in a chair near the phone and must have dozed off, because by the time I woke up the lights in my house were back on. I glanced at the clock and saw it blinking. I searched for my phone and saw it was 3 in the morning. I must have slept a long time. I walked to the bathroom and grabbed the handle to open the door, but the handle turned as I touched it. I yanked my had back fast as fuck and stood there, silent.

The handle turned and the door opened. I was met with pitch blackness in the room. I reached an uneasy hand in to flip on the light switch. I found it and turned it on. The flickered on for a mere half a second before it popped and went back to blackness. Within that short period of time I saw a faceless figure standing in front of me. Clenching its long yellowed teeth. My piss could wait. I backed away slowly into the hallway and started to head for the door. The walls creaked behind me. Then the ceiling. I closed my eyes and continued forward. A loud stomping in the walls and ceiling now. I rushed now to the door leading to my porch. I opened it and

went outside. I was getting in my truck and heading the fuck into town.

I slid across my yard which was now covered in a thick coating of ice. It might be better to take the tractor I thought to myself. I climbed into my John Deere 4430 and reached into my pocket only to realize I had no keys. Jesus fucking Christ this was getting ridiculous. At least I had the tractor plugged in, so it would start when I did start the damn thing. I headed back to the house. I could see through the window that all of the lights were off. I didn't turn them off. God dammit.

I stomped every footstep as I walked into my home. Making sure I made as much noise as possible. I figured that was at least insulting. Stupid fucking aberration. Ruining my shower and night in general. I got inside and grabbed my keys. I found no noise, or anything inside. I showed that fucking thing, maybe I didn't have to go into town. The phone then started ringing in the distance. Shit.

I turned the lights on and went into the living room and picked up the phone. I answered with an uneasy hello. It was the electric company, they had drove their truck into the ditch and wanted to know if I could help since I was closest. Sure thing I said, I could just pull them out with the tractor. I did just that. They were very grateful for my help, but not so much as to even take a cent off next months bill. Fuckers.

The next morning the countryside was covered in a thick layer of ice. The power had gone off again around 7am unfortunately. And it still wasn't on, but at least it was day. And with day comes daylight. I went downstairs to take a victory shower. As I relaxed under the water the lights went out again.

The End.

[TAHRAJJ](#)

The Secret Room

Okay I haven't posted this story because even though things worked out okay I was terrified and thinking about how she looked and how I felt makes me feel the same way when I remember it.

I lived in the second oldest house in my area near Waco, Texas, from when I was about 11 til I was 18. I don't know the significance of this really but I feel it's the only possible explanation for any supernatural presence. I'm not sure when the house was originally built but the rest of the houses around mine were built in the 40s and 50s so I supposed it's older than that.

The house seemed normal when we first moved in. Only two families had lived there over the years so it wasn't like there was a high turnover rate. In fact no one really noticed or mentioned anything supernatural with the house.

However, there was a "secret room." This room was actually a selling point for my parents to help us deal with moving. Even though my dad was in the military we had lived at our past house for quite awhile and didn't want to move. So of course when my parents said there was a secret passage connecting one of the possible bedrooms with a secret room we became excited about the new house. My sister and I fought for it but I won because the other bedroom already had flower wallpaper up. When I first saw my

room I went straight to the closet to see the "Secret door."

The secret door wasn't really secret, it was right in the back of the closet and plain to see. However it was a lot smaller than any normal door. Even when I was only 11 or 12 I had to squat down to get in. It looked like it was made for a child to use.

Another interesting thing was that the door handle was not really built into the door, it was just a handle added as an afterthought. This made me think it was originally just some sort of attic or crawl space door and not meant for a room. The door was lockable by key from my side of the door, the other side had no handle or keyhole. When you open the door there's a very small hallway which is the same height as the door and not really fit for an adult, but it's just a few feet long and then you get into the room.

The room was just an empty room added above the garage of the house. There was no way out except for the "secret passageway" to my closet. There were no windows, one light with a string used to turn it on hanging from the ceiling, and the room was completely white with seemingly new wallpaper. There was no furniture or anything left in the room from the previous owners, in fact I don't think the previous owners used it at all. I believe it was sealed before or soon after they moved in and wasn't touched since then, since it was pretty dusty, but who knows. The lock did seem very old and had a hard time moving as if it was rusted or the wood was warped or something.

Now my parents thought the room could be me and my sister's own little toy room or whatever when they first saw it, but after moving in they had second thoughts. I'm not sure what it was but they said it was because they wouldn't be able to hear us if we got hurt in that room since it was so detached from the rest of the house. Of course since we wanted our own secret room so badly they gave in, but said that we had to tell them when we were playing in there and we had to keep the door to my room, my closet, and the secret room open at all times when we were there. So we went on and like I said earlier nothing much really supernatural happened in the rest of the house, and not even too much in the "secret room," at least not to me.

My sister began having an imaginary friend. Whenever I wasn't in there I could hear her talking and whispering to someone. I noticed that although at first she used to have fun in there that as time went on she kind of seemed sadder when she was in there. However up til now this could all be coincidence so I didn't give it much thought.

The only weird things that happened with me was at night I thought I could hear some sort of scratching on the walls behind my room, except it wasn't really with fingernails it was softer sounding. It wasn't on the door, but coming from inside the room.

Now I believe that I only heard this at night because it was quiet at night, and the scratching rubbing sound was so soft that you normally couldn't hear it. I really had no idea what it was, I told my dad once and he looked around for some animal but couldn't find any so we just forgot about it and I lived with it. Like I said it was so soft it never really bothered me. It could be some far off tree rubbing against the house for all I knew. This rubbing happened consistently but like I said I never paid it much mind, at least until my sister went into the room one night.

She knew about the rubbing too and never really said anything about it. One night though, probably about a year or so after moving into the house, the rubbing was going on as usual. I was in that limbo before falling to sleep when I thought that someone was

in my room and unlocking the closet door. I thought it might have been a dream but I looked around and saw my door and closet door open, so I got up to check it out. I was a little scared but I realized it was probably mom or dad checking out the rubbing sound since I told them it still happened sometimes. I turned the light on in my closet and looked in. I saw a figure sitting in the room facing the wall. Now even when I was a kid, I had been pretty brave. I was still scared since I was pretty young, but I knew that you can't just run or you'll never know. I said "Hello?" and I heard "She wanted me to see" in what sounded like my sister's voice. The light was in the middle of the room, and it was tough taking even those few steps to get to it in the middle of that dark room. But like I said, I couldn't just leave so I just went there and turned it on. When I looked at the figure, it was indeed my sister, sitting and scratching at the wall paper. I touched her and she was crying so I pulled her up and took her out of the room. I'm really glad that I didn't just lock the door and run or else she'd be stuck in there all night (this is one reason why I never run away from anything abnormal). I locked the door, took her to her room and watched her as she went to sleep. I really thought she could've been sleepwalking or something although she never had before, and since it was over I didn't want to wake up my parents. I went back to sleep.

The next day I asked my sister in the morning if she remembered going into the room and she looked freaked out. I told her she was probably just sleep walking but she said that "the girl" asked her to come look at her pictures. She didn't start crying but she was about to because she was so scared. I didn't ask who "the girl" was. I told her it was just a dream and went to prove it. She didn't want to enter the room again so I went in and saw where she was scratching on the wall. Only a little bit was scratched away, so I started peeling some more wallpaper off. Under the wallpaper were different pictures drawn in what looked like crayon. They were typical kid pictures of mainly cats, and houses, however there was one picture that I thought was weird.

It was a little girl, a cat, a mom, and a dad. Now everything looked like a normal kid family portrait, except the dad had no face. It was just a circle. Of course my rational side said she just never finished it. But still the dad picture looked strangely out of place, like the lines were distorted like she had trouble drawing it. Anyway I told my parents and they yelled at me for pulling back the wallpaper. I didn't want my sister to get in trouble so I didn't say anything about her or what happened last night. My parents said we had to get it fixed now and were mad, and didn't let me play in there again as punishment. The whole thing still seemed normal to me. Kid draws on wall, parents put wall paper up to cover it up. I didn't realize until later that night when the scratching rubbing sound started up, that it sounded like a crayon. I really started thinking that it was "the girl" that my sister talked about was drawing on the wall.

Now after this happened, I started believing that the girl was actually in there. Once I started acknowledging her presence, weirder things began to happen. It happened really slowly. I was about 14 or 15 after the episode with my sister, and the weird things were happening slowly over the course of the next years I lived in the house up until I was 18. The changes were so subtle that I didn't really notice that they were happening until much later. The drawing sounds increased a little bit and soon were audible even during the day. I also started hearing little pattering of feet. The more I heard these things the more emotional I felt about them. I started feeling angry the more I heard the sounds, especially when I was trying to sleep. However I always managed to control myself and try to think that this girl was obviously sad and just trying to have fun and I calmed myself down. However this was going on so long that I finally asked my sister when I was about 16.

I asked her if she ever heard the sounds. She said that she did, although they were pretty quiet. Now I didn't think this was so weird since obviously I could hear them too, and I told her how annoying it was. She kind of looked at me as if she was hurt, and said that every time she heard the sounds she felt really sad. She had trouble talking about it, but I told her this is pretty important since it's going to affect the rest of my years left in the house. She told me that "the girl" was the girl that she used to talk to when she played in the room. She didn't know her name, but they used to play together. She said she looked just like a little girl about her age so they had fun together. However, as my sister got older, the little girl seemed to get older too, except very unnaturally. It was subtle at first but soon she began hating seeing her. She said she looked as if she "shouldn't have been alive anymore." I didn't really know what this meant. My sister said she wore the same dress the whole time, even when the girl grew out of it. I asked her why she went into the room that one night to find the pictures, and she said she really didn't want to but the girl made her feel so sad and she'd do anything to help her out. However this still freaked her out and I didn't ask anymore questions.

Things got worse every night, and I hated hearing that sound. I was so mad that she wouldn't just shut up so I could sleep. The weird thing was I was scared at the same time, since I knew that whatever it was in there wasn't actually alive anymore. What also freaked me out was that the sound didn't annoy my sister, but I guess she had more tolerance than I did.

I asked my parents who used to live here, and they said a family with two sons. Of course this didn't have anything to do with the room, since they had it locked off the entire time they were there. So I asked if they knew anything about the family before them. They said the original owners were the ones who had the house built and that they didn't know much about them, except that they had a daughter who died when she was 11. I asked if they knew how she died, but they said it was some sort of accident, so it wasn't murder or child abuse or anything. I also asked if she died in the secret room, but they said they didn't think so. I really think that this was the girl in the room, although I have no idea why she inhabited it still.

Once I knew this I sort of had an idea with what I was dealing with. Last year was when things got the worst. I heard almost constant drawing and her jumping around inside the room. The footsteps sounded heavier and were louder. If I ever heard it I'd pound on the door to the room and she'd stop immediately, but I'd hear soft whimpering or crying. She'd also start drawing again later on. Sometimes I'd scream at her to shut up. I really got mad every time it happened since it had been going on for 6 years. However, I knew that I had to do something about this. I was a lurker by this time so I've read a lot of ghost story threads, and I remembered how pussy most of the goons were regarding ghosts and never checked anything out. So I knew that I had to at least understand what was going on exactly, and if possible end it. I didn't really have a plan but I knew I had to see the girl or talk to her or something.

Last year, shortly before I turned 18, my parents went away for the weekend, so I took the key to the secret room from their room (they kept it ever since locking it that day when I took off the wallpaper). I was determined to see her so I stayed up expecting to hear sounds. I couldn't hear anything so soon I just fell asleep. It was about 1 am when I woke up to a loud bang, like someone jumped or fell. I heard her footsteps afterwards and of course the drawing. The first thing I felt before any fear was pure anger. I hated that she woke me up, even though this was what I wanted. I immediately grabbed the key and went to the door. I was pounding on it as I said "That's it!" and unlocking the

door. The sounds stopped and I heard whimpering. I threw open the door and this was the first time I saw the room in years.

The light coming from my room illuminated a figure in the room, much like when I saw my sister years earlier. This was when I began to feel a wave of different emotions. I was really angry, really scared, yet I also knew that I had to do this and remain calm. I went into the room and stood a few feet away from the figure which was standing in the corner. I turned on the light. What I saw was probably the most horrific sight I could probably have ever even thought of in my entire life. Any horror movie monster had nothing on how unnatural the girl looked.

I finally realized why my sister described her in such a weird way. Her body was taller than she should have been. Her limbs were so lanky and bony and stretched like she kept growing past how tall she should have been. She was wearing a really small dress, and it was really tight on her body. Her face looked as if her head had continued to grow but her face had not. The skin was stretched and the eyes were sunk back into her head yet wide open and her small, childlike teeth were exposed since her lips were stretched back with the rest of her face. Her hair was down to her waist, her face had tears streaming down. I took all of this in in just a moment, and as soon as we met eyes she let out a wail as if she was crying and moaning at the same time. It wasn't a loud wail like most people describe ghosts, it was pretty soft and it was as if she was in terrible pain, but I couldn't tell her expression since her face was so unnatural and stretched.

As soon as I heard the wail all the anger in my body was overcome by fear and I ran. I wish I could say I ran for a video camera, but I just ran. I know I've been talking about how much I hate when people don't investigate things but I was so terrified that I ran. Once I got out of my room I ran to my car and drove away and spent the night at a friend's house. Once I realized what happened I was in a cold shiver and scared out of my mind for the entire night. I was too scared to go back home until my parents came home.

I waited until they came back on Sunday, and then I came over. They asked me why I took the key and left the closet door open and I just told them I wanted to see if I could sell any of my old toys on eBay. I took one last look in the room and locked the door. Ever since then nothing happened. I don't know why things stopped, but I'm always hoping it's not because I "let her out" like in the Ring or something and that she's really evil. Since nothing has happened since then I do really hope that I helped her out in some way, but in all honesty I don't care. My parents moved after I went to college, and I have no intention of ever going back. I came up with a theory that the male family member in her life was really mean to her and hated her playing in there, and possibly beat her, while the female family member always felt sad (hence my sister, and the girl's willingness to open up to her first). Anyway like I said that's just all theory but it kind of makes sense. This all happened last year, and the more I think about it the harder it is to remember. Sorry for typing such a long post, I didn't realize I had this much to tell.

UNKNOWN POSTER – THE SECOND FLOOR OF DOOM

Since I was in third grade I was best friends with a guy named Kris. He lived with his mother and his grandparents in the old family home, this three story farmhouse. The house had a strange rule. No one was allowed on the second story. Ever. The reason for

this: It was haunted. The bedrooms were on the third floor so every time we would go up there to play we would stop on the landing for the second floor and see who could hang there the longest without being freaked out. Hang out on the second floor landing long enough and the doors began to rattle on their frames. What you could see from the landing was a long hallway, three doors on the right and a bank of windows with the blinds drawn. This was a source of entertainment for years and he would always tell us ghost stories about living on the third floor and hearing noises from those locked rooms on the floor below us. Scratching on the ceiling, banging, voices.

One summer, we repeatedly ran down the second floor hall to see who could get to the end, turn the last doorknob and get back without being grabbed by ghosts. The doors were all locked and none of them were supposed to open. We stopped doing this the one night I slept over, yanked open one of the doors (to find a dark, empty room) and heard this cacophony of horrible sounds. Scratching and babbling and what not. I also swear that I saw something moving in the shadows. We both freaked out and ran downstairs. His grandfather was extremely pissed that he had to go up and close the door. He came down from the second floor, pale as a dying man and wound up walking slowly outside and tossing the room key, this gnarly old skeleton key, into the woods.

However, the second floor lost its allure in sixth grade when his grandfather was found dead on the second floor, half in and half out of one of the rooms that was supposed to be locked forever. From that day on, we stopped fucking around there and his mother and grandmother nailed the doors shut. After that, things got weirder. He would tell us that one of the voices he heard from the rooms below was his grandfather asking him to open the door and let him out.

By the time we got into high school, he started to unravel and we didn't hang much. He was extremely depressed and so was his mother and grandmother. His grandmother's health was failing, too. They all looked horrible, like they weren't taking very good care of themselves anymore. When I did see him he would tell me harrowing stories about being kept up all night by the voices in the rooms below and that they banged on the floor all night and wouldn't let him sleep. His grandfather was angry, he always told me. In the spring of our sophomore year he stopped coming to school. I was trying to check up on him but his mother wouldn't let me talk to him. I went by his house one day and she told me through a crack in the door that he couldn't be my friend anymore and that I should stay away. I went by a couple of days later and knocked again but no one answered. I saw the curtains move a little, like someone was looking at me through the window but that was it. A few days later I went by again and found that no one lived there any more. The blinds and curtains were pulled and the place was empty.

I never found out what happened to him or his family.

UNKNOWN POSTER – THE WIREMAN

Last night, I was derailed from seeing a movie by a pal of mine 'J,' who needed a ride to a barbeque, with an invite as barter. Damn right I could see the movie another time!

We arrive at Lindsey's house, where her roommates were all running about, organizing the contents of 11 empty grocery bags; meat here, condiments there, booze here, etc...

I'd noted to Lindsey that I liked her new home, it's much bigger, roomier, and safer than her previous one, to which she looked a little puzzled.

"You... you must be referring to the house on 'Nashville St,' because you never saw..."
"...the other one," Lindsey's roommate Emily finished.

"So... you don't know the story of the place in between the place you knew us to live in and this one, right?" Lindsey asked.

I just stood there, curious of all of the wide-eyed, uneasy looks, making myself wordlessly obvious that I'd not a clue. They called in the third roommate, Brianne, followed by J.

They took turns adding in their 'two-cents,' confirming little details, adding others, to which they all agreed upon as the story progressed. Rather than make this a back-and-forth story of four people interjecting, I'll tell it to you third-person.

On Carrollton Avenue in New Orleans, Lindsey had parted with her previous roommate, and got together with two girls from school she didn't know so well, Brianne and Emily, and got a decent place. The place in question was rather roomy, in a good location, and, above all, a hell of a bargain. This house, like most in the neighborhood, is nearly one hundred years old.

When Emily and Lindsey arrived to move their belongings in, they saw a note on the door of the furthest room from the front door, there was a note by Brianne, saying that she'd already claimed it, which annoyed the other two girls.

A blessing in disguise.

Within the first week or two, Brianne and the girls were all in the house together, Lindsey and Emily supposedly asleep, and Brianne up all night, determined to finish the book she was reading. At somewhere between 2-4am, she reached the last page of her text, closing the book, and settling into bed to see if she was tired enough to sleep, just yet. Note that the book was NOT a mystery/horror book, and that she had an elated feeling about what she'd just read.

She was replacing the book back on the shelf, and general before-bed tidying up, when the light above her started flickering, then went out. Brianne then turned off all of the lamps around the room, leaving the one near her desk on.

She soon found out she couldn't sleep, so she sat up again, and turned on the television, putting in a cartoon DVD, in the hope it'd tire her out before the sun came up.

She heard a rapping on the wall, and stood, not knowing if it came from her door or her wall. Brianne lowered the volume on the TV, fearing it woke up a roommate, and approached the corner of the room where the noise was coming from. It wasn't the door, it wasn't the wall, it was coming from the closet.

What Brianne didn't know at the time was that her deep closet shared a wall with Emily's equally deep closet, not Emily's wall.

Brianne assumed it was Emily who was knocking, and crept back to bed, in silence. Again, the rapping coursed through the room, so Brianne got up, exited the room, only to find Emily fast asleep in her own room, her body splayed nowhere near the wall in question. She checked on Lindsey, who was also fully asunder, her room too far for her to have knocked on the wall, to do so loud enough to gain Brianne's attention would have woken up the whole house!

Confused, and a little weirded-out, Brianne returned to her room, closed the door, and turned off the TV and remaining lamps, and reached for the desk lamp, which turned off before she could hit the switch. She retreated her hand in surprise, and the light flickered on; she then reached forward again, and she successfully managed to turn it off, the desk lamp having given up on a life of its own.

Suddenly, light flooded the room, the overhead light blasted into life; perhaps it wasn't the bulb that broke, but simply a loose socket?

Brianne, in the few seconds it took for her to turn around, and head towards the light switch, became uneasy. Sure, it was scary, and the visual impact of the overhead light flickering like crazy was intimidating enough, but it wasn't without the realm of reason that this old house had loose bulbs, sockets, even wiring, to which she'd have a chat with the landlord about investigating before a inner-wall fire could occur.

Brianne consoled herself with such thoughts, as she approached the light switch in the strobed room, to finally turn it off, and put an end to this ordeal for the night. However, she began to believe the strobing effect of the light flickering on and off maniacally was making her see things... or not, for once she got to the light switch...

The light switch was been frantically flipping up and down on its own.

She jumped back in panic, as the strobing continued for a full few seconds, then suddenly stopped. Following a few moments later, in the darkness, was the knocking making a re-appearance, but much, much louder than before.

Brianne grabbed what she could, and got the fuck out of there around 5am, not only not looking back, but too scared to even inform the other girls of what went on.

It took a long time for Brianne to be coaxed back into the house, since no strange events had occurred since, yet Brianne wasn't going anywhere NEAR that room, so, she slept elsewhere in the house. It was suggested that Brianne sleep on the second floor, since the weather was good, and the only reason it wasn't used was that the landlord had yet to repair the AC/Heating units up there. Brianne refused. As tall-tale hauntings go, Brianne reasoned, she was going to stay away from an attic as far as possible, despite the fact that all of the happenings occurred in the back bedroom that she once claimed.

Weeks passed, and Emily had some visitors come over on one occasion, and Lindsey had some of her own on another; neither group of visitors slept more than one night in that house, citing that they had 'strange dreams' that they refused to discuss, and they had an unnatural apprehension from going down the hall past Emily's room.

Lindsey decided to investigate a bit, and entered Brianne's room during the day, finding nothing out of order. However, upon inspecting the closet where Brianne heard pounding noises, she discovered that not only did the back of the closet share a wall

with the back of Emily's closet, there was a sizable hole cut out of it, enough for a child to pass back and forth. Upon even closer inspection, the wall was shared, yes, but was hollowed, there was three feet or more difference between the two panels in the back of the two closets. Lindsey shined a light on the little space, and found a large spool of 'industrial' wire. She turned the light upward, toward the ceiling, and discovered this little 'hollow' went straight through the second floor, and into the attic, she could see a large beam stretching across, far above.

Lindsey kept this discovery to herself for a few days.

A night or two later, Emily was looking rather haggard, and explained that it was due to lack of sleep, since recurring nightmares kept jolting her out of slumber. The other two girls pressed on the contents of the dreams, the result of which much to their shock.

All three girls (and one overnight guest) had the same dream, as did the two previous guests, when contacted and insisted upon the details:

A very old, bald man was suspended above them, from wires somehow attached to his back, reaching up into the blackness; his arms were slung down, locked at the elbow, as to reach as far down as he possibly could; his arms began as skin, muscle, and sinew, but gradually terminated into a cluster of wires. The Wireman dangled above the dreamer, waving/scissoring his arms back and forth at locked length, as if trying to wipe past the faces of the startled dreamer. Finally, the man would buckle, as if a few inches of slack was granted from above, and the Wireman would immediately and eagerly grasp the sleeper's throats with its wire-hands, and choke them vigorously. They could hear him smiling. The dreamer would suffer and die in the dreams, before awaking.

The vast majority of these factors were shared with the dreamers, without deviance.

The profusely apologetic Landlord didn't question the girls' fright (obviously there's something he knew they didn't,) and offered to send in an exorcist. Apparently, Exorcists are few and far between, so the girls popped down to some of the (very few) reputable psychics that were marvelously expensive; she got three to come on half-pay, half-favor. Remember, this is New Orleans, even I know of 1000 'Psychics,' but I only believe 3 or 4 of them.

It should be noted that Lindsey was smart about this, she didn't mention anything about the room, dreams, or actual location of the house, and should the psychics wish to investigate before they come to the site. Lindsey convinced them to accept the job with as very little info as possible, and all of the girls were there when the Psychics showed up, offering them nothing, but listening to everything.

The Psychics entered the house and all of its rooms, feeling nothing, until they got to the last room of the hall, where all three of them looked at each other in discomfort. One began crying. They backed out of the room. Lindsey took them into Emily's room, and showed them the 'little room' between the closets (obviously from the 'safe' side,) and directed their attention upward. Soon after, the band of explorers would find themselves in the dreaded attic, and had found the crossbeam in question.

It had a deeply-etched groove of wear from a once-taut wire, and was indeed centered directly above that little hole.

The Psychics soon joined the girls in the living room, and discussed what they felt.

Apparently, a long time ago, a woman had run off from her husband, and little boy. The husband refused to let the child go outside, thinking that he'd run off, and the only way the mother would return was if the child was there, she'd surely not come back if it were just the father.

One day, tired of the wait, the father locked his son in his bedroom, and hung himself (with wire, we're not 100% certain, in the little room? Not 100% certain) until, of course, he died, assuming that the mother would soon come for the son. She didn't. The little boy died of dehydration in his room.

While this didn't explain a good half of what went on, the Psychic went on to say...

"Well, there was some sort of torture... perhaps self-torture, but I don't know if the preceded the man and his boy, or if it involved the man and his boy... we threw down many tarot cards, and, despite the meaning of 'The Hanged Man' that we all accept, it came up every damn hand... we use 108 cards, it came up EVERY three cards after a thorough re-shuffle. I think it's demanding a new meaning, perhaps an obvious one? We don't know, we don't normally do this, but certain impressions are undeniable."

The Landlord offered a second property, bigger, better, and cheaper, to which the girls took, and presently live.

The girls, when they think of it, did a little investigating, and here's what they came up with:

- Neighbors had seen six sets of tenants come and go in the last two years alone.
- Their pal, Brian, who had several nervous breakdowns (including crying in class, and walking around bug-eyed,) in the year previous turned out having lived in that very house, in that very room for six months. Brian was mortified when the girls admitted they stayed there. He even recalled the 'Wireman' dream with eerie clarity and description. Apparently his state has improved in the time he's been out of that house.
- The house is currently unoccupied.

UNKNOWN POSTER – THE DRAIN LADY

My father was a military man. Retired back in '95 from the Navy after 20 years of proud service to our country. But before that, we moved often... every 3-4 years or thereabouts we'd pack up and get shipped somewhere new. Early 1989, a wonderful opportunity arose and dad took it. A 16 hour flight later, and we were stationed at N.A.S Sigonella, Sicily. I guess I was about, ohhh 10 or 11 at the time. Those years were blurred save those pinpricks of memory that still haunt me. That still plague my dreams from time to time.

Our first home there was an apartment in a complex called "Bellavista" far from the Naval base. There was a waiting list to move into Base Housing that generally ran for about a year and a half's wait. Until your time to move, you had to live amongst the locals wherever you could. Bellavista was a beautiful place... we lived on the upper floor

of the complex and had a wonderful view of the countryside off our back balcony. At night, one could look up at the night sky and see a thin trail of fiery red lava slowly ebbing from still active Mt. Etna. And in the morning, everything left out in the open was often found to be blanketed ever so slightly in volcanic ash, almost like a light dusting of snow.

But naturally, as perfectly nice as Bellavista was, it wasn't meant for us for long. The landlord's daughter was pregnant, engaged... and homeless. Guess who got the boot? So we moved, with the landlord's assistance, into another home. Motta S. Anastasia, a little cobblestone-streeted town near Catania, and much closer to the Navy base. The day we drove up to the new place, I felt ill. Of course, nothing was thought of this at the time, but I'd swear in retrospect I was being told something. The place was a 3 story house with an apartment on each floor. I really don't remember the neighbors, but both were similarly Navy families. And I can imagine I pissed them off a lot with the screaming.

Dad unlocked the door and proceeded into the small entryway. The cobblestone street gave way to a marbled floor entrance and a matching set of marble stairs up to the second floor, which was our new home. The place was stunningly beautiful. Marble floors... glass french doors into the living room area... balconies attached to nearly every room, save the one that was to be mine. Claw foot bathtub...bidet... all the modern conveniences expected of a home in Europe.

I walked into the room that was going to be mine. Small, simple, square and quite cold. To the left, at the end of the wall was a door covered with a "persiana." Basically, a form of window blinds made from heavy horizontal flaps that was operated via a cloth strap attached to the wall. I pulled it up to see that the door was mostly glass and beyond it was a very small "room" lined with brick along the floor and walls. I opened the door and stepped into the room and looked up to discover the room extended all the way up through the third floor and up to a hole in the roof. There was no covering on the hole either... it went straight into open air. The shaft allowed a fair amount of light to shine into the only room in the house without a window in it, which I thought was pretty damn cool initially.

The chill seemed to come from the room, despite the glaring sun nearly directly overhead. It was then I heard the first whispers. Like... if you were to take a wire brush and softly rub the stiff bristles against your jeans. At the time, I attributed it to echoes off the brick... but I couldn't help but feel weird about it. It wasn't coming from any discernable direction or source... but it surrounded me like a blanket, as if sound could be tangible and touchable. It pressed in gently on my ears like pressure on an aircraft ascending or descending. I turned to leave and I noticed a glinting drain in the middle of the floor. It was obviously for rainwater to drain away but my nausea increased when I saw it. My stomach gnawed at itself as I ran out of there and I swear I saw the drain cover jiggle a bit on my way out. I lowered the persiana quickly and rejoined the family in the living room, shaking and sick as a dog.

Now granted... a little brick room was far from the norm for paranormal ghostly stuff. But try telling that to whatever was in there. Christ. For weeks and weeks, I'd get up the nerve to open the persiana in broad daylight and risk a peek... only to stumble back from the door sick as all hell to my stomach and trembling. I tried telling my parents of course... but an 11 year old's ramblings about a scary brick room generally get chalked up to too many "Freddy" and "Jason" movies. The whisperings rarely stopped at night.

They were persistent from the time I laid down until I finally forced myself into slumber. Often, I'd wake up in the middle of the night to silence, and then the whisperings would start up again, as if it was waiting to make sure I was awake.

There was never any real words to the whispering... just a hollow "ksssh sshhhaww hisssshhhhh haaahhh ooooshhhh aaashhhhh" that seemed to repeat, but never in the same cadence. There was no emotion behind it either that I can remember. It wasn't angry, it wasn't sad nor happy. Just there. Always fucking there.

One night, after about 2 months of this, I was awoken by a particularly horrifying dream. I seemed to start having those dreams after we moved in... I had never had constant nightmares prior. But I awoke from the dream with the feeling that something was terribly, terribly wrong. Immediately my eyes darted to the door... and saw that the persiana was up. Now, European goons with experience, back me up... Persianas are about the noisiest damn things to have in a house. They're generally metal slats hooked in with metal hooks that grind and squeak loudly in protest as they're pulled open. There was no way in hell that the persiana, which was always closed, could have been opened without waking up everyone in the house. But sure enough, it was open about 3/4 of the way up the damned door. A bit of moonlight reflected off the bricks in the shaft and into my room with a dull bluish tone. I lay there for hours, paralyzed in my bed, but unable to look away from the door, lest there be something there when I looked back. Eventually, I just conked out...

The next morning crept up finally and I was freed from my paralysis. I ran to the door amidst a wave of nausea and pulled the persiana shut as fast as I could. There was a light dusting of volcanic ash on the brick floor and I'd swear I could make out footprints or scuffing in it. Mom, still asleep at the time, yelled at me from across the hall after hearing the noise, but I couldn't care less.

Over the course of the next 3 months, it was the same routine. The whisperings never faltered. The persiana would be found at least 2 to 3 times a week opened, and the blackness of the room would stare out at me in my bed. Then one night, it was different. I still have nightmares of this incident and it makes me cringe and want to curl up in a ball still whenever I conjure it up. I had awoken again in the midst of a terrible nightmare. And sure enough, the persiana was up, but this time it was all the way up. The moonlight was barely filtering in that night, but I'd swear I could make out something there in the room. It felt like I was at just the right angle for me to see whatever it was, and if I were to move the slightest bit, I'd lose sight of it. It was a small sphere that shimmered like a soap bubble does. But it was so faint I could barely make it out. I watched as it hovered there for the longest time. It began to shrink like some TVs used to do when you turned them off... shrink into a tiny dot of light.

But before it winked out, it flashed and expanded. It did so at an alarmingly fast rate and solidified into the form of a woman. She looked to be in her early to mid thirties, dark curly hair... definitely a local Sicilian. When she became "whole" and a solid image, she began shrieking and pounding on the glass doors with both fists. Her head swiveled wrong on her neck, shaking back and forth like if you put a teakettle on a stick and shook the stick around. Her eyes were completely black and full of anger and hatred... The skin around her mouth flapped loosely, giving me glimpses of her teeth and tongue and her hair was tossing around violently. Some sort of liquid oozed in small spurts from the corners of her mouth and flecks of whatever it was flew as she shrieked. Her screaming was horrific and nonsensical, and all I could do was scream back. My dad

charged into the room to my bed, thinking I was having a nightmare. She shrank back from the door and... ugh. She slithered down the drain somehow. She twisted and distorted and I'd swear I could hear her bones splintering and cracking as she wound herself down into it. It was awful and to this day, dad says he's never heard anyone scream so inhumanly before. I often ask him jokingly if he meant from me or her.

CANIS LATRANS

Wife Doppelganger

Let me see if I can't dig up something interesting. These threads combined with a bit of Humper Monkey really drew me to this site to begin with so I might as well contribute right?

Weird shit happens to me frequently enough as to seem pretty mundane and boring, only very rarely does something happen that really gets me, and the most recent something of that caliber happened just a few months ago.

Little bit of background for ya, my wife Ash and I have been married for four or five years and live in a little two story town house. Pretty normal place, living room downstairs with the kitchen and two bedrooms upstairs. We have recently got rid of a troublesome roommate so having the place all to ourselves has been really nice. She works at a bakery while I'm prepping for school and things are goin' pretty damn fine for us.

The day it happened was completely routine. She gets up and goes to work, I putter about doing bored guy stuff. She comes home, I make dinner, see to it I make her laugh (My sworn duty as a husband) and talk about the regular bullshit married people talk about. We go to bed and as I'm dozing off she plays her gameboy until she zonks.

I pop awake at like three in the morning for some reason. It was one of those nice fresh "Bam your awake now motherfucker!" awakenings with zero sleep fallout, I love those. I had to take a leak and figured that what woke me up. Go to the upstairs bathroom and do my thing, and figure since I'm awake I might as well brew some coffee or get some breakfast ready for Ash. So I head downstairs, and immediately notice a few things that are off.

The living room is lit and the TV is on to some ridiculous infomercial, might have been the "Is Colon Cleansing Hype?" one. I think it was because I distinctly remember the guy talking being so strange looking, fake tan and I swear he was wearing make up. I digress, but that guy really is weird looking. Anyways, TV is on and I notice Ash sitting on the sofa across from it. I stop at the bottom of the stairs and look at her. She's sitting upright, hands on her lap, just watching the commercial. "Hey, I didn't know you were up, good morning." I sez. She's still watching the commercial, has her everpresent smile on and says back, "Yes." I start to head to the kitchen when she turns her eyes to me without moving her head and asks, "Would you please hand me the remote?" I stop, turn and look at the coffee table that's between her and the couch, and the remote is sitting right there. "Dude, it's right there." I say pointing, it's seriously within reaching distance of where she is sitting. She's looking right at me, still not moving her head and she has some of the clearest blue eyes of anyone I've ever met. "Yes" she sez.

I didn't think any more of it really, yeah she could have obviously reached out and took

the remote off the table, but maybe she was meditating or practicing ninja stillness skills or whatever. We are irregular people on occasion.

So I walk over to pick up the remote and hand it to her and about three steps in I get this feeling. I'm almost within arms reach of both her and the remote and every hair on my body just goes apeshit. Goosebumps from my cheeks down my back. My heart rate goes from calm and normal to "Sonic the Hedgehog is Drowning Music" without any warning. It hit me so hard I felt faint. My fingertips are quivering, if I hadn't taken a piss moments before I would have right then. Some of you have described this feeling better than I can, and you'll know it well enough. My body is saying, NO. It's like a biological prey reaction, its how I imagine deer feel right before they bolt. I'm not exactly paralyzed but near enough to it. She still hasn't moved, just watching me with those calm, clear and safe eyes.

The guy on the TV is still talking about how science proves flushing your ass with water makes you a happier person, gets rid of the toxins.

I'm getting tunnel vision, and little sparkles at the edge of my vision, the kind you get when you stand at attention with your knees locked like a recruit. I'm going to pass out, I am completely familiar with this progression of sensations. The twinkling, the sparkly chills and then bonk. I manage to break eye contact with her and stare at the remote and back away slowly. It's weird how I keep bringing up the anal hygienist on the commercial, but his weirdly androgynous voice was I think actually giving me something to focus on other than what was happening, as absurd as it may sound.

I manage to back up to the stairs and put a foot on the first step, the oh shit feeling is still there, but the twinklings are gone so I don't feel like I'm going to pass out anymore, but I feel...argh, like if I take my eyes off that remote I am fucked. The second I look away, when she isn't in my peripheral vision anymore its done. I can't blink, I don't dare shut my eyes, and even though I'm breathing steadily enough my heart is just going nucking futz. I can hear it, I'm fucking positive so can she.

Felt like I was on that first step for hours. Couldn't have been too long in hindsight, but right then it was forever. Finally though, I took a dose of fuck it and as calmly as I could turned and went up the stairs. I turned my eyes away and focused up at the top of the steps. I refused to look to my sides, I refused to look into the living room. I head up the stairs, and I can just feel slow movement behind me. I know if I book it I'm fucked, like that would be uncorking the bottle of very bad shit under pressure thats behind me, so I don't, but oh lord do I want to.

I make it to the top of the stairs and turn to go into my bedroom, I notice the lights are off downstairs, so is the tv. I can feel her at the foot of the stairs looking up at me but oh man I do not have the balls to look back. I step into my room, shut the door behind me and make my way back to my bed in the dark. I'm feeling around, my heart is still fit to burst. I feel a sleeping cat, Sam my erstwhile buddy and the only cat I havn't ever wanted to strangle despite him being a complete asshole at all times. I feel around Sam, find the edges of the blankets and then I feel my wife's foot. She's warm and sleeping like a pile of rocks. She isn't making any noise but I can feel her rythmic breathing. I slip into bed, shut my eyes and throw the blankets over my head like a fucking six year old.

I still don't know if I actually managed to go to sleep after that, I think I just stayed up until she woke up to the alarm at six in the morning. I do know that at sometime around

noon that next day I passed out so hard, it was like I hadn't slept in days

Grandpa and his Wife-in-a-Jar

My grandfather was not a wicked cool irish dude laying down coherent and protective folklore to protect his line. He was a half-mad indian who claimed his father was a coyote and his mother a stone carved into a rude simulacra of a woman. His eccentricities drove my own father away and deep into fundamentalist christianity, but to me he was just a wildly entertaining old man who told some of the best stories and always had some horrible joke to tell his grandkids. I remember not too long before I started high school he told me the story of his first wife and what had happened to her.

When he was young and vigorous he had been a bit of a hobo and wandered through various towns as the need arose. In one town he met this pretty little thing whos father happened to be either a preacher or the mayor, or quite possibly both. She was a white girl with red-gold hair, fresh eyes and lips that went from innocent to illicit in half a second. She taught at a small school and he chatted her up one day as she was walking to her home. Things progressed, and my Granpa has this way with words even when he was crazy old and half senile the dude could talk like words were syrup and you were an unsuspecting pancake. They get to romancing and he remembers her having kisses that were described as "A warm girl dipping her toes into cold water before being pushed in screaming by one of her friends."

For many days he would walk her home and spend time with her, and on some nights she would sneak out of the house to go into the bush with him and do crazy Granpa things. She'd always ask his name, but he'd never give her the same one twice. Likewise she knew to play his game and would change her name every time she told it to him. Soon enough rumors started popping up around town about some nasty indian that was courting a white woman, and since my Grandpa was the only indian around people started giving him trouble. He got beat up a few times, and one guy threatened to burn him but my Granpa was stupid and brave in equal amounts and didn't give up. There was drama in the girl's house as her father had suspicions and eventually things started to get really heated. In the height of it all Granpa and this girl snuck off and got married in the old way off at the edge of town by an old black woman whom my Granpa knew but never could understand. "She talked like a french fish thrown out of a pond," He said. They exchanged locks of hair, and other momentos and old stuff like that with that lady mumbling at em.

So they secretly married and had a coupla nights of crazy fun and planning on maybe going further west to maybe California. Of course the stories dont ever work out with the happily ever after crap, especially regarding him. They're hanging out at a soda place talking about their dreams and planning on leaving within a few days when her father, brothers and a bunch of folks from her church stop in on their way home from services. Shit goes south fast. The father is embarassed and irate, on top of having been terrified for the past week or so at the disappearance of his daughter. Threats and roughousing commense. Granpa is fixing to get lynched and he knows it, but he also loves his wife and won't back down or run away. A real fight breaks out and the father is cursing him for being a "red devil," and "wandering satanist," and all sorts of other unkind things. Granpa gets beatin' up bad, near death the way he told it and his wife is drug off crying his names.

They lock her up in her room at the house and warn his broken and bloodied ass to get

out of town or the next time they see him, they will kill him. I guess they were gonna beat some sense in to her or starve her straight, or maybe inject some apparently much needed Jesus into her.

Granpa's not having any of it though, and this is when shit gets weird. He's got these little wooden dolls he carves, blocky ugly little things with big teeth and square eyes. He hides out in the woods not far from her house and he gets to carving these things. He carves a God damned army out of em, each one has a sprig of some plant on top of it's head arranged to make it an individual and he just mass produces the things. At night he starts creepin' around that house leaving them in strange places. Up on a window sill, next to an overturned dog food bowl, a whole bunch on top of the door like the old water bucket on the head prank. Every night he does this, and every night he can hear her crying up there in her room, just sobbing all broken hearted. He tries to get up there, but can't quite reach so he just goes to work scaring em harder. He gets a hold of one of their cats and guts it on their doorstep, leaving one of his little dolls standing there with a flint knife in it's blocky hand. Starts scratching up the walls and whispering underneath windows. "Give her back, give her back or I'm gonna get you." stuff. For a week or two he does this, and her sobbing up in that room is driving him mad. Finally he starts asking help from places help is better off not being asked from. He talks to the old black lady who talks funny, and he asks Grandmother Spider to help him out too.

It's the next day after he talks to Spider that he hears the news while he's hiding in some bushes waiting for someone to come out of the house. Some mailman and a brother of hers are talking through screen door. "It's a shame" they say, "So broken up and twisted over that unnatural love to that walking devil of a man that she gone and done that terrible thing to her parents." They go on talking about that until Granpa realizes what exactly they're saying, he said when he heard "Only place you can go to after that is hell, ain't no place in God's kingdom for those what do that." He knew what had happened. He poked around a bit for more information and sure enough, what he feared had happened. His wife had taken her life the night they dragged her away from him, threw herself down the stairs when they tried to lock her in her room. Though some reckoned she had fallen on accident, or was maybe thrown down by her angry father, so there was a chance she could go ahead and go to heaven.

He was broken hearted to say the least. More than that though he was angry, the kind of crazy angry only he can really get, like stupid crazy scream at the moon angry. So he did, he went to screaming and cursing and calling down all sorts of foul shit. He got help too. He took chicken feet and bound them with spiderweb and he terrorized her family, he bound nasty things to those dolls of his and he left them everywhere. Every night that girl just kept on sobbing up in her room, even though she was still pretty damn dead. Eventually police started getting involved, and some folks went to really looking for him. Around then he figured it was time to leave, but before he did he finally managed to climb up to that window of hers and open it up.

The way Granpa tells it, he caught his wife in a jar and left one of those little dolls on her bed with a broken neck and a tuft of hair on it's head. Then he booked. I wish I could say that story had an awesome scary ass ending to it, but it doesn't really. It was one of his favorites, and though it changed every time he told it, that's the best approximation of all the different versions I could fix. He still had that jar though, and it's chilly to the touch. Just an old empty mason jar sealed with wax. But if you press your lips to it, it gets warm real sudden.

Tikbalangs

A long time ago I spent some weeks in the Phillipines, with a group of people called Nigridos. Pretty deep jungle work, the forest around the areas they lived could get really dense, and the smell...oof, jungle smells like swamp-ass smuggled in a dogshit bag. They were awesome people though, very good at the things they did, and from a much different world than I had come from.

Weird shit and boogie-men were pretty much acknowledged as real, they would tell stories, but these aren't the "Make shit up to entertain your guests," stories, these were more instructional, boring and without embellishment. They also ate some bizarre stuff, and that was part of the reason we were there, learning to survive in a place that's pretty much an evolutionary arms race and everything else has a head start on you.

Coupla weird things happened while I was out there. Not the least of which was a conversation I had with one of our guides as we were rummaging around in the bush. We were setting traps and poking at different plants when I lit up a cigarette. My guide made a short hand-waving gesture at me, both hands palm down waved downwards.

"Put that out, put that out." he said. He had a kind of flat affect to his voice, and these guys are usually pretty quiet out there.

Me: "Dude it's hot, it smells like a dead whore and I got bugs on me, I'm not putting it out, eat balls, smoke keeps the bugs off."

Him: "Is that tobacco?"

Me: "Ya, I don't pack anything bigger than that, you want one?"

Him: "Yes, but don't smoke here, not near the trees."

I hand him a cigarette and he tucks it behind his ear. Cigarettes are like currency in a lot of places, even if you don't smoke and you go travelling in odd locales, carry a pack of smokes with you, you won't be disappointed. Anywho, he won't go any further until I put the damn thing out so I dash it and give him a bored, pissed-off look.

Me: "Alright it's out, what's the fuckin' deal then? We got like feral baboons or something gonna jump me for it?"

Him: "I don't know what you are saying, but this isn't a good place for tobacco smoke, teekbalangs live around here."

Me: "The hell did you just say?"

Him: "Teekbalang." He points upwards, "They like cigars, if you smoke around here they will take you up into the trees and rape you."

Me: "Wait...what? What the fuck? Rape me up in the tree?"

Him: "Yes, very uncomfortable."

I could imagine it as very uncomfortable. The rest of our outing passed pretty uneventfully as I had put out my cigarette and thus avoided rape from something that lived in the trees. Later on I did some digging around and discovered that Tikbalangs are these retarded looking horse

headed dudes that chew cigars and frequently abduct the shit out of people for little to no reason. While nothing supernatural happened there, it was just the flat matter-of-fact manner in which he had said such things that struck me as really bizarre. It wasn't a game, they had their games, this wasn't one. It was just instructions on how to not get raped by arboreal jungle ogres that lived in that specific area.

Manangallan

One of the more flat out creepy things that happened was when I was called in to assist with a birth in the next village over. Having some medical experiance (corpsman woo!) I lived for this shit and so, hopped on this ridiculous little bike thing made out of two-by-fours and scrounged wheels, rode down a couple huge ass hills and bam there we are. The village was nothing fancy, same shit you see in documentaries, pretty basic accomodations and nothing more advanced than a simple radio. I don't mean to disparage the people when I say the place was pretty primitive, the people were awesome, just different and they didn't have any of the shit we use and take for granted on a daily basis. The kids ate spiders, did I mention they ate some crazy shit? No joke, first thing I see when we ride in is this little kid in a blue superman t-shirt chewing on what I assumed was a cooked or pickled tarantula. Those taste terrible in my opinion.

Anyways, there was a young lady who was in labor and showing signs of a difficult incoming birth so I get together with the villages nurse-midwife type and we get to work. Signs are pointing towards a possible breach birth, and this girl is fucking tiny. We're in this little hut off to the side, helping her along and I'm making sure she has enough fluids, set up an IV and administer what meds I figure will do the most good. The midwife was puttering around doing things by routine perfection and made me look like a clumsy ass. Hours pass and it starts getting dark. Its just the three of us when the birth really gets going and this little thing is just screaming bloody murder and bleeding all over the god damned place. The midwife is telling me it's likely the baby won't survive, but the mother is healthy and strong. I'm nervous about losing both because there was a lot of blood out where it wasn't doing any good and the girl's breathing was getting shallow periodically. While we we're working I notice this old bat of a woman come in and stand quietly off to the side. I assume it's the girls mother or something and don't say anything about it. Shit finally starts to wrap up and the midwife manages some sort of judo birth-canal arm wrestling manuever and we have ourselves a slightly blue-lipped baby girl. After some work she comes around and starts twitching and being a baby, I hand her to the midwife who is working on the placenta and it looks like theres thankfully no tearing or remaining attachments that could cause some serious damage, at least from what we can tell.

So pretty much mission accomplished, a messy and painful birth, like they all are, but not a fatal one. I'm feeling pretty good and give a smile and a nod to the old woman who had come in and stood silently off to the side watching us the whole time. The midwife sees me do this, turns and notices her finally. She hissed. Women who hiss are scary, it's a weird and hateful noise. Old women are even worse, theres this old vitriol in it that just burns, it's vile and makes you feel so very bad. But old filipinas hissing? Good god damn, if theres anything I learned from my time over there it is to never, under any circumstances be on the recieving end of one of those hisses. It's a poison green declaration of absolute contempt that makes my damn bones shudder and my balls tighten. So yeah, she hisses at this old goat of a lady who came in and the old goat just stares at her before hanging her mouth open and making this horrible smacking noise.

The old bitch has no teeth, has a face like a wrinkled old anus and is giving off this miasma of just filthy bad. Tagalog, or the local dialect thereof comes from the midwife with a volume and a rapidity that prevents me from ever translating it. I'm not good with tagalog but I got the distinct feeling that everything she was saying to the old woman was profane. The old intruder makes this weird inward moaning sound. There was a movie, the Grudge, with this dead japanese woman who made this groaning sound. It was like that, but inward and hollower. Not as growly, but with this very weird hungry sound to it. Like a cat yowling backwards.

I'm sort of at a loss for what to do, so I'm standing there watching this, the mother's fingers are digging into my arm strong enough to leave me bruises and I have the baby in the crook of my other arm. The kid is still twitching and fussing, but hasn't made any noise yet. The mother I think is praying, pretty frantically.

The midwife keeps screaming and this old toothless howling woman-thing holds her arms out towards me and makes this weird mewling noise before kind of grasping in my direction with her fingers. It was a comically "Gimme dat baby," gesture, it's intent was pretty obvious. Awful kind of her since I wasn't proficient in the local language. I was not gonna give her dat baby. Midwife is still cussing up a storm, and I figure well, I better make my position known. I shift the baby and set it beside the mother and flip off the old woman. I know it's a pretty specific gesture, but I think I got my intent across. This pisses off the old bat and she just lets out this awful slobbery noise. She's got saliva running down her face in thick ropes and her mouth is this wide foul black spot on a face thats looking more and more horrific by the moment. Old folks can really be creepy to look at and this ain't helping much.

Without warning the midwife grabs the placenta that she'd drawn up from the pan at the foot of the bed, screams some more and throws it at the old woman with great force. What happened next was sudden, far too sudden and absolutely gross as all hell. Old hag, who'd been focusing her attention on me for the past few moments just instantly turns, grabs the placenta and shoves the whole damn thing in her mouth. Like a fat kid eating spaghetti, bam, slurp. I'm not sure if the velocity of the placenta ever altered after it had been thrown, it was a perfect catch and redirect. She moved goddamn fast too, way too fast for an old broken ass lady. I had hardly registered what just happened when the hag left. It was like she had bungee cords attached to her back under high tension and she flipped a catch somewhere. Whoosh, backwards, out the door. She went out with such speed that the mat on the inside floor went flying. I wriggle lose from the mother and run out after her, intent on...I don't know, something, perhaps more rude gestures but theres nothing out there, just jungle, the bitch was gone.

After that, things went calm pretty quickly. The midwife continued her work with the mother, and the baby started squalling finally. I pass out in a chair in the corner and wake the next morning to find the mom sound asleep and the midwife still going about her business, which happens to be her shooin me off.

Many days later I told that story to one of the nigridos, the same one who had warned me about the equine-aspected brutes of molestative intent in hopes of some sort of answer. I described it as best I could and he said I had seen a manangallan. It's a hard weird word to say, ma-NAN-gal-lan, but you say it really fast. At first I thought he meant penangallan, which I've heard about but he told me it was different, or at least different here. Now that I think of it, he was pretty liberal with his B's so he may very well have

said banangalla or benangallan. Long story short, the horrible woman was some sort of undead baby-sucking vampire thing that could be assuaged with either fresh placenta or dissuaded entirely with fire and thorny branches. I'm imagining massed firepower could probably dissuade her as well.

I have more wierd jungle shit I'll dig it up later. Also, still enjoying these stories guys, some good stuff here, and good storytellers as well.

Face-jacket

For a long period of time I was stationed in Okinawa Japan, which was a gorgeous and very brightly colored place. It's japan, so it's weird as fuck to begin with, but the Ryukyu islands were a special and colorful weird as fuck. The island is heavily urbanized, but there is still jungle in between the housing areas and the commercial districts, and it is crazy thick. This wasn't the low-brush jungle of the philipines, this place was just a morass of vegetation. The cities and towns themselves were very clean too, much cleaner than any other place I've been to, and the smell wasn't too bad. It smelled of the ocean, cooked meats and seagull shit, with only a little of the rank rotten vegetation smell you typically get in jungle areas.

When I say the jungle was kind of inbetween places I mean just that. You could be walking down a heavily travelled sidewalk past a mall or supermarket or something and on the other side of the street, bam, impenetrable foliage and weird noises. They had these snakes there, Habu, poisonous and hilariously aggressive that would screw around right at the borders of jungle-meets-city and chase you around if you were unlucky enough to draw their attention. Between them and the ganguro kids I got my fair share of mundane heebie-jeebies. Ganguros are...well, shit, look it up on the internet, I don't really have words for it. Pleasant enough kids, very animated, but just a weird subculture.

Anyways, the fun stuff. I was spending a lot of my free time poking around the old mythologies and folklore of the area, and as you might have guessed Japan has a crazy deep history of scary monsters, ghosts of every imaginable variety and some really bizarre occurances. I was in particular digging around for information on the Ryukyunesse version of the kappa. Kappas are pretty well known, turtle shelled dudes with a dent on the tops of their heads, dig cucumbers and suck the blood out of people who get too close to their river homes, yadda-yadda. Interestingly enough the part thats left out is that these things suck the blood out from your anus, leaving a bloated corpse with a distended rectum. This sounds gross, but it actually makes sense. When someone drowns they'll go through a coupla different stages of decomposition, bloat occurs and the rectum does get distended, sometimes grossly. I figured people dragging up someones body from a river and seeing the malformed orifices wouold probably whip up some bizarre creature to account for somthing that would seem so unprecedented.

I thought I had it all figured out and went to a coupla different places to test my ideas and see how they were recieved from my various sources, which were old people. Old people who usually didn't like foreigners and eventually REALLY started to dislike me for bothering them all the time to boot. One of the guys I was always talking to about this stuff was a guy named Fred Nakamura. Fred had a more japanese first name I'm sure, but he never told me what it was. He was the awesome old goat with a collection of some really nasty and neat stuff. He had jars of preserved fish of hideous aspect, haunted mundane objects wrapped in paper wards and books, so many awesome

books. He was a great source of information, and my time spent in his dinky little house was usually occupied by me poking around and finding something weird, like a jar filled with frog eggs and asking him what the fuck. Then he would tell me what the fuck and I'd be happy and buy him an Orion, which was this pretty awesome beer.

One night Fred and I are getting heavy into the creepy stories and I'm complaining that while Japan has an awesome history of weird spooky shit I had yet to really see anything spooky as all fuck. The entire island was like one big cocktease for me so far. All this lore, legendry and history and I had yet to meet a woman whose neck was like a snake or a hopping one eyed haunted umbrella (I shit you not, one of the yokai things is supposed to be exactly like that). Fred gets tired of my whining and pretty much calls me on my shit saying that if I was faced with something really and truly terrifying I'd lose my shit and bail, and everyone knows americans are all talk, especially the ones on this island, which was mostly marines and some airforce. I cop attitude towards that and puff up a bit, but he's just merciless, goin' on about how folks like me are all talk, no bark and no balls, blah blah blah.

I know where he's going with this so I play along to the stereotypes. It's polite, it'll get me what I want and it makes the old guy happy to bash someone mercilessly to do it. I start bragging and he gives me a dare, and I take it in a heartbeat. There's a little quiet creek not far from his house, and at that creek there's a concrete aqueduct thing that is apparently home to something pretty god damned nasty, he'll offer to take me there if I don't chicken shit out and bail. If I do, he'll mock me, my ancestors, my branch of the military, my favorite color and my first dog for the end of my days. Hells yes. I am in like Flynn.

So this creek is in one of the wierd little sideways jungles not too far away from the Kadena airforce base. Nothing too fancy about it, it just missed development and is pretty rarely troubled by people. Its dense bush so we walk along the creek-edge which was rocky. The water was amazingly clean too for the first part of our trip. Crystal clear stuff, only occasionally did I see a styrofoam cup or anything normal like that. I could hear the streets to either side, people talking on their phones and music playing on the overhead speakers, also cicadas, always those god damned cicadas. So, we keep going the length of this little creek and very suddenly it starts getting choked and nasty. I went on about how pretty it was specifically to illustrate how nasty it got and how quickly. One second I'm looking at an arrowhead spring water commercial, the next, there's dead cats all over the place and it smells like someone slapped a leper with a colostomy bag. It was gross, stinky and uncomfortably warm and humid. Fred just keeps chugging along and pretty soon the jungle starts reaching over the creek and it's getting darker. Sure enough we come to a bunch of large concrete pipes that serve as some sort of overflow collection.

The pipes were pretty big, there were three of em, and you could walk right in without having to duck your head, and they were expectedly dark as hell. Fred points at them and tells me, "Alright badass, you march up the one on the right, only the right ok, you got a flashlight?" I pull out my little kick ass flashlight I've had for years, the thing is trusty as a crow's eye and give him a smug grin, "Good to go Fred, when I get out of there your buying me a girlfriend for the evening." He shrugs and laughs and says something in japanese before shooing me into the hole.

I start to head in, I've got pretty solid all-weather boots so I'm walking into the pipe from the middle of the creek, not too worried about foot rot or anything like that since

I'm not planing on spending too much time out here. As I go in Fred yells at me from back up the creek, "Don't be a bitch!" I'm like, whatever dude, and in I go.

The pipes dark as hell, and crawling with spiders. The creek narrows out and I'm able to walk on dry ground for a good distance as that little circle of light behind me gets dimmer. There's not a lot of graffiti, which actually bothered me. Usually these places are rotten with tags and whatnot but this place only had a very few markings, most noticeable a bright red and yellow mark that said "PISS GO YEAH!!" which was awesome. I peed on it and then went my way. The tunnel curved, cutting me off from my lightsource at the rear and my little flashlight was doing a brave attempt at keeping the corridor in front of me illuminated pretty damn well. Eventually I couldn't see much to my sides though, which is how the cistern chamber caught me off guard. I was going along and I just got this feeling, halfway between spider-senses tingling and a noticeable change in pressure. I turned and scanned my sides and rear with the flashlight and discovered that I was standing in a pretty god damn big circle room with a low ceiling. Spooky place, it was awesome and carried the noise of my footsteps like crazy, I could hear my steps bouncing around all over the place. As I was marveling at my surroundings I noticed on the far end of the chamber, near a pipe that went further the walls looked, dirty...smudged with something, which from that distance I assumed to be crap. I walked up and discovered that the smudges were a little bit more defined, at first I figured it for graffiti and felt a little more relaxed, but as I got up there I realized, no, it wasn't graffiti and I began to feel a lot more worried.

They were drawings of faces. Hundreds, maybe thousands of em. Life sized renditions of faces drawn in some brown-black substances that could have been paint, feces or...yeah, the cliché writing aid of the terminally homicidal. I don't think it was blood, but it could have damn well been blood. That wouldn't have been the creepiest part though, the faces, yeesh. These things were drawn with care and great detail, and they were all recognizeably individual. No two were alike. Male, female, young and old, every inch of the far wall was faces. There was no empty space between the renditions either, and occasionally a drawing would share a jawline or an ear with it's neighbor. It felt weird too, you always feel like your being watched when your alone but the sensation I was getting was uncanny and potent. I was being watched, by this wall. I just stared at em for the longest time, almost wanting to touch em to feel if they were just two dimensional or more. What broke my reverie was a face near the floor, at the edge of the tunnel leading deeper into the pipeworks. The faces weren't all japanese, some of em were anglo and african, and there was one face that stood out to me for its familiarity. I freaked right the fuck out. I turned to get my bearing and make haste out the exit, figuring I could haul ass until I saw the exit, calm down and saunter out like a badass and still pass my dare. My light flashed around finding the passage I had come in from, but in it's travel it passed over something and I only saw it for a half second. Hunched over, raggedy-assed clothes, blank white eyes. It was a good coupla yards from me but I just didn't have the balls right then to put my light back on it. I wasn't alone in here, and whatever was there with me was right over there. I froze, checked my breathing and felt my heart go system critical. I could hear him breathing in there with me, the labored kind of breathing a COPD patient has, laborous, unsustaining breaths. Not loud, but long and troubled.

A long pregnant period of time passed were I was just waiting to either shit myself or bolt. He broke the silence first, and his voice was high pitched like a girls, real shy sounding, like chimes or a voice you'd hear belting out some jump-rope poem in a school yard. "Would you take tea?" I gave an involuntary shudder and tried to say no

thank you but it came out as "eeee."

I heard him move towards me and I was gone, all my muscles suddenly decided to work for me and the whole freezing thing let up. I took off like a rabbit on fire. When I was young, I could run. Not so much now, I still have the legs, but the rest of me has gone pretty happily soft. Back then though, kapow, off like a shot. I was half coyote, half gazelle, I could outrun anything. My grandfather once told me that his dad won a bet against the devil in a race, and had since never been short of things to run away from. Right then, I was the Flash, I left a trail of splashes far behind me, and even though it was dark as a beggar's future I moved without fear forward, because I knew that no matter what was in front of me, it could not be worse than what was behind me. I'm lucky I didn't brain myself on the wall of the pipe. When I saw that circle of light that said "Outside! Safe!" I leaned into it and shot out of the mouth of that tunnel like a cannonball. Fred was standing there having a cigarette and I grabbed his raggedy old ass and kept going.

A couple of hours later, back at his house he gave me a sound bitching out and mocked me mercilessly. I was entirely too happy and terrified to bother shooting him down and took his abuse with a broad smile. "Dude, what the fuck, did I just get the shit scared out of me by some old blind artist or something? I mean seriously!?" Part of me figured that there was very well a practical reason for what I had just experienced. Japan is rife with subcultures and weirdos, and it's not unlikely to run into some crazy old pervert hiding in a pipe who draws the faces of people he sees every day, and maybe the blank white eyes I had thought I saw were like, sunglasses or something, maybe he was wearing contacts. More likely, Fred set me up and a buddy of his was in there waiting to scare the shit out of the american kid. If that had been the case, I was lucky I went with flight instead of the alternative, I had enough bad shit on my conscience, don't need to add mercilessly beating an old man to a pulp on top of it.

Fred started telling me the story of what that pipe was and what it used to be. A long time ago, before the war and hell...before the japanese, there was a cave near there that had since been filled in. The cave was the home of an old man who took faces from people and made them into a kind of cloak he would wear as he went out hunting. If he saw someone whos face he wanted to take, but couldn't right then for whatever reason, he'd go home to his cave and with one long ass nail and his own black spit, paint a rendition of their face on the wall so he'd remember it. The story says, to save yourself you had to sneak in there in the dark and smudge out your face when you found it. I got butterflies in my stomach and remembered what I had seen down there, and what I had neglected to do. I called Fred a miserable old bastard and if that thing came for me I'd never buy him a beer ever again. Fred laughed at me, called me a stupid kid, and then asked if I wanted to see more places like that. Of course I said yes.

Face-jacket, thats what the guy was called.

Echoes

Another story from the jungle, this one being the one that still gives me nightmares on occasion. Now, I can not really claim this as happening exactly as I remembered it, not in any honest sense. I remember it as happening like so however, which still has me waking on occasion in a cold sweat.

This is back in some weird little island in the philipines learning jungle survival stuff from

the nigridos. My friend Tony and I were getting the hang of some of the finer points of staying alive in a world that wanted you dead and festering with larvae. Tony is a solid guy, the kind of friend your lucky to have. He had my back, I had his, and it didn't matter what stupid shit the other decided to get himself into, he wasn't going into it alone. Seriously the guy was loyal to a fault, still is. This is actually how we ended up in the middle of the bush together god knows how many miles from whatever could be considered civilization and light years away from anything remotely safe. Part of the final test of what you learned out there was to go out alone for a coupla days and make your way back to the village. It was a basic practical test, ideally you had a nigrido shadowing you not too far off making sure you didn't get yourself gravely by being an idiot. You'd never know these guys were there though, ever, they knew this territory and knew how to work it. The jungle is dense, profoundly thick. I know you've probably heard stories about how you can walk past like...an entire ruined temple in the middle of south america and never even clue in that its there even though your practically on it's doorstep. Its true, you step ten feet from your buddy in the wrong direction, blink wrong and bam, your alone.

We had both done pretty good as far as the nigridos cared, we picked up things fast and weren't shy about doing things most westerners balk at, eating bugs, getting filthy and reaching into mysterious holes to grab whatever might be lurking in there. I had no problem with this as my dad was kind of a nutjob survivalist in my early youth and had a thing for doing things "the Traditional Way," Tony had no problems doing this stuff because he had balls the size of a C-130, loaded with tanks, and driving those tanks were condors with helmets.

Anyways, its time for the practicals, and although we were supposed to solo that noise, Tony and I basically said "no dice we're going in as a pair," to which the nigridos smiled and nodded and agreed that we were smart to demand such a thing. You never go out there alone. I always thought it was kind of a trick question thing anyways, sending your goofy ass out into the dense solo when all throughout the training they go on and on about how your a dumb shit if you go out there alone. Bonus points for us I guess right?

We get bags over our heads and led to a little riverboat. They rumble us out for a few hours and then uncerimoniously dump our asses onto the beach. The nigrido tosses us a knife, stares at us for awhile before making this weird little gesture and bugging off on his boat. I couldn't catch the exact gesture, but it was like a gang sign I guess, quick, fingers all tangled up. His boat was shit, I swear it was made out of warehouse pallets or something the like. Tony and I both figured the guy probably went up river a bit then bailed on his own craft and fixed to shadow us and keep an eye out.

With bravado fed by the others presence we went into the jungle all smiles and ego. We were good, we knew this, we were not afraid and figured this would be fun as hell, and give us some future stories to tell the ladies about and hence get laid. Tony has a knack for direction and the two of us sussed our whereabouts after only a few hours. It was daytime, so climbing a tree gave us a pretty decent view. Not a lot to see really, but somehow he figured on a direction we were supposed to go and we headed off. Moving through the jungle can be slow work, in the movies you have to hack your way through shit with a machete like indiana jones or some shit. Reality is a bit different. If you know where to step, you can avoid all the work of cutting stuff down. Along fallen logs is pretty good, up roots and the like, but dont ever put your foot alongside something like that, thats snakefood. The nigridos do it at kind of a lazy jog, we were more deliberate but still moving at a pace that was comfortable to us.

We chattered constantly, it wasn't to keep predators away, as far as we knew the island had no real big threats like cats or anything, we did it because Tony and I couldn't shut the fuck up when we were around each other. I'm sure you guys have friends like that. Those two chucklefucks in the back of the classroom in high school always snickering and loaded with jokes, that was pretty much us, in the jungle...with a single knife and something to prove. The first day was pretty damn uneventful, we didn't eat, and we spent almost the entire time moving. We found water in different places, big cone shaped leaves are good for that, and they typically come with snacks of differing squiggly varieties. We made camp up in the branches of a big goofy ass looking tree, took light watches and slept like babies. I woke up covered in bugs the size of my fingers and Tony fell off his branch and got stuck in the crook of the tree when he woke up, clumsy bastard.

The second day started out like the first, chattering, moving, high spirits. The jungle was getting smellier and bleaker as we went, I think we were close to an estuary or something because there was a briny smell. The soil went from firm with a heavy layer of dead vegetation, to black-brown silt and loose. Tony and I tried making some fire, took us awhile but we did the trick with thread from his shirt and long bendy twig to make a bow with and whatnot. We got some smoldering going, but shit out there was so wet it just made a lot of thick black smoke and never really caught. I figured if we kept some tender dry on top of our heads or something and maybe found some good dead wood we'd have something worth burning. As time went on we got to talking about old times, funny crap we had done, new ideas for pranks with which to torment our hapless buddies with and the desire to come out of this not only successful but as badass as possible. We didn't want to be the Swiss family fucking Robinson, we wanted Rambo. I mean seriously, how could anyone want anything BUT that. Imagine that crap, coming out of the bush all grim faced and scarred, with like a dead deer over your shoulder and the skulls of your enemies tied around you in a belt made out of human hair. Not that we had enemies local, but I'm sure we could make some right?

That's pretty much us. It was around mid-day Tony and I noticed this weird echo effect with the jungle. It was hard to notice because we never really shut up, but when we talked, there was this weird echo that was soft and sounded far away at first. Until he pointed it out and we started listening more carefully. Everytime we talked, there it was, that echo...it wasn't as far away as it initially sounded either, just deceptively soft. We figured it was maybe soundwaves bouncing off the broadleaf plants in the area or something and coming back at us all curved up. We weren't rocket scientists, but we weren't proper dumb either. Tony and I made a game out of it, we'd start chattering at each other and then he'd hold up his hand, fingers splayed and visually countdown with em, we'd stop mid sentence when he hit zero, and could hear the last few words said bounce around us in a weird jungle whisper. At dusk we had been getting kind of tired of the game and blew it off, but before we went up to rest Tony pulled it on me one last time. Normally echoes just kind of stop or trail off right? This time...I dunno, it just kind of looped, and it looped wrong.

The last thing I had been saying to Tony was something along the lines of "I'm a goddamned sexual tyranno-" and cut off. What we heard bouncing around us in that quiet sibilant way was, "I'm a god damned, god damned, god, god, I'm, damned." Tony and I stopped talking and just kind of stared at each other for a bit. We weren't ruling out echoes yet, though over all our time out here doing this training we hadn't ever really heard it before, or mention of it. We were both creeped right the fuck out, and when one of us is creeped, the other picks up on it and the hackles go up. We found ourselves a solid tree and that night we did not pull light watches, we pulled proper. I'm figuring a little after midnight Tony woke me up with a hand on my shoulder.

Its dark at night in the jungle, god damned dark, and noisy. The canopy over head pretty much prevents any good starlight coming through, and the skies are most always fat with gray clouds. The bugs get set to screeching at night and they don't quit for nothing. Underneath our tree something was rooting around in the bushes, even through the bugs we could both hear it. Shuffling, a quiet snort, crunches, snuffling. Sounded like a pig to me and I was set to bark at it and maybe spook it off when Tony's hand on my shoulder tenses. Then I could hear it.

Muttering in between the snuffles. A snort, some bushes rustling and a few low scattered words. Bits and pieces of sentences. It took me a second, but fuck me if it didn't sound like Tony down there pissed off and searching for something he'd lost in the bush. You know when a grumpy ass drops a contact or something and gets to searching for it muttering under his breath, it's like that. Whatever was down there was fucking talking. It wasn't making any sense though, the weirdest fucking thing. "So tits," snortsnort "Yeah the green," shuffle, "Named after fucker," rustle. Then a laugh, and I froze when I heard that. It started with my laugh, which is this goofy Mark Hamill as the Joker thing and ended with Tony's troublemaker's drawl. See we had been bullshitting for the past what, day and a half, and spent a good time laughing our asses off at eachother. Whatever the fuck that thing was down there it was like it was trying our voices on for size.

We'd both seen Predator, we'd been quoting that shit for days out here. I can't even begin to count how many times I'd just stop while one of the instructors was explaining something, stare off into the horizon and mutter, "Theres something out there, up in them trees." Which never failed to make Tony laugh like a retard. Military types watch a lot of god damned movies, and your typical boots on the ground motherfucker can quote like a champ. No lie, we can even do crazy shit like quote a movie line for line with a different cast from yet another movie. You havn't lived til you've seen a bunch of petty officers do a scene from Aliens with Thurgood from Half-Baked as the Sarge. We caught the smiliarities to our situation pretty god damned fast. It was eerie listening to this thing natter about imbecilicly down there, it had no comprehension of the noises it was making, but it was fucking making them.

Tony slid me the knife and secured himself in his spot and I kept the watch until dawn. The thing trundled off a half hour or so before daybreak. I'm no apache, but I know knives well enough to be comforted by holding one, but even that didn't break the "oh what the fuck have we gotten ourselves into," gloom that caught us.

The next day was a grim fucking thing. We weren't chattering, we weren't joking around anymore. Nerves were on edge and both of us had to have looked like someone had gutted our favorite dog. Tony did at least, I'm a goofy looking guy so I probably still looked like a run of the mill dork. Believe me, the urge to quote predator was pretty god damned strong but we just couldn't get past the feeling that we needed to be quiet and careful. Tony managed a half-hearted Arnold gargle when we were headed up a ridge, I think in an attempt to beat the gloom, but even that couldn't do it. He does a good Arnold gargle too, for those that don't know what that is, its hard to describe really its like a weirdly accented "Arghlearg" noise done in Arnies manner thats pretty unmistakable when you hear it. Wow, actually writing that down makes it seem so dumb as hell, still funny as all get out though I think.

We didn't hear that weird echo as long as we didn't talk. We were starting to get hungry though, and random bugs wasn't doing much to assuage that. It felt like, I dunno the

right description, it felt like we were being bullied if that made any sense. We couldn't talk, we weren't allowed to. That got us both feeling a little pissed off. Tony and I individually aren't anything I'd call cowards, we aren't heroes by any stretch of the word, but were not pussies. Together though, we get stupid brave. I'm sure you might see where this is leading. To us it was a natural shift. It took a few hours of grimly trudging along in the direction we believed was the right way to go for the shift to happen, but it was kind of inevitable. Screw this thing. Screw this stupid talking thing. I broke the silence proper, started bitching about the girls on this island, how they had curves like a dirt road. Tony countered immediatly that I lacked the proper gear to drive a dirt road. We started chattering again, this time aggressively, we were defying this damned spooky thing. We began the most ridiculous conversations. How do you properly screw a dolphin? Do you beach it and plug the blowhole? Do you sneak up on it in a zodiac, spear gun it's ass and go at an eye socket? Crap like that. We were uncouth savages. We were listening for that stupid echo, waiting for it.

We were not dissapointed. The echoes started up, it was hard to get a location, but the best I could figure was back and towards my side a bit. Tony scored a major victory when he said something along the lines of, "Dance around that flagpole bare-assed and body-painted like I'm a drag-queen paramount." The echo came back as "I'm a drag-queen." Tony stopped in his tracks, turned around and screamed back at it, "YOU'RE FUCKING RIGHT YOUR A DRAG-QUEEN YOU DICK EYED JUNGLE CUNT!" It was liberating, terrifying though. That was the first time we actually addressed the god damned thing. But we did, we addressed it, we acknowledged it as existing and that just sat bad. A small victory but that feeling in our guts, that wasn't the feeling you get when you win a fight. It's the feeling you get when you start a war.

When Tony had called that thing out it was a declaration of war. We both started getting hostile, not towards eachother mind you, but towards this whatever the hell it was.

We got to planning, and threatening, vocalizing the horrible things we were planning on doing to it once we caught ahold of it. I distinctly remember Tony saying something along the lines of "I'm strangle this goofy-assed thing, I'ma kill it with my bare hands." I laughed, "Dude what if it's a fuckin' nigrido and he's just screwing with us." Tony just stared at me. I shrugged, couldn't blame him for the sentiment really.

Thing is, we kept going on, we never turned around, neither of us wanted to actually stand our ground or charge off after it. There was this distinct sensation that doing so would have been one helluva bad idea. We were getting hungry though and figured that it was probably time to do something about it. There's a lot to eat in the jungle if your not shy, frogs, bugs and the like can keep you going like a trail ration, but if you want something with more substance you have to kill it, or if your some sort of fancy botanist I suppose you can tell a jungle death turnip from a potato and do it that way. We were not botanists, and I only knew which plants could get me high, unconcious or stop bleeding. Tony climbed up a tree and managed to brain some sort of monkey critter with a rock. The guy could be quiet as hell, and the monkey critters out here were curious and stupid. The specific trap we used to catch the monkey off guard was me laying down in a space between some trees and doing my best curly impression from the Three Stooges. You know the thing where you lay on your side, and start running and kind of churn circles while going "whoop whoop whoop." Well, thats what I was doing, which got a few monkeys coming down and looking at us like dude, what the fuck are you doing, and Tony hit one with a rock. We were some crafty bitches.

I managed to start an acceptable fire, previously I had taken our tinder and folded it up in a dry leaf and worn it on my head like an idiot. The campfire was tiny, but it did the trick, I cleaned the monkey critter as best I could and we cooked it old school on some sticks. The sticks caught fire frequently, and a lot of the meat burned to inedible carbon but my god it was good. We cooked the hell out of that monkey, I'm sure it was loaded with parasites, but burning the hell out of it had to help, and I figured we could get purged when we got back to our unit, or hell, just the village if I could boil some water and drop some tabs. The other monkey critters watched us eat, they were quiet, just staring. Probably should have felt bad about that in hindsight, but neither of us was feeling charitable or friendly really. Something about having meat in our bellies and actual fire, albiet a small one made us feel a lot more ready for this weird shit and we got to planning on how we were gonna handle it.

Idea one was to continue on as we were going and maybe just pick up the pace. It was the safest idea by far and Tony figured we had another day until we got to either a shitty road we could navigate off of or a larger river we could follow. Idea two was to cover ourselves in mud, arm ourselves with bows made from roots and shit and ambush the thing. I shit you not, we figured why the hell not. Idea three was to split apart at night, have each person in a different tree and stay up until whatever it was came snooting around. Whoever was in the tree it decided to investigate would signal the other who would come down and murder the hell out of it from the rear. I liked idea three and voted for it, Tony voted for two and the monkey's skull sided with me making it a unanimous vote for idea three, because Tony was italian and italians don't get to vote.

There was some threatening of eachother's life, but in the end we pretty much settled on our two tree ambush idea.

We didn't move from that site that day. We sharpened some sticks, thick short ones make good spikes. Tony let me keep the knife since I was a bit swifter with it than he was and he carried the spikes. The guy is strong, much stronger than me and I figured he could put those things to much better use than I if he could get a good line up. Figured it would go like this. It would start bothering one or the other of us who would throw a twig at his buddy. Buddy would come down and engage whatever it was, at which point the initial target would drop down and help secure the kill. We went over it a coupla different times, figured out some possible oh-shit secondary plans but really, there wasn't much to it. This thing had been creeping us out for awhile and we wanted it dead, we felt kind of elated by the thought of killing it. Turn the tables on it's ass and come out like badasses. We got ourselves motivated and I did something which is I guess kind of embarrassing but whatever. I put on warpaint. I guess thats dorky as hell. I took some of the black-silt soil we had been around, mixed it with monkey-juice and smeared three dark lines across my face. Tony thought I looked kinda badass so he did the same. We used to do this during training and paintball games, hell, once during a hide and go seek game with some corpsman girls at camp lester we did it. Yes, we played hide and go seek, with the legitmate intent of getting laid by said corpgirls, yes we smeared our face paint on the aforementioned corpgirls. He did a full on handprint on his face, it looked very Conan meets Geronimo meets a Guido. The paint tightened up into pretty solid noticeable lines when the fluids coagulated, which took all of fifteen minutes or so.

Our site was decent too, an opening in the canopy over where we had set our campfire promised that if there was any light to be had that night, we'd be able to make some use of it. We picked out our trees, climbed up there and took a few practice throws with

twigs we had nearby. I hit him in the eye, he kept aiming at my balls. Spirits were high, sort of...it was a false high, bravado I think.

Night came, and with it, bug song. High chirps and cackling buzzes all over the place. I near pissed myself when what I had assumed to be a knot of wood next to my thigh twitched and started this staccato screech that ricocheted off the trees. Was a big assed beetle thing. We lucked out in that cloud cover was lighter than it typically is and we had a good moon. Not bright by any stretch, but more than we had any night previous. We waited. Felt like forever, sitting up in a tree, trying to keep your heartbeat regular. Knowing the second we heard whatever it was we heard we'd get that adrenaline kick to the nuts that would make our whole body start shaking. I'm not sure how long we waited up there before it came. At first I missed it entirely, I was so intent on listening for it I missed it entirely. When I finally zeroed in on the snuffling, rummaging, muttering beneath me I realized I had been hearing it for some time now. It was under me. Me.

I pulled my knife up and crouched on my branch, my free hand making sure for the love of god I had a strong hold on a nearby branch. I took a few minutes to steady myself and really listen. I wanted to make sure of a few things before I alerted Tony. I desperately wanted this thing to be alone, and I wanted to get a general idea of it's size. Size wasn't too hard, judging by the heaviness of the rummaging going on beneath me it was man-sized, maybe a bit bigger but lower to the ground. As for the numbers, well fuck...I only heard one. Small comfort that.

I had a pile of little pre-snapped twigs and I grabbed the whole damn thing and tossed it towards Tony's tree. Now, remember I said Tony can be a quiet guy. I had no idea if I had hit him, or if he had started moving, I could only really guess as to the actions over on his end. I got a good grip on the branch with my legs and made to swing under it, do kind of a spider man maneuver and maybe stab downwards. It was a bit overelaborate yeah, but I used to climb trees all the time as a kid, and dangling like a douchebag was second nature. Nowadays the dangling not so much, douchebag I still got. Anyways, I'm dangling, I let go with my hands and get ready to knife this fucking thing in the head when I see it.

A huge moment of confusion washed over me when it happened. I damn near went loose and fell off my branch. Tony is looking straight up at me. He's gotta be like, four feet off the ground just lookin at me with this blank retarded look on his face. Mind you, it's pretty dark, but I can see a face...swear it looked like him, at first. Then I focus on it a bit more and notice. It has no fucking facepaint.

It's not Tony.

Shit, it doesn't even look like Tony's face anymore, it's just A face. But it's a god damned human face, looking up at me, blinking. My blood runs cold and I can feel my body come to a screeching halt. "Tony, get the fuck back up in your tree." I say.

"Up in your tree." It says back, sounding pleased with its god damned self.

I can hear Tony, the real Tony over there in his tree rustle as he gets right the hell back up in the branches. "What the hell is goin' on, what the hell, what the heeeeeell is that." He's got this angry nervousness in his voice. I've heard him like this only a few times, usually before we got our collective asses kicked by some angry merchant marines. The thing is still staring at me, and I'm making out more of it's body. It's a fucking pig. I

mean, it's body. Its got the broad rectangular barrel of a body. Its quadraped though I cant make out the distinct feet, its got a human, or at least human-ish face. "Its a pig Tony, it's just a god damned pig." I say, and the thing is mimicking me just the same as always. I can hear an exasperated sigh over in the other tree and I continue, "It's got a people face though, stay the fuck up in that tree Doc." Doc is a magic word to corpsmen, its a business word and it isn't lightly used, marines call us Doc, but usually only after we've proven ourselves I guess you could say, corpsmen rarely refer to eachother as such, unless were trying to elaborate on a point. I was elaborating my point as hard as I could, as calmly as I could, without shitting myself. I was still upside down, if I had shit myself, well...think about how unpleasant it would be to fill your pants and then have it run up your damned back and into your hair. Blech.

Man-face is looking up at me and Tony goes silent over there. We stare at eachother for along while before I manage to find purchase and swivel back upright. I'm not looking down anymore, let that thing root around.

I didn't sleep that night.

It left before morning, like it always did and Tony and I went to ground and moved out, as fast as possible. We talked little, only that what I had seen was an unquantifiable thing, I could not predict any actions outcome on something I knew absolutely nothing about. I mean shit, if it had been like a tiger or something ridiculous like that, I could have figured something out, even something stupid, but not this thing. If it had been the nigrido, well, Tony and I would have likely kicked the hell out of him, but I woulda chilled Tony out before he killed him no problem. It wasn't anything I knew though, it was wrong, and bizarre and very disturbing. We immediatly initiated idea one. We didn't hunt anymore monkees, we didn't fish, we didn't eat bugs. We drank sparingly as we went, which gave us some serious dehydration issues. Tony had an idea of where to go and thats where we went, fast.

Thank god for the river, when we found we made so many miles. We weren't playing around anymore either. The first civilian craft we saw, which was this shitty little rickshaw thing, we flagged it, asked for a lift and we got back home.

When we arrived at the village we were haggard, dehydrated, cut up and miserable. This wasn't a big surprise to the nigridos, everybody came back from the practical like that. What bothered them is the man they sent out to watch over us never came back.

That keeps me up some nights.

Winnie

This story takes place not long after I left the Navy and attempted to return to civilian life. It's an easy thing for some folks, but for me there were tribulations that complicated it. I sort of went hobo for a few years there, wandering through various places and occasionally tracking down obscure branches of my family and spending some time with em.

I had a small line of cousins in West Virginia, and this story took place there. First off, West Virginia can be absolutely gorgeous. Very densely forested, lots of mountains and hills, it was amazing. It had it's ugly side sure, most of that being found in it's people, but away from the cities and up in the hills, man...its amazing. I guess the best

description I can give is from a movie, like Last of the Mohicans, there were waterfalls and pretty damn majestic cliffs, the forests were just mind-boggling and so open and clear. Its weird though, for all the god damned grandeur of the place, the locals spent their time doing the stupidest things to keep themselves entertained.

Hanging out in front of the local Dairy Queen parking lot seemed to be Richwood's chief social ritual. These kids would pull up in their pick up trucks, talk shit and smoke pot until three in the morning. Occasionally there would be some half-hearted racing, usually at least a handful of fights and screwing. They had some decent pot though I'll give them that, home grown stuff, some of it skunkweed yeah but enough of it was noticeably nice. I was shacking up at a great aunt's place and had taken to heading down there with one of my cousins every night for the past week or so. Sure I spent plenty of time just kind of wandering around up in the hills, but these folks at the DQ were just sort of oddly fascinating. I could tell em stories as barter for various things and I made a solid amount of spending cash, cigarettes and whatever else for doing it. These guys were stupid for dares too. Some guy whos claim to fame was highschool football heroics made a name for himself one night by setting his beard on fire. I don't think he realized exactly how fast it was going to go up, or what kind of damage it was gonna' do in that short amount of time, but in under a minute he went from looking like a rugged lumberjack to a screaming chemo-patient. No one gave half a shit for him either, his brothers just loaded him up in their shitty pick up and drove him down to the clinic.

One night we're down there and I had made friends with this big doofus named Winston something-or-other that everyone called Winny. To put it politely I'm pretty sure Winny was either retarded or just inbred, or likely both. He was half again my size, his eyes were a bit too far apart and he had this hilarious slow manner of speech, which combined with the local accent (A curiously exaggerated southernish sound) made him sound twice as stupid as he actually was. I may be mean mouthing him, but we were friends, there was something I liked about the guy. Yeah he was kind of like a kid, and sure he could probably be dangerous if he lost his temper, but normally he was just this really damn friendly guy who just seemed to want to be liked and didn't get any of the jokes others had at his expense, he just liked that they laughed when he was around. These locals could get fucking nasty too. Something about the younger ones, they had eyes like racoons, just looking for something to grab onto with their grubby little paws and chew at. Winny's best attribute is that he didn't even understand their bullying. Dude ate up my stories like they were candy too, and this encouraged me to elaborate on them even further just to entertain him more. I could tell some real whoppers with this guy and he took them as gospel, it was beautiful. I'm telling him stories about how I saved a handful of beautiful japanese women from evil World War Two Shoguns who just never gave up the fight, and said rescue involved me at some point beating a tiger to death with my own severed arm and he is wide eyed and absolutely thunderstruck. This guy ended up following me around everytime I went to one of these little get togethers. Which if I'm not mistaken is how they got to calling me the Tard Wrangler, which I wasn't much appreciative of.

The one time the get together deviated from the DQ parking lot was to have a bonfire out in the middle of the woods. There was sure to be some more liberties to be had out there were the local cops couldn't idely cruise by. I was eager for it and a few of the girls gave me directions on the promise that I'd either tell em some more weird stories about my travels or bring a six pack with me. I opted for both and then some, spending what little left of my money I had to buy a case our two, which Winny was more than happy to lug around for me. Dude was tireless, he liked beer just fine but was more partial to

soda and capri suns.

We showed up at eight or nine and the bonfire was already going pretty decent. People were drunk as hell and loud. The fire was big enough I guess, lots of random shit just set to burn, I distinctly remember a wicker chair in there. They had guns all over the place too. Mostly shitty 22s and a few double barrels, but I heard handguns occasionally. They were shooting up in the air, and off to the sides, plinking cans and someone got pissed when the back tires of his toyota got blown to shit. I'm not big on guns really, they bother me, that probably seems weird but with that many drunk assholes around and most of em armed, someone was bound to do something lethally stupid.

Winnie and I got to shmoozing and being social, I had initially decided for some god awful reason to see if I could get the big doofus laid. There were plenty of pretty girls thereabouts, they had this farmer's daughter thing going on that's kind of irresistible really. Clean cute faces, hell freckles even, and then bam! Tits on display. I'd dipped around enough and the girls were willing, no problem about that, I'd figured I'd chat one up with Winnie in tow and maybe talk him up some and get a kick when she drug him off behind some bushes.

I find a likely pair of girls and get to talking. I'm not really drinking much, and Winnie's pretty much just been packing away the cokes, the girls were fairly fucking smashed though. The taller of the two had some amazingly dark brown hair that hung down to her waist and a body like a violin. She was wearing cut off shorts and actually had a pretty respectable tan going on. I've no doubt that this one had some cherokee in her either, her eyes and cheeks said as much. The other was a bit more like a cello but had a chest that pirates would kill a man over before burying somewhere. She was blonde though, and I'm not partial to those. Hell I figured I'd take the violin and maybe do a duet with her off somewhere nice and give Winnie some pointers on the cello. I'd heard a kick-ass rendition of a Kansas song on a cello once and figured Winnie should be able to figure out a passable version of that. Innuendos are shared, lewdities dropped and I may have pitched a horrible limrick or three, Winnie's over there being beautifully oblivious to the delicate interplay goin' on. One thing I'll give West Virginia's girls is that when they decide that they've been sold on something, they can be pretty outright about getting to it. It's refreshing really, a little bit of chat and bam her hand is in your pants. Throughout this I'd been chatting Winnie up pretty solid, talkin about how my cousin had a flat a few days ago and the big galoot damn near picked up the whole first half of the car and whatnot. Blonde girl is swaying on her feet and giving him some come-hither looks. I nudge Winnie and pull him off to the side and give him some basic rules of engagement.

Now I know I was harping on about how dumb this guy was, but he caught on pretty fast after I laid it all out for him. I gave him my basic rule, "If she starts saying no, or fussing and acting all unhappy like, then you just stop whatever it is your doin, take her hand gently and ask her to tell you exactly what she wants, you got that big guy?" Winnie is all goofy smiles and bright eyes, "Oh ye-ah, oh yeah, I seen pictures." I smile and nod, "Just don't start screaming or twist her head off or nothing like that." Winnie shakes his head no, of course not, not a chance of that happening.

Cello girl takes him by the hand and leads him out of the firelight off to some dark corner of the woods and I take my cherokee girl off to some high rocks on the far side. I will not go into details, except to say that as best I could figure that girl did not have any tan lines at all, just kind of a nice coffee color to her all over.

I am thouroughly enjoying myself when I get a poke between my shoulder blades. Now, I'm in sort of a state that may be called involved and don't notice it the first time. The poke comes again though, a bit more insistant and forceful and I'm a bit what the fuck. Violin girl's eyes damn near bug out of her head and she grabs her top hissing out, "Oh for the love of jesus!" It's Winny and he has this morose look on his face, completely unashamed of having interrupted my current engagement. "Mr. Latrans she done gone run off on me what do I do?" He sez. I'm looking at him for a moment, and my cherokee girl takes this time to make herself scarce, dammit. I take a big sigh and look up at him while I'm getting my effects in order and ask him.

"What in twisted snakes are you talkin' about Winny."

"She done run off into the woods, she ain't there no more what do I do?"

"Did you grab her rough or snap anything?"

"No! I was being real gentle like, she said it was ooookay."

"And then she just got up and left?"

"Yuh."

"Right in the middle of it?"

"Yuh."

"Well shit."

I figured maybe she just cut and run on the big guy or something and did it in a suitably crafty enough manner to leave him dumfounded, which really wouldn't be too difficult. I calm him down and figure we might as well chase after and see whats up. I wasn't wanting to make a scene or anything, just make sure the guy hadn't had a black moment or something and done a thing we'd both regret. He takes me down to where they were doing their thing and I see his shirt and her clothes kinda spread out, so they'd have something comfortable to lay out on. Her clothes were still there, what the hell. "Winny she run off nekkid?" I ask. He nods, "Yuh." I'm having a think, and ask him which direction did she go and run off to, cause it sure as hell wasn't back to camp. He points off to a dark part of the forest, near where the mountain side is more like a cliff and jabs in that direction. "Oh shit Winny was she giggling and laughing and shit when she ran off?"

"Yuh."

"Oh you doofus, your supposed to chase after her ass."

"You said to be careful and not move to fast."

"Yeah I did say that, well shit...listen it's this thing girls do, they make you chase em, and they run around like idiots and then you play wrestle em down and...you know what, fuck it, lets go make sure she didn't get eaten by a cougar, stupid-ass drunk hillbilly."

"I ain't drunk."

"I wasn't talking about you Winny, c'mon."

And so we went. Leaving behind the bonfire, and the gunshots, and the noise, right out into the woods towards that cliff. If anyone here is familiar with West Virginia, they'll know it's very much a coal mining state. I'm pretty sure a large amount of horrible mine collapses and stuff have occurred over the years, if not in West Virginia than in areas nearby. The mountains are riddled with old shafts and openings, a few times while I was out wandering I've almost stumbled right into a vent or a shaft that was all overgrown. I wasn't too surprised then when we came to a half collapsed mine entrance on the side of that cliff. I'm feeling a little queasy, but I figure the stupid thing probably ran her ass in there for some privacy. Winny's got kind of a blank look on his face at the moment and isn't offering any insightful observations. I didn't have much on me but a lighter, having given my old trusty little flashlight away to a friend before I left the service, so I light it up and head in. I figure she can't have gone too far in right its dark as hell.

We get a coupla feet in and sure enough, just at the edge of the little circle of light my fire's making I can see for a second a curve of pale thigh. She giggles and moves off deeper into the dark. I'm thinking, god damn-it the drunk ass is still playing her games and is likely more than not to get herself killed. I holler at her and we keep going. "Listen chick, whatever your name is...enough games, c'mon now lets head back up, this shit is unsafe you hear me?" All I get in answer is a stupid flirty giggle, a brief glimpse of some tits and maybe a shoulder and she goes deeper yet.

I'm starting to get a little pissed. I was having some decent fun, hell Winny was getting his too, and now we have to play games with some drunk hillbilly in an abandoned mine, of which there were hundreds of up in these hills. If something went wrong, the chances of us being found were nil, especially since the locals didn't tell the cops shit about what they were up to out here. I keep going, and we turn a corner, turn another one, keep going down chasing this daffy giggling bitch. Winny stumbles a few times on the old rusted tracks that were splayed out every which way and gets to complaining that it's stuffy and smells bad in here.

I'm about to whip into him when I realize something. He's right it does smell god damned bad in here. At first I accounted it was due to trash and old condoms and shit, but we'd long since gone past that point, there wasn't anything down this far except rocks and dust. Bat shit maybe? No guano smells different, makes your eyes water. This smelled like that shit you get in the back of your throat when you've had strep. Those weird grungy yellow nuggets of congealed mucus that when coughed out smell like horrendous rotten ass. It smelled like that.

Meanwhile the flirting ninja is still dancing out of my flickering little light, which is starting to sputter and has gone out two or three times now. It's also hot as shit. The feeling comes in slow and powerful. I can feel the hairs on the back of my neck go, "Ooooooh shit Canis."

I stop and Winny bumps into me, I turn and look over at him and he's still got that blank look on his face. "Ruh-roh shaggy."

"My names Winny."

I snort back a laugh and give him a solid look. "Winny we need to get ourselves out of here I think, this girl is gonna get us killed."

"We can't just leave her to get hurt down here." He's looking concerned now, and it's a genuine concern which is pretty awesome. I'm trying to remember how long we've been chasing this girl, how many turns we've made. It's more than three, and hell my ring of light doesn't do

much, how many side passages had we passed that I hadn't seen. Oh fuck me, this place is a god damned maze and all I have to get us out of here is a bic lighter that is currently burning the shit out of my thumb, and she is STILL fucking giggling right over there, a stone's throw. I start pushing Winny back and say, "C'mon big guy, she'll follow us out, lets get back up topside, this place smells wrong innit?" He gives me this mournful look and nods and we start going back. The giggling is following.

Always just out of the full reach of my light, can't see but bits and pieces of pale skin and curves, never eyes and no hands either, how the hell is she getting by down here? I've been in enough weird situations to figure this might be one of em by now.

We're heading back and she's following us when I slam right into an old knocked over mine cart. Just laying on it's side in the middle of the tunnel. Immediately alarms go off in my head. Oh fuck me, we didn't pass a mincart, oh fuck we've gotten turned around. My lighter goes out as I'm still reeling from this disturbing revelation and I hear, tik-tik-tiktiktiktik from right behind us.

I furiously get to clicking my bic and eventually it sputters up half-assedly and I can see her pull back into the shadows. She was close this time, touching close. I didn't see much, I saw her form and figure, the hips and chest. But the feet were all wrong. It was brief, but burned into my eyes there. I'm sure in hindsight it could have been a trick of the light but at that moment I wasn't wasting time trying to validate and explain what I had seen with logic or common sense. Her feet were pointed, featureless, like spikes. From calf down they just kept on tapering until they reached a point that she was walking on...and scuttled back into the shadows with. I can hear a giggle and that weird breathy come-over-here noise girls make when they want your attention. Normally its sexy as hell, but my bloods running cold and miserable right now because of it.

Winny steps in close and is staring off in her direction and says, "That ain't her." I'm a bit aghast but manage to responde, "You know you aren't half as dumb as people say you are Winny." which gets a smile out of him.

We tried to find a way back as best we could, I had Winny up front and warned to watch his footing because falling down a shaft now would be pretty much the end of our party tonight. As he was going forward I had my back to his and was watching behind, walking backward for every step he took. I'm breathing real careful, my lighters going out of fuel and that light is just shrinking, and if I breath on it funny, well fuck. She's keeping up with us too, always right at the edge, and that edge is getting closer. I don't even have a god damned knife on me, stupid...how the hell did I not bring one, or borrow a gun from one of the sister-fucking rednecks up at that bonfire. Stupid, stupid. This is going so poorly.

Winny is concentrating on forging a path back up but I can hear him sighing and getting a bit frustrated, banging his head a few times on the low ceiling. One, I've got this thing following us and I can almost see it for what it is, and it isn't good. Two, I'm really hoping Winny doesn't lose his temper and go ape-shit with me right next to him. I'm missing Tony right about now.

Then I hear the damndest thing. In between her tik-tik-tiktiktik-tik steps, I can hear kind of a far off tapping. Its ringing metal on metal, tap, tap, tap...real regular like. Winny immediatly sort of hones in on that noise, zones out and starts moving towards it.

Got taps in one direction and tiks in another. tiktiktik. Her hands are the same way, oh god damn it, she has the same tapering points on her arms as her legs and I can just about see her face. It's smiling, but it's all wrong, all out of purpotion. Her eyes are spread and her nose is flat. And I still have no idea where we are, I've given up figuring a way out to a big guy whos about as complex a thinker as Bambi the Prince of the Forest.

He just keeps going though and I'm trying to find something to burn so I can keep the light up. Searching my pockets for some paper or something. I manage to find the receipt for the beer we bought earlier and light that shit up. Theres a brief small flare of light and I see this thing kind of bounce back into the dark and go up the side like gravity doesn't matter a whit to her. Like a spider, moving weird now, not pretending anymore.

That tapping is still calling to Winny and my light is pretty much dead. Then I hear him tense up and no shit he actually says, "Yipee" or something damn close enough. My light goes flat dead and I'm sucking a breath in and getting ready for it. I figure if this thing grabs me I can maybe scream like an ass and bite it or something I dunno. It takes me a second to realize that even though my lights gone out I can still kinda see. Oh shit! Thats moonlight! Fuck this we are OUT.

Winny is still walking and I damn near bowl his ass over, "Move, fuckin' move it man move movemove!" I'm out with my feet hitting dirt in seconds and Winny is just kind of joggin' after me. Whatever that thing was it ain't coming out of that mineshaft after us. We're standing there collecting ourselves and I notice I can still hear that weird metal on metal tapping noise. Its coming from inside the mine, which is weird because to us it sounded like it was coming from outside right? I'm figuring echoes or some shit but I'm getting that distinct gut feeling that tells me, no...it isn't just echoes man. I know she's right there at the mouth of that shaft though, I can feel it.

I'll take care of it. Trusty guy, me saying that immediatly puts him back to normal. We get back to the party. Now, honestly I have no idea how I'm going to "take care of it," and in truth I'm not really planning on even attempting it. As best I know, that dumb girl ran in there and got A: Lost, B: Eaten. And neither of those two possibilities mattered one fuck-all to either me or Winny. So the discovery of both of those girls back at camp, clothed and irratated as fuck was kind of a nice reveal. Those two were back at the fire, imperiously ignoring the hell right out of us. They were back to getting their drink on and chatting up with some local good ol' boys and I'm wondering, well what the fuck. "Winny when that girl ran off, do your remember which way she went?" Winny shrugs and cracks open like beer number two or possibly soda number thirteen and nods, "Yuh, she went that way what we went." I give him a long look, "You sure about that." He starts to smile and nod, then frowns and shakes his head, "Nope." Oh fuck me.

Best we could figure from talking to others was that cello girl had run off into some bushes wanting to play catch-me-if-you-can and had been waiting out there naked for quite awhile before giving up, getting her clothes and finding her friend. She'd never even known about the god damned mine, what was in it or that weird knocking sound. Violin girl was giving me attitude because my big goofy buddy made an ass out of her best friend and blah blah blah dumbshittery. It wasn't too long after that found me elsewhere out of West Virginia. Caught a ride with a trucker who was a solid dude and a former Marine to boot so oorah to that. I gave Winny my empty bic lighter though and told him it was a good luck charm. I'd bet anything he still has it.

There ya go, West Virginia, beautiful place, stupid people, deep holes.

Cheddamouf

Sorry for the long delay, the wife and I moved into a newer, much smaller apartment and it took time to get things rolling again. The economy sucks, and in this town its particularly nasty. It awesome to see how big the thread has become, I havn't been able to catch up to it entirely but there are some really good stories in here! I also totally got mentioned in the same sentence as 50 ft, I mean holy shit.

But you guys don't want to hear how my days have been going you want meat.

My mother had an interesting way of interpreting old fairy tales and folklore for myself and my sister. I wouldn't call it outright malevolent, but she had a knack for making us terrified of things that normal kids find pleasant or joyful. The tooth fairy was one of these things. I understood later that the tooth fairy was some sweet old winged lady who sneaks in, finds a tooth under a pillow and switches it out for a coin. Nice broad. We had cheddamouf. Cheddamouf was a scrawny little man-thing that looked sort of like a skinned cat and had a black filthy crust over it. It's eyes were bright orange and its mouth was very wide and filled overflowing with yellowed teeth it had taken from children who didn't brush their teeth enough. The way mom told it, if you neglected certain oral hygienes, this little fucker would come into your room in the middle of the night, sit on your chest and wrench your teeth right out...then stuff em in it's own face. This was I think partially her ideal way of getting us to brush our fucking teeth. When we lost a tooth we could put it under our pillow and it would be gone the next day, but we didn't get a fucking quarter, we just bought ourselves a bit of leeway.

I never met the thing as a child, I was pretty good at brushing my teeth. Later on in life however I managed to get myself in a nasty situation that ended up with me losing most of my teeth. Thanks to shoddy repairs and a deep set infection, not long after that I lost the rest of em. Painful thing, the hurt is bad sure...but losing the shape of your face is worse I think. I couldn't look at myself in the mirror, couldn't smile (Something I've always been in the habit of doing in even the most desperate of times) and eating became a chore for sometime until I got my replacements.

Some creepy shit had started to happen at my old home that facillitated my leaving it with haste.I've told you of the doppleganger. That unnerved me, but worse is when my wife came upstairs one day to see me fussing around with some books in our bedroom closet and gave me the weirdest look. She had just spoken to me in the kitchen moments ago. I was standing down there with a jar of peanut butter in my hand and asked her to come over and open it. She laughed it off and came upstairs to find her shoes so she could head out to work when she came across me in the closet lookin' for my books. We laughed about it and joked about deja vu combined with her general absent mindedness giving me the abilities of teleportation. In truth I was pretty worried about it.

This thing had given me a definate sense of malice and threat, and the fact that it was also targeting my wife caused no small amount of anger. While she was away at work I got out a lot of my old things. My ghost jars, my little strips of paper with things written on em, bag of old rusty nails and some coins I've swiped from various places. These things are stuff I've had since I was a kid, my personal weapons to engage in weird little wars. I doubt there is any real power to them, I don't think anyone else can take one of my ghost jars, shake it and make something bad run screaming out of the room, but they work for me. I got voodoo on the living room and the doorways, not the full nine yards, but enough to make me feel a bit safer. The wife was a bit amused by the sudden appearance of a lot of plainly weird shit, but she knows me well enough to know theres something to it. I threw out the peanutbutter as a precaution because A: I have a hard time eating that shit anyways due to my artificial teeth and B: fuck that

peanutbutter.

Nothing much happened for the next few days after that really, excepting the hot and cold taps switching sides on occasion. I can't honestly say that's what they did, my memory is simply put...ridiculously bad, but I kept getting it wrong. I even wrote a letter H on my right hand one night just so I'd remember which side was which when I hoped in the shower the next night. It didn't work. Reminds me of when I was a younger man I used to write a big R and a big L on my respective hands before I would go about doing patient care that shift. I found it hilarious, my patients found it horrific...I like to think that secretly they enjoyed my humor after they stopped worrying about my competency.

I'm meandering, anyways...the final event that solidly got us up and moving was a chance meeting with an old friend of mine I'd never actually met as a child.

The nights had been getting colder, the cats had taken to sleeping with us...worming their way under the blankets and keeping our feet warm. The wife was solid zonked, she has a hard time passing out, but once she gets there she's out. I had taken my teeth out and dropped em in a cup on the bedside table to fizz overnight so I could give em a double good scrubbing in the morning. I know its probably gross to think about, and honestly it is pretty gross...but at least its an old war wound I can pretend isn't there at times, which is nice. Some people lose entire fucking limbs, I just got my teeth pulled out.

I'm sleeping pretty solidly, dreaming about small women with large tits when a clinking sound brings me up and out. At first I figure its one of the cats on the end table drinking out of the cup with the fizzy water and my teeth in it. I turn a bit and get set to go back to sleep and my comfortable dreams when I'm struck by how weird things have been lately. It gave me the most terrific little chill up my spine. How the hell, after the shit I've seen, could I just let something like that slide without checking? I wonder if there isn't some part of our brains that just quietly chooses to ignore that shit as a safety measure. Mine almost works, I almost went back to sleep. Instead of that I sat up pretty quick reached over and flipped the light on.

Now this light on the end table was right next to the cup with my teeth in it, so when the light went on, and I saw what I saw...my hand was right the fuck next to it. Wretched little skinned cat body and a head like one of them capuchin monkees. He's sitting there on his heels, the same way philipinos sit on their boats. Feet planted, ass resting on their calves. He doesn't have skin, or maybe he did a long time ago. He's made of raw meat and covered in scabs, looks like a fetus caught some sort of bubonic badness and broke out in lethal acne, and he's fishing out my god-damned teeth from that cup. Little raccoon hands. When the light goes on his head pops up and I'm locked onto those eyes. They were orange yeah, but rheumy and covered in some sort of weird half-closed membrane. Mom wasn't kidding about his mouth, the thing was giant in comparison to his stupid little head. This warbling slash of flesh filled with what I knew to be teeth, but initially thought of as broken yellow crayons.

Fucking Cheddamouf, stealing my god damned teeth. He didn't really react to me with any sense of alarm. Just sort of stared at me, then went back to fishing for those teeth. I didn't move, couldn't really...its that lock up, the cold freeze you get when shit like this happens in the dead of night. He pulled the top piece out and picked at it with his little raccoon fingers. I get the impression that he knew this was what he came for, but

something was wrong. His gestures became frustrated, he banged my dentures against the lip of the cup and twisted em. He then gave a little shudder and brought his eyes up to mine. They had the most hilariously depressed look in them. He couldn't do shit with what he had. We stared at eachother for a coupla minutes before I turned the switch off and went back to sleep. Fuck that little guy, if he wants my teeth he can go find them.

The next morning, the wife asked me what I was doing with the light that night. It had sort of broken her dreams up and she half noticed it, wondered if it had actually happened and if everything is ok. I muttered something about varmints trying to steal my teeth. Yeah, I actually said varmints...and over the years its gotten easier to say shit like that without rolling my own eyes. Having a beard helps I think, I can't imagine a clean shaven guy saying shit like that. We didn't talk about it after that, but she caught the weird undercurrents in my voice I suspect and after that we pushed forward the date of our move.

I got rid of a lot of my old shit in the transfer. I have a feeling some of it might have been making things a bit more difficult than they otherwise would have been. Besides, I've got issues...I know this, and I figured some of those things probably weren't making my issues any better. The new place is small, cozy as hell. I don't get the creeping feelings here at all. It's nice, I hope it lasts awhile. Until then, no newer stories...I'll have to dig a bit deeper back and see if I cant come up with something interesting, or call Tony and see if he remembers anything in particular.

Eddie

I had a friend a long time ago named Edgar. Edgar was the single most mexican motherfucker I ever met. The actor from that Machete movie kinda reminds me of Eddie, except my guy was like...four foot something and broader than a barn door. I met this guy shortly after my time with the fleet, he was hurt in a pretty bad way and didn't wanna get fixed up by a legit doc or take a trip to the emergency room, his buddies had heard I did patch jobs on the cheap and welp. Pulling a coupla rounds out of someones ass can make for strange friendships I suppose. Guy was covered in ink, he had tear-drops, numbers, spider thingies...all sorts of signs that proclaimed him as a macho badass with whom you do not want to fuck with. I've been told what these things mean but I can't fucking remember them for the life of me. Regardless, they're designed to ward people off and mebbe warn em about the individual wearing them. They have the opposite effect on me since I met Edgar, I feel safer...like I have someone at my back that will pull me out of the shit if I need it.

After I fixed up this guy, he saved my ass more times than I can reckon. I lived in a pretty ratty part of town, and I'm not exactly a threatening looking person normally. I'm not an easy mark but I look the part ya know? Anyways, Eddie saved my ass from what I think was a mugging on occasion. Getting cornered by a buncha dickheads out of the circle K with an eye on my cigarettes, I'm wondering where I'm going to stash the bodies and Eddie's bouncy car pulls up and solves the problem for me. Those fuckers BAILED when they saw him. He was pretty god damn friendly, drug me to a coupla decent parties, fed me el presidente til I was unconcious on his sister's couch and tried to hook me up with his cousin. I'm a half-breed, and neither of those parts is mexican, but that didn't seem to bother him, I stood out like a sore thumb at the gatherings ya, but I was the "Only white boy who I'ma let take a knife to my ass."

Long story short, we was pals. He and his boys got into pretty frequent rumbles with another troop and I made out nice for myself picking up their pieces. It may not have

been particularly ethical doing patch jobs, but fuck it I've never really been big on ethics. Anywho, they have this long standing fight with these guys from across town and eventually shit starts hitting the fan. Apparently the other guys had a santarista or some shit giving em a hand. I don't know if thats the proper term for the chicks that do this shit, I know the word bruja popped up. My own sadly racist as shit word for it was meximagician. Ya, ya I know, its not exactly telling of my cultured self to sling shit like that but whatever. Hispanic magic is bloody terrible shit. It's chicken feet and skulls, and bad shit incoming. Feels old as fuck too, I have no doubt that that gobbldygook they spew when slinging a hex is nauhatl, and it makes my skin fucking crawl.

The other guys are getting more vicious, what would be occasional spats in the street and maybe a drive-by is turning even nastier. People are getting attacked in their homes, Eddie's hot cousin got her thighs stabbed while she was sleeping and they're doing shit like leaving gutted dog corpses hanging over fences. What starts making my guys worry is that they aren't feeling so hot all of a sudden. These are tough macho dudes, but superstitious as all hell, hearing a bruja is mucking around deflates em at an alarming pace. Edgar puffs up to compensate for this and starts making with the threats towards the bruja the other guys got. Saying he doesn't care about that shit, he's gonna slice up the old cunt and her sons. Blah blah blah. I'm like "Eddie chill man, she's prolly some dudes grandma." But he's having none of it, he's got a bit of torquemada in him I think, he's gonna cut himself a witch.

Shit does not go well for em over the next few weeks. Bunch of his boys get picked up and thrown out by the police, two of em flat out fucking disappear and their girls are getting hit with the shit, the bad guys are targeting their families now. I know how voodoo rolls, it's a mindfuck, you make people afraid with it, ride their anxieties and fill in the blanks they make on their own. It's taking credit for something bad that happens even if you aren't the one responsible and tying all the shitty things that can happen to someone to one imagined source, you. It's terrorism, the most effective kind, people have been doing it to eachother ever since some broken ass nutjob tribal picked up a dead animal and made the stronger guys hunt for him by claiming he could catch their souls in it.

I was worried, but still pretty distant from all this shit. Edgar was my only friend in this, these were not my people. Fuck, I don't even have people. So I was watching it from the outside, only really getting involved when Edgar brought me someone to fix and a bottle of JD to pay me off with. By this point he knew he didn't have to bring me shit, I'd do it on the house if he needed it, but traditions right?

I got involved when Edgar got his damn self fucking killed. The way I heard it a grip of bad guys caught him dropping his little girl off at his grandmothers and fucking disembowled him on the sidewalk right there. It had to have happened fast, this guy knew how to fight. He bled out in the ambulance, the paramedic taking care of him was a drinking buddy of mine and told me he was paled out right from the get go. It's not the first time I've had a friend of mine get a headstart on me, but it never feels good. Edgar was a hoot, and now he was fucking dead...to boot, I was probably gonna get mugged fucking hard next time I was out, and probably by the guys that killed him. They knew who I was, my protection was gone.

So I did what any honest coward would do, I stayed in my fucking apartment. I locked the doors, and didn't plan on leaving until judgement day. I'm not that much of an oorah go get em kinda guy. I can throwdown yeah, but only enough to keep my goofy ass alive,

and I almost never go looking for a fight if I can help it. I'm no viking, I'm a craven-hearted coyote son of a bitch. I would have been completely happy waiting this shit out. Ya sure there would have been some guilt, but I have plenty of guilt I carry along, eventually the individual shit stops mattering and it's just this fucking thing following me around that I can placate with alcohol.

My plan would have worked wonderfully if it hadn't been for Eddie not leaving me the fuck alone. Now I was drunk as a ferryman, so that might have done it, but he was there sitting on my shitty couch one morning when I pulled myself out of bed. Fucking staring at me. Didn't have the decency to put his guts back in either, they were all splayed out over my tv-tray, getting gook in my microwave dinner I hadn't finished.

"Get the fuck out of here Eddie I can't fix you up this time dude." I sez.

He's looking at me with the blackest eyes, and he ain't blinking. I sure as hell do. I leave him to my couch and go take a shower. Have you ever tried having a cigarette while showering? There's an art to it, but it's god damn satisfying. When I get back out there he's moved from the couch to my little kitchen and is looking up at all the empty booze bottles I got stacked on the shelves. I never threw away any of the shit he gave me, even after I drank em. Just kept them up there for some fucking reason. He's staring at em, and I realize just how damn short this guy is. In life Edgar always seemed pretty fucking gigantic to me. Here, now...he seemed so much smaller. "Eddie get out of my fucking kitchen." I say, I havn't had an episode like this in years and I'm not liking it one bit. I've been doing really good. He just kind cocks his head towards me and says, "Ain't I paid you enough?"

"Oh fuck you," My bloods getting jumpy and my breath is starting to fever up, been at least a year since I've had shit like this happen, I was doing so well.

"They did it front of my little girl man, she had em do it in front of Maggie."

"Yeah well it's fucking done now innit? It's over, go to sleep Eddie."

"It ain't over man, what if she goes after her?"

I'm looking for my meds now, going through my drawers trying to find the pills I havn't taken in like forever, but didn't have the balls to throw out. They make this shit stop happening sometimes, or at least they did. I'm a big fan of placebos, even if they don't do shit, my desperate and sudden need to take them right the fuck now might actually accomplish the intended effect. Fuck, I probably coulda shot-gunned skittles and got the right effect.

"It ain't over man, that witch gotta pay, she gotta get where I can get her." He says, he's got this lazy english that's unmistakable. He dosn't sound all stuffed up and impressive like he used to either, he sounds like he's had the shit kicked out of him. Ha, fuck that description, he sounds dead. Although in retrospect dead people shouldn't fucking sound like anything right?

"What the fuck you want me to do about Eddie? Seriously, I pull bullets out of asses and stitch shit up, what in the name of seven snakes do you expect me to even be able to do? I'm not a jaguar mang." Can't find my pills, I'm starting to accept it as happening, not exactly the best of things and I know it.

"You got to get her man, you got to get her ass for me."

"Thats serious shit, what am I gonna tell the cops when they pull me in? Edgar the Undead Mexican sent me, its cool guys?"

"I never took you for a pussy."

"I'm not a pussy, I just plan on staying alive you bag of dicks."

"Why the fuck for, you hate living as much as I hate being dead."

"Yeah well I'm not looking forward to whats waiting for me where your at Eddie, I got bad shit following me."

He takes down one of my empty bottles, Captain Morgan I think and turns it in his hands. I'm starting to get a bit desperate here. I got bad shit waiting for me if I leave the apartment before this shit blows over, on the other hand, I've got Eddie in here with me. Stuck between a spic and a hard place. Ha ha, fuck me.

"I know how this works mang," He says, "It's tradition, I'll do something for you, you do something for me."

"What the fuck you talking about Eddie, you can't do shit for me."

"I'm not the only dead guy here Doc."

And my blood runs flat fucking cold at that. I've been collecting things like Eddie for a long god damned time. There are a lot of em, its what sent me to the pills ya know? They havn't come out in forever, but I never really felt like they left.

"You threatening me Eddie?"

"No you stupid fuck, when I ever done you wrong?"

"What the fuck you figuring?"

"You do this for me, you take this bitch out, I'll keep these motherfuckers in check, I can handle these bitches."

It wasn't the first time I've shaken a dead man's hand.

War does funny things to a guy. Maybe not funny ha-ha, but definately funny in some bizarre fucking way. Funny like watching some fresh outta bootcamp shitbag catching a grenade and getting blown apart so fucking hard and fast all thats left is his boots just kinda standing there steaming. Its horrible ya, and any right-minded person would puke right there. But war makes you laugh your tits off while you're puking your guts out, because its so goddamn funny.

Maybe thats why after making the deal with Edgar I couldn't wipe my stupid smile off my face. It felt good to walk the warpath again. It was like getting a handjob from that girl in highschool who wouldn't give you the time of day back when you were a kid. It's like, ah...having a cigarette after a coupla days dry and you get that light headed hooo-yeah feeling. Like taking the perfect clean shit, you know the kind, zero residue left behind, zero splash, just a ten point

dive from your ass into the bowl, the kind they should have at the olympics.

Once it was struck and the sun headed out I went to work. Violence was about to go down and the idea of walking out of it alive wasn't even pinging my common sense radar. I had to macgyver the shit I felt needful from what I had laying around. Jury-rigged witchcraft to ruin some old ladies day. Tore up my one yellowed pillowcase into strips and wrote the lord's prayer on it with magic marker before wrapping it around an old aluminum baseball bat Eddie's hot cousin gave me in case an asshole kicked in my door. I grabbed the dice I used to bilk some dudes out of like forty bucks and tossed em in my back pocket. The last was a half finished bottle of I think, that Parrot Bay coconut shit that I could chug down like it was soda. Seriously though that stuff isn't even alcohol until about three minutes after you've slammed it, and then you are on your ass. Rum is important though, doesn't matter what kind really, I know a guy who's big on rum, and he could be important if the shit goes sideways like I'm figuring might happen. Fuck, I'm hoping it goes hard sideways. By this time I'm rolling with the delusion. It feels fucking good to just accept this as the way it is, to just roll with it and throw myself laughing into the madness.

This delusion is something I'm comfortable with, it's pleasant. Like smoking in the shower.

Ah, I'm mistaken. The last thing I took with me was my headset earphones and a little broken walkman. It used to have a working radio, but I dropped it rocking the fuck out a few too many times and well...it didn't exactly work at fucking all anymore, but I needed it.

I was carried to the site of my crusade by a bus. Seventy-five cents. Bus driver looked at me funny, I was rocking out to a walkman that didn't work with a baseball bat over my shoulder. I highly doubt I was the strangest thing he'd seen that night. Back in the day crusaders got to wear cool shit like armor and fancy stuff like that, I had ratty blue-jeans and a Dr. Pepper shirt.

I knew where these guys lived, everyone did. Other side of town in a shitty little neighborhood that mirrored Edgars stomping grounds. If you didn't know they were at war with eachother you woulda sworn they were family. Shit they might have been. Bus dropped me off at the seven-eleven at the corner. Skinny black guy with a camo jacket asked me for my change, told him all I had was the bad kind and to get the fuck out. He left.

The small white house with the double front windows, thats what Edgar's cousin had talked about. It musta been like nine thirty and there was a party going on. Bouncy cars out front bouncing, loud music playing, and many men in white wife-beaters having a good time. They were marked like Eddie was marked, I still didn't have a fucking clue what those marks meant aside from them meaning I was probably about to get my ass killed. I turn the volume up on my little walkman. It's not playing anything, it never does anymore, but it's playing it loudly. Theres only one way to do something this stupid, do it hard.

I had a dance in my step as I walked up to the two guys sitting on the hood of the car right out front. One of em popped his head up and looked at his buddy, they both said something but I couldn't hear it. Music was too loud. I give em a half smile, shrug and point to my headphones. The guy nearest to me pulls out a little nifty switchblade. He

gets a bat to the face. Connects somewhere just around the jaw and turns him around. His friend hesitates a second before laying into my goofy ass with a solid right that just about causes me to shit my pants. I hit street with more than the recommended velocity and try and get back as fast as I can. Just in time to catch a boot to the mouth as it turns out. Hurts. I have an issue with my mouth, it's a delicate spot for me. I'm about to call it and back out of this shit when my song comes on. You know the song, everyone has one, it's quite motivating...people can do fun shit when their song is playing, it's the reason I brought the fucking thing. I'm getting the shit stomped out of me now, but he's leaving himself open in all the wrong places. Knees, knees are like paper-mache foundations on a skyscraper if you tap em right. Tap em with a bat.

Tap tap.

This house had a white picket fence I shit you not. It was hard to see if it was well kept because it was fucking dark around here, only like one street lamp actually bothered to not be broken so I couldn't really tell, but I bet it was clean. I bet it was well kept.

Apparently my altercation outside drew some attention and carbon copy guys start coming out from all over the place. It sounds bad, but in the place I happened to be at, all these guys sort of looked the same to me. Same shirts, same baggy pants, same markings, same angry "what the fuck is this white guy doing with that bat" look on their faces. I wasn't just any white guy with a bat. I was Gringomageddon, I was become kali, my song was playing and even though I couldn't remember the words I was singing along best as able.

At some point one of the fuckers put a knife in my upper thigh. Not really dangerously deep, although it was a couple breaths away from my balls, which would have been a problem. Enough to comically stick out to the side though. I hit them with my bat. I wasn't aiming to kill, or wound...or shit, I wasn't aiming. I was swinging. Most of the time I hit something, not always a bad guy. I distinctly remembering bashing the unholy batshit out of the mailbox and screaming at it.

This is of course when shit gets weird. By this time I figure I'm so deep into my own little broken rectum of a rabbit hole that what is and what is not are completely indistinguishable from the other. For all I fucking know I'm downtown at the thrift store just WAILING on the clothing rack and screaming about Ronald Reagan trying to sell my scrotum to the lizard people. Or I could be going to war with a bunch of gangbangers. By this point I no longer care. I really could use those skittles right about now.

The people I'm beating down are people I've seen before. A young marine I watched catch a round in the head while I was fixing his broken thumb. A buddy of mine who got drunk with me back in the day and ended up drowning in a creek and I was too wasted to even fucking notice. My first girlfriend, the one who got beaten into a coma by her dad and never woke up all the way. There's dogs fucking everywhere. Barking dogs, tearing at my calves, some of em are pit bulls, cropped ears. Some of em ain't dogs...they are my coyotes, and they are laughing their asses off. My songs stuck in an endless loop and all I can do is keep swinging.

I'm so sorry I didn't get your head down man, I was too focused on your stupid fucking thumb. I am so sorry I wasn't thinking, I should have been watching your back.

Somewhere in there my grandfathers cheering me on, but I cant understand him

because the musics too loud and well, I never really could fucking understand the guy.

My hands are shaking and some part of me is wondering why I havn't been shot yet. There is gunfire ya, there's actually a quite a lot. There are bullets flying all over the god damned place, and oh holy fuck Gunney's down and they are calling for the Doc and I can't fucking get to him! Get the fuck out of my way!

I'm not alone anymore. Edgar's boys are here...and they are shooting the fuck out of everything.I have backup? I have fucking backup, my marines are here, it's going to be ok. Give them hell guys, give them buckets of it. I've got something to do here.

You know its not easy to kick a door down. I remember that clearly enough. Don't get me wrong, I kicked that thing like four times hard as I could, and I've got some legs on me sister. All I accomplished was hurting my foot before I used the knob. I'm not without a bit of retarded. Open that door the polite way.

Everything was going to hell around me, but I was the eye of the hurricane. It was calm where I was. Edgar was keeping the dead off me I think, he was out there in the front yard with his boys keeping my ghosts back while they kept the living occupied. He must have talked to one of them about this before hand. Coulda' told me about that part of his plan I think.

The living room was fuckin' quaint. The couch was plaid, there was a potted plant and a giant crucifix on the wall with xipe totec splayed out on it. Shitty little tv, on which was a guy in a bee suit silently looking at me with his mouth in a wide O and his eyes bugged out. Oh dios Mioooooo.

She wasn't what I thought she would be, I imagined a shriveled little black thing with venomous eyes and black magic crawling off of her. I imagined a female version of the Emperor from Star Wars, all croaky and full of hate. What I got was a pudgy warm-looking woman in a flower print mumu holding in her arms what I first took to be a chihuahua and then on second glance saw as this fucking...thing.

Like an oversized hideous little skinned bat. Big ass ears and beady eyes, mouth filled with ridiculously oversized teeth and tattered patagia just hanging off the sides. Its god-damn little hands, little people hands. This thing made chihuahua's look dignified. It was, what the fuck. The bitch threw it at me, and it screamed as it came, it screamed words.

Dumb old crow. I came equipped.

Its not the first time I swang a bat at something that was probably a chihuahua. It was the first time I actually hit the fucking thing. Out of the god damn park. Oh wait, this thing was a bat...I swung a bat, at a bat. Ah ha ha, fuck me.

She called up my old regrets on me, she hissed out my sins. I have a lot of those. She said shit in words I don't think have any meaning except to the dead, and the dead came for me as best they could. They held me down and whispered my name to me as it's written in the book the name-eater carries. She spat curses on me and I felt them hold. Edgar was trying as best he could, I think I saw him wrench a few things off me, but the poor guy had no idea the shit I carry around on me. I'm like a pack mule for bad shit. I went down hard.

There were a lot of bullets flying around, did I mention that? I'm pretty sure I did.

She found one.

When that mamasita went down that shit let up just enough. The things holding me down with chains made of my own not inconsiderable regrets stopped for a bit. I was able to get up and stand again, I used the bat to assist. She was dead on the ground, gangbanger's bullet resting somewhere pleasantly warm in her graymatter, but this shit wasn't done yet.

Old witches die hard. Her ghost was there pulling itself up and figuring out what the fuck just happened, and I can hear Edgar screaming at me to do something. He wanted to do this part himself I think, but he's busy keeping my ghosts from ripping me right the fuck apart. So I do the only thing I can do. I take a swig of rum, and grab a hold of my dice. I ask the Baron for one last favor, spew the rum into my hand onto the dice and roll those bitches.

Afterlife lottery.

I get a five and a three, they come to rest between her rapidly cooling breasts draped in that ridiculous mumu. I have no idea where that indicates, but I'm hoping it's like Eskimo hell or something ridiculous like that. Nothing but penguins with dildo-hats and polar bears on scooters. The good Baron takes her off my hands and it's done, it's fucking done.

I'm giggling, half crying...Edgar's not there anymore, and one of his boys yanks my stupid ass out the door and into the car. Eddie's sister is there and she puts pressure on my thigh, which is bleeding like god damned crazy for some reason and saying shit in that Spanish-moonspeak with such rapidity that it's making my head spin. They peel out of there fast as fuck, I'm fading out but I'm there enough to giggle and mutter out "eepa eepa!"

Ha ha, fuck me, passing out time.

Eddie's sister helped me get out of Los Angeles after that. Fuck that town, I'm never going back. But she and I occasionally keep in touch. Edgar's still around, but he keeps it quiet, especially since I've gotten my shit relatively together. So there, does that count as a ghost story? It has ghosts in it. In my head when I'm going over it, I'm always played by the same guy. To hell with Bruce Willis, I want Steve Buscemi.

UNKNOWN POSTER – THE BWYSTFEL

I was maybe seven when my great grandmother died at the age of 96; she was Welsh, and a smiling, stooped-back woman with keen blue eyes and a maze of wrinkles. Apart from several stories — which I recall my grandmother being annoyed that I was told — I know little about my greatgran. Scared I would forget her altogether, a few years after she died, I sat down and tried to remember what she'd told me, making notes for myself. The below is taken from the notes I and my own memory.

You can read these two stories in a number of ways — a very old tale of a shadow person/ghost/demon/faerie beast, or a child's imaginings, or maybe just an attempt to frighten me. I'm repeating them as I was told them.

Spellings of (probably) Welsh words are all approximate; where there's a *, I've quoted directly from the notes, but am not sure what she/I meant.

The Bwystfel and the Bone Den

"When I was a child, I lived in Radnorshire, one of seven children and the youngest of six girls. As my parents had six other girls and an infant boy to take care of, they left me to myself, and I ran about like a wild thing. Not that they didn't love me, but they had other things to do.

I was about five when I began to see the Bwystfel. It roamed about the farm, slipping in the shadows, and the only way to see it was to look for the shapes that were darker than the spaces between stars. Its mad eyes were like coal sparks, it laughed like a goat in pain, and it was always angry. I watched it from a distance: one spring, I saw it kill a nest of sparrows – closing its hands about the nest until the little naked birds smothered on its flesh* -- one summer, it poisoned the sheep, biting the ewes' legs until rot and infection ate into their flesh that no amount of doctoring could fix. Later, it skulked into the shed and sliced the handyman's chest open, then danced his blood up the walls and over the rafters. My parents said it was an accident, but knew better. "The Bwystfel did it," I told my father, and he boxed my ears for being a liar. No one believed me at all. . . except the Bwystfel itself.

It grew angrier. At night, it crept into my room, giggling and ripping the blankets away and pinching me. I shared a bed with two of my sisters – we didn't all have separate rooms like you do – and when the Bwystfel came, we shivered together, too afraid to move until morning. We were very little girls, and nobody trusted us with a candle, so we had no way to drive the thing away. It tormented us in whispers, calling us names and telling us we were bad children, because our prayers that it would leave us be weren't answered. My sisters refused to speak a word of it, and they wore the Bwystfel-inflicted bruises like jewellery – saying they'd fallen over or been bitten by the cat.

I decided I would have to find the Bwystfel myself and scare it away. I took the statuette of Florence Nightingale that my mother gave us to hold when we were sick and a stone with a hole in it, both for luck. As it turned out, I would need the luck.

I walked for ages, got lost, and eventually stumbled into a small wooded copse where I had never been before. Under the trees it was cold air, and pine needles and dried leaves lay thick upon the patchy grass. I clutch Florence. . . and then I saw the bones.

Bleached and ancient, they lay scattered in so-wide* circle: small bones, large bones, bones half buried in the loam, bones with scraps of dried flesh still clinging to them. A sheep skeleton hung suspended in the tangle of a blackberry bush, and canes had grown through the eye sockets of birds. I started to cry – I knew I'd found the den of the Bwystfel.

The Bwystfel appeared from nowhere, crouched down on the tawny grass like a cat about to pounce. The ivory of the bones jutted up around it like little fingers, clawing, trying to drag it down. "You'd better run, small girl," the Bwystfel hissed. "Better run, or your brother-boy will break his bones, snap-snap." It vanished, only to appear again, behind me. Terrified, I flung my lucky stone at it; the stone passed right through its head, and the ghoul screamed.

I'd seen enough. I bolted, dropping Florence, rushing headlong towards where I thought the nearest road should be. Once there, I kept going, my skirt ripped to ribbons by thorns and my legs stung with nettles, until, turning a corner, I ran smack into my grandfather. He was a big man, my grandfather, and he swung me off my feet and held me as I sobbed.

"What's wrong, darling?" he asked, when I calmed some. I told him of the Bwystfel and what it had said, and instead of being angry, as my father had been, he listened. His brow furrowed. "Are you feeling brave, darling? Do you think you could be brave for me?" When I nodded, he had me show him where I'd gone – then he sat me on a bank and gave me his best silver snuff

box to hold. "I'm going after the Bwystfel," he told her. "You stay here in the sunshine and I'll be back soon. If any bad bwcy* comes, you hit it with that."

So I waited, shaking, afraid for my granddaddy and afraid of the Bwystfel and afraid of what Mother would do if I lost Florence. Finally, back Grandad came; flushed, and bleeding from a hundred cuts on his hands. He looked angry, more angry than I'd ever seen him, for he was the mildest of men. "The Bwystfel-beast is dead again," he told me, "and under the soil where it belongs." He spat upon the earth and ground the moisture in with his boot heel.

"What do you mean, dead again?" I asked.

Grandad was quiet for a time, then he said. "The Bwystfel was an unchristian/damned* who hurt small things because he loved pain. When I was a boy, Old Thomas* killed him, but Young Thomas found where he lay and let him out. I'll sort him out for good soon and he won't bother you any more." When he arrived at my father's house, he made excuses for my torn dress and tear-stained face, saying I'd been attacked by a dog, and Florence had been broken as I'd tried to escape.

And then, without another word, he went to the shed and fetched the dead handyman's bottle of whiskey and gun powder and a box of matches.

I never went back, but I heard of a fire that burned bone den trees to the ground."

If nothing else is true, the Florence Nightingale statuette still exists, and has indeed been broken and glued back together.

The Bwystfel and the Handyman

I loved the Bwystfel story -- wouldn't you be pleased to know your great granny tried to kick some paranormal butt? -- and after many pleas and the repetition of the original story dozens of times, I convinced my Greatgran to elaborate. While I have mismatched, incomplete notes on some of the other stories, this was the one she told most often.

"The handyman was a widower and a drunk, yet good natured and pious all the same. He never swore in front of ladies, and he always tipped his cap to Mother. . . . Somehow, tho, he angered the Bwystfel. Everywhere he went, the thing would follow, cursing low and solid in his ears. It pushed him into ditches and stuck bramble canes in his bed, so would awake in covered in needle-point scratches. The handyman and Father were good friends, and the handyman often ate with my family. As the weeks past, the man grew paler and paler and became jumpy, starting at every sound. I watched the Bwystfel slithering around his ankles and snickering. He couldn't see it, but he could hear it, and he thought he was going mad.

At dinner one night, the handyman told us that he was having nightmares – horrible nightmares of rotting things – and that he could smell the carrion when he woke. By this point, my father was worried for his friends, and together they pried the floorboards up, looking for dead mice. . . and found them. . . along with the handyman's missing cat, curled up under the floor just below the foot of the bed, where it used to sleep. Everyone agreed that the cat must have been hunting mice and become trapped and starved.

That didn't explain the broken necks. Or the dried corpses of a hundred bees, lying in

rows under the bed.

Eventually, the handyman, too, began to see what I knew was the Bwystfel. He said, that he could feel its stare, and when he slept the shadows seemed to move: growing larger, then smaller, then larger again. Things tapped on the walls at night, and knocked on the windows and breathed cold breath on his face. The milk turned sour and the butter rancid and cracks appeared in every plate the handyman owned. And then things got even worse.

I was playing nearby when the scream came. The Bwystfel shrieked with its goat laughter and the sound of crashing and scraping metal echoed out of the shed. Chickens ran willy-nilly, and the dog, lying beside me, barked and barked, the hair on its back bristling like a brush. Mother burst from our house and ordered me away.

Every rusted farm tool in that little shed had come off its hooks. The handyman died a few days later from a blow to the head and an infection from a pitchfork cut. He had never having woken up."

Naturally, I cannot vouch for the accuracy of these stories, nor do I know what a Bwystfel is. All I can add was that the smiling Greatgran I knew didn't exist when she recounted these stories. At least once afterwards, she stayed up all night with the light on. Also, out of my grandmother's hearing, and after a good bit of sherry, she made me promise that if I ever met anything like the Bwystfel, I was to go straight to the nearest church and stay there.

SQUAT

"There are no ghosts in this house. Only God."

My family is the very definition of a Fundamental Christian family.

They do not admit to believing in ghosts or spirits or demons... despite the fact that Jesus made a practice of driving demons out of people in the Bible. So you can understand their chagrin when their youngest kept insisting that in his room there was a scary old man that wouldn't let him sleep at night.

We'd been living in our new apartment for about a year and a half. My brother and I attended a public school about three blocks from home and despite being country boys now living in a fairly large city, we fit in rather well with the other children in the neighborhood. However, despite Dad's new job paying better than he used to bring in being a small town cop, money was tight. Mom took a day job so we could afford to eat something other than pancakes, hot dogs, and that disgusting canned chicken noodle soup. It took a little while to get used to it, but soon my Brother Gabe and I were in a routine.

We would walk home from school together and sit down at the table together to do our homework. Seeing as how it was kindergarten, I didn't have much in the way of homework, so I usually ended up watching Gabe do his math and spelling for a while before I'd get bored and go watch GI-Joe. Mom would come home around 6:00 and start dinner. Dad would come home at 7:00 and we'd all eat and watch M*A*S*H before I got sent to bed.

It was late May, shortly after my 5th birthday. It was one of the first hot and muggy nights of the year, so I had the window open and I was sleeping on top of my blankets. A cough woke me. It was the sort of cough I would later learn to associate with my maternal grandfather, who would die from pneumonia after a long battle with emphysema. It was wet and labored and from the sound of it, whoever was coughing should have been doubled over in some serious pain.

I opened my eyes and standing at my window was the oldest man I'd ever seen. His face was a giant mass of wrinkles and his head was nearly completely bald, save for the Picard ring around the sides of his head. His long white beard was stained yellow around his lips and he absolutely reeked of cigarette smoke. We made eye contact.

His eyes were the most intense blue I've ever seen. If there's one thing I will take with me from that incident, it will be those piercing blue eyes and the way they shimmered in the darkness. He didn't say a single word; just stood there, stooped against the window sill and stared at me.

I screamed like the little girl my mother's always wanted and ran crying out of my bedroom. My parents were in the living room still, which means it couldn't have been terribly late yet. I gibbered something about a man in my bedroom and Mom held me close and told me it was ok while Dad took his gun from overtop of the fridge where Gabe and I couldn't reach it and went to investigate. Of course, there was nobody there and I'd had a bad dream and should go back to bed. I refused and spent the night sleeping in my He-Man sleeping bag at the foot of their bed.

The next night I made dad check the room with me. Nobody was in the closet. Nobody was under my bed. And the window was closed and locked. It didn't matter. Somewhere after midnight I woke to the sound of a wet, lung tossing cough followed by the sound of wheezy breathing. I lay very still and pretended to still be asleep. The stench of cigarette smoke began to fill the room and I started having trouble breathing through it all. I forced myself to open my eyes long enough to find the door and ran for it.

Mom held me. Dad yelled. That night they wouldn't let me sleep in their room. Instead, I took up residence on Gabe's floor. Something he was none too happy about. I laid out my sleeping bag and curled up inside it, crying softly until Gabe hit me with his pillow and told me to shut up. I shut up. But I didn't sleep. I waited. I waited because I knew, as only a child can, that the old man would be back that night. I waited for hours. And then, just before dawn, I was rewarded. There were footsteps out in the hall. Footsteps that were drawing closer and closer to Gabe's door. Footsteps that stopped. The smell of smoke permeated the air and even Gabe started to cough a little bit in his sleep.

The door rattled. I moaned a little and curled up into a little ball hidden deep in my sleeping bag. The door rattled again, harder this time. I started to cry again and begged the old man to just go away and leave me alone. The door continued to rattle until finally when it sounded like it was going to come flying off its hinges, it broke off and went completely still. I risked a peek out from under my sleeping bag. The smoke still lingered in the room but it was fading fast. I breathed a sigh of relief until I heard heavy footsteps come pounding back down the hallway and up to the door. It burst open.

I screamed louder than I had the night before. And with good reason too. It was my dad and he was pissed at being woken up again. He yelled at me for banging on the doors and when I tried to tell him that it was the old man he spanked me for lying. I don't

know what hurt more, the spanking or that my own father thought I was a liar. I spent the rest of the pre-dawn darkness standing in the corner doing what seemed at the time to be an odd punishment; repeating the phrase that my father wanted me to say: "There are no ghosts in this house. Only God."

This was to become quite familiar to me over the years and while it still strikes me as odd to deny a spirit's existence, the probably billions of times I've repeated it have made it seem like a normal, everyday expression. There ARE no ghosts. Only God. What this taught me was that God is a nasty old man with emphysema and smoke stains in his beard who likes scaring the shit out of little kids.

The next few weeks plowed on like this. I would wake at random times during the night with a coughing old man stinking my room up with his smoke smell. He wasn't actually smoking anything though. It was like his very essence was made up of tobacco smoke, like he'd smoked so much in his obviously very long life that his lungs were still full of the stuff and it just came out when he exhaled. That would explain the coughing. Every time he showed up I would start changing the mantra. "There are no ghosts in this house. Only God. There are no ghosts in this house. Only God." Over and over again and it never seemed to do anything. I imagine it really freaked my parents out, though. Waking up to me screaming this at the top of my lungs about every other day for weeks on end had to do a number on their nerves. I bet the landlady loved hearing it too.

One night in mid-June he finally acknowledged me. I was mid-mantra when he coughed. This time it wasn't the typical gut wrenching cough that I'd grown so accustomed to hearing, and instead more of a "Pardon me good fellow, but I'd like to say a few words." sort of cough. All this time, I'd been refusing to look at him but being a curious little boy, I just had to look.

He was leaning against the window sill, in the same place he'd been in the first night I saw him. His eyes were still as piercing blue as ever and they drew my gaze like a magnet. "David," he said. "You shouldn't be afraid of me. I'm just an old man." And then he jumped out the window.

I never saw him again.

I would really like to write all of that off to a five year old's over-active imagination or a recurring nightmare or something. In retrospect, this wasn't all that scary. But at the time, I was ready to piss my pants. I suppose this should have prepared me a bit for the way my childhood would go for a while, but really, I don't think there was any way for me to be ready for happened next. Again, I want to attribute all of what follows to a hyper-active imagination. But I just can't.

Charlie

My family moved out of our apartment in the city and into a house in more of a country setting on the outskirts of town. It was only country because it was a state preserve. Go about five miles away from the house, in any direction, and you'll hit a four lane highway that takes you back to the city proper. But to a family born and bred in small towns with more cows than people, it was a nice little refuge. There was actually a horse ranch about a mile down the street.

The house we lived in was owned by the company my father worked for, so it was win-

win. We got out of a cramped apartment with no parking and we also got to save all that rent money so my parents could eventually buy their own place. Of course, nothing is to be that simple. There had to be a reason that nobody else in my father's company wanted to live in that house. Dad had only been with the company for like two years or so and they were giving him a company house? I mean the car was one thing. But a whole house? Aside from the fact that the basement was prone to flooding when it rained, dad couldn't find anything wrong with it. So we moved in.

The house was really nice. It had a little foyer area right at the front door. Off to the left was my father's office. Off to the other side was the alcove that would later house my little brother's playpen. Past that, you reach the living room which had one wall lined entirely with mirrors. Being impressed with my own facial expressions, I could often be found kneeling backward on the couch and making funny faces at myself in the wall. Through a set of pocket doors on the left was my parent's bedroom. Continuing out the back was the kitchen/dining room and the downstairs bathroom. At the end of the dining room was the stairwell. My folks cut a doorway into their bedroom from the base of the stairs so they could hear Gabe and I when we were in our bedrooms, upstairs.

The upstairs was basically two rooms that split off from the stairs. Just off my room was the upstairs bathroom. At the back of Gabe's room was the toy room. It had unfinished walls with exposed pink insulation, which held all sort of hidden treasures like matchbox cars and this really great old wooden boat. Running between the bathroom and the playroom was a corridor that I would eventually discover. On the opposite side of both rooms were our closets, which ran the length of the house and were split in the middle above the stairs by a thick wall made by un-mortared bricks.

We'd only been there for about two weeks when Mom and Dad decided to cut the doorway to their bedroom from the stairwell. That very night the bumping started. It started small and quiet and down at the bottom of the stairs. At first, I thought it was our cats, recently recovered from Grammy and Grampy's since we weren't living in the city anymore and could have animals again. We had two cats back then, one for each of us boys. Mine was named squash. He was a big orange beast who probably weighed as much as I did at the time. Gabe's cat was exactly the opposite: small and black with lots of hair. They hated each other and would often end up fighting, so hearing a soft bumping from downstairs was nothing new and especially nothing to worry about.

This went on for a few nights and it continued to not worry me. That was until the night that Squash was on my bed when the bumping started. His ears perked up and he let out this horrible growl noise that is guaranteed to make your skin crawl right off your bones. My first thought was that Gabe's cat was coming up the stairs and that Squash was pissed. But then she came running in from my bathroom and hissed down the stairs at whatever was bumping around down there.

I called down to my mom and dad to see if maybe it was them. No answer. They were sleeping. The bumping started coming up the stairs. I slowly started to freak out. I stood up on my bed started the mantra that my father had forced me to learn, hoping that maybe God would finally show up and protect me from whatever was going on. "There are no ghosts in this house..." The bumping stopped almost immediately. I was floored. It had never worked on the old man, but it worked on the bumping. I settled down on my bed and closed my eyes.

bump bump bump

It was in my closet! Down by the back wall.

BUMP BUMP BUMP BUMP

I screamed. I screamed loud as I possibly could. "THERE ARE NO GHOSTS IN THIS HOUSE! ONLY GOD! THERE ARE NO GHOSTS IN THIS HOUSE! ONLY GOD!"

The bumping stopped. And of course, this is when my parents decided to wake up and come storming up the stairs.

They figured I was upset because we had moved and I wasn't adapting to the new house and so I had decided to wake up in the middle of the night and pretend I heard ghosts. And then they brought me to talk to the pastor.

I don't really remember all of what he said because it was a bunch of bullshit about how there was no such thing as ghosts and spirits and that Jesus would not let a demon come into the house of good, faithful Christians. I asked him what would happen if the demon was already in the house before the Christians moved in. He sputtered for a minute and then said that the light of Jesus would drive any demon out. This went on for what seemed like a very long time. It was probably only a few hours, but that's like four or five episodes of He-Man and that's a very long time to a kid.

He finally ended the tirade about god and his power over demons and then gave me a silver cross. I overheard him tell my parents that it was just to make me feel better because I was obviously making the whole thing up. Mom and Dad took me home. In retrospect, I should have asked to stay at the pastor's house. The scariest thing there was his toupee. At my house, I had something evil in my closet.

Things didn't improve at my house but I never woke my parents up by screaming at the thing ever again. Instead, I entered into a wary co-existence with it. It bumped and I hid under my covers. I stopped sleeping at night because I was so terribly afraid of whatever was in my closet. I relished nap time during school as the only time I could get any decent sleep. I was a five year old zombie.

My sixth birthday came and went; just another sleepless night filled with a racket coming from my closet. Two days later, I got off the school bus and found a boy about my age standing in my front yard. He was short, like me. He had red hair and lots of freckles all over his face and arms. He dressed nicely and looked as if he'd just had a bath. He said, "Hi, I'm your neighbor Charlie. Want to play?" His voice was that squeaky pre-pubescent little boy voice that is so easily mistaken for a girl's.

So we played. We played a whole lot of He-Man because He-Man ruled. I mean, he was the Master of the Universe, for Chrissake! Charlie always left before my mom got home from work, something about how his mother might worry if he was out too late. With my parents, I understood and never thought anything of it.

One day when I got off the bus, Charlie asked me if I'd like to go exploring. I was up for exploring, so off we went. We explored behind the hedges in front of the house. Nothing cool back there, just sticks and leave. We explored the little nook behind my father's desk and found nothing but dust. We weren't very good explorers. Then Charlie decided we should explore the upstairs. He led me through the house and up to the bathroom that set off of my bedroom. He stood in front of the full length mirror that was set into the wall and said, "I think

we should go into the walls.” I watched, fascinated as he pressed his hand against the right side of the mirror and pushed in. *click* The mirror was a door!

I’m not really sure how the hinging and latching system worked – it probably involved magnets like the glass doors on TV cabinets- but when he pushed in, it released and then opened outward, revealing a dark passage. Now THIS was exploring. For some reason, I didn’t think to question how he knew the door was there. I simply followed him inside. There really wasn’t much to the passage. It was simple plank flooring with unfinished walls, just like the play room had. Charlie shut the door behind us and little cracks of light at the far end of the corridor began to slowly light the passageway.

Charlie was standing just in front of me, staring at the wall and tracing his fingers over a dark stain on one of the two by fours in the wall. “I used to come here and hide a lot when my daddy was mad at me. But one time he found me.” He sounded so sad and small at that point.

I wanted to say something, anything to make my friend not sad. But I found that I couldn’t move my mouth. In fact, I wasn’t even breathing. I don’t know how long I stood there frozen, watching my new friend absently tracing the stain on the wall. It must have been hours because I was suddenly snapped from my reverie by my mother frantically calling my name from downstairs. I took a huge gasping breath and turned back to the mirror door, hastily telling Charlie that my mother was calling and I had to go, but Charlie wasn’t there anymore.

Thinking that he must have just been hiding in the darkness, I blundered my way through the door, figuring out to open it from the inside by accident. I hurried downstairs to find my mother in tears at the kitchen table. I told her that I’d been playing with Charlie and hadn’t heard her calling me. She grabbed me into her arms and hugged me half to death, babbling something about how she’d come home and couldn’t find me and I didn’t answer her and I wasn’t in my room and she thought I’d been kidnapped or ran away from home. I told her again that I’d just been playing with Charlie upstairs.

She stared at me blankly. “Who’s Charlie?”

It didn’t occur to me that she’d never actually met my new friend. It also didn’t occur to me that I’d never mentioned him to anybody until just then. So I plowed ahead and dragged Mom upstairs to the bathroom and opened the secret door to introduce her to Charlie. He wasn’t there. He was gone. And of course, Mom wrote it off to me having an imaginary friend. I never saw Charlie again.

But the bumping... Oh the bumping never stopped. In fact, after Charlie stopped coming over, the bumping got worse. Instead of staying on the back wall of my closet, the bumping started to get louder and move closer to the door. After a few nights, it was slamming against the door so hard that I heard the wood begin to crack and splinter with each blow.

Finally, the night my mom went into labor with my little brother, whatever was in the closet got out. I had been wakened by my dad. He was going to take us all to hospital and then a lady from our church was going to come pick us up. I was groggily putting my shoes on, ignoring the slamming going on off to my right when suddenly it just stopped. I looked over and saw that the door was now standing open by an inch or two.

There was darkness between the door and the jam. This wasn't just the regular darkness that one sees in a closed off room, but a tangible darkness. An inky black darkness that seemed to be both substantial and vapor at once. I watched as tendrils of darkness seeped from the closet and into my room. There was a moment of hesitation, much like watching a cat pause before it strikes at an unsuspecting mouse. And I knew what was coming. I hurled my shoe at the door and flung myself into the bathroom, slamming the door shut behind me.

I fell in a heap in front of the mirror door and suddenly knew that the thing in the closet couldn't come through because of the mirror. In a flash, I had myself locked inside the secret passage and was huddled against the far end, ready to break through the flimsy barrier of foam insulation that separated me from the toy room. At the other end of the passage, I heard the bathroom door give way with a crash. That was enough for me.

I pressed myself through the gap between the wall supports and easily knocked the insulation away from the wall, tumbling into the toy room and coming to my feet like an acrobat. I didn't pause but ran as quickly as I could, through Gabe's room and down the stairs, knowing that any moment I would feel the icy grasp of whatever was now trashing my bathroom. One step. Two steps. Four steps. The racket in the bathroom suddenly stopped and I leapt the last dozen steps to the landing, plowed into my parents' room, and ran out into the living room where the mirrored wall was crawling with shadows. I screamed and ran out the door to the car where Gabe was already waiting. Dad, carrying Mom -baby stomach and all, strode out of the house, completely oblivious to all that was going on in the mirrors right behind the couch.

We got to the hospital in about half an hour. Half the church was already there to pray for Mom and one of the deacons' wives whisked Gabe and I off for the remainder of the night. Nobody asked me why I only had only one shoe. Two days later, I had a new brother. He was named Stephen after the Martyr. A role he's been playing very well for the last 25 or so years.

Things were quiet for a while after that. I had no explanation for why my closet and bathroom doors were destroyed and why the insulation in the toy room was all busted in. So I got the belt. By this time, I knew better than to say anything about a ghost. Chanting and silver crosses didn't do a thing to make me feel better and telling my father that a ghost broke the closet door would have gone over like a fart in church. Dad decided to not fix the door and instead took it off its hinges.

I stopped sleeping in my bed. Instead, I slept under the kitchen table with a flashlight and a giant red tape player that my Grammy had given me for Christmas. I played the Beach Boys' Surfin USA so many times that I broke the tape.

Just because I wasn't in my room anymore didn't mean that the thing wasn't still active. I could hear it, occasionally; banging around in my closet. As for the things in the mirrors, let's put it this way. It's been over two decades and I've been in some pretty hairy situations since I lived in that house, up to and including being grabbed and thrown about by something I couldn't see. Shadows in a mirror seem like such small potatoes when I look at the words on paper, but just thinking about them today gives me the creeps like nobody's business! Back then, I started using the back door to enter and leave the house so I didn't have to see them.

About six months after Stephen was born, there was an electrical fire in the basement. I have never seen anything cooler in my entire life than what amounted to a lightning storm erupting from the breaker box. Sadly though, THIS is what it took to convince my father that we needed to move out. Black vapor demons busting out of closets and chasing his son down the stairs? No problem. The entire living room wall looking like a portal to hell? Chump Change. One little

fire in the basement that didn't do much damage at all? Screw that, let's move out!

I finished up second grade in some semblance of normalcy while living out of an apartment above the Pastor's house. Even at six years old, I never felt I'd be thankful for anything that organized religion could do, but there was absolutely nothing wrong with that place. I wasn't visited by any scary old men or closet bumping monsters, and the living room was this wonderfully bland flower wallpaper. The next few years passed almost completely without anything of note happening. It was as if I'd experienced enough in that short time to blind me to the world of spooks and goblins and ghosties. Time is a remedy that fixes all things, though. And those blinders were eventually torn off. But that is a story for another day.

40s Music

It was the summer after 8th grade. This puts it somewhere around late August of 1993. I was very excited because I was finally going to be a high school student. Those were happy days. I had money, because I had a paper route that my best friend Jim and I delivered on every day. I had transportation – my Giant 12 speed was the best bike in my part of town. And I spent just about every day with my two best friends, the aforementioned Jim and my other best friend, Nick.

We'd spent the summer riding our bikes all over town, exploring the bike trails that wandered through the fairly extensive woods that stretch through the middle of town. The three of us were inseparable. So when the time came for Jim's parents to take his older sister Christy to college, we ended up holding down the fort at Jim's place. That night, it was just the three of us, a lot of Jolt Cola, two large pizzas from Dominos, Batman, and Batman Returns.

It was somewhere around 3 am the first night. We'd just finished watching Batman Returns when we heard what sounded like voices coming from upstairs. So, being the strapping young men that we were, we trooped upstairs to investigate the strange noises. We hit the top of the stairs and the sound cut off, like somebody had thrown a switch or something. We made a quick trip through the upstairs rooms and made sure no TV's or stereos were on. In the master bedroom, Jim's father's clock radio was very softly playing some old 40's dance music. Now, it was set to WPYX – which played all the good rock and roll, in those days, and this sort of music shouldn't have been playing at all. So Jim muttered something about "That's weird" and went to turn the radio off, thinking his father had left the alarm set. But the radio wasn't on. The switch was very clearly in the 'off' position. Jim put his hand on the radio, and the music stopped. A little freaked out, we headed back downstairs.

Now, that's explainable, I suppose. I pick up distant radio stations from time to time, that for whatever reasons, will completely drown out a powerful local station. And maybe the radio was somehow on, but static electricity from Jim's hand killed it? I don't know. Read on!

We no sooner hit the living room, when the noise starts up again. It was definitely voices, but they were indistinct, almost like the murmur of quiet conversation from across a room. There were also footsteps, as if people were walking around upstairs. And very faintly, we heard dance music again. The three of us looked at each other, eyes a little wide and shared a nervous laugh. My first thought was that Jim's older sister had set us up. She knew that we were going to be spending a few nights alone in the house

and had probably sent her friends over to hide make spooky noises to freak us out. I voiced my suspicion to Jim and Nick and they agreed with me. We silently headed back up the stairs. As we reached the landing at the top of the stairs, the talking stopped, the footsteps ceased, and the dance music faded away to nothing. And then a door slammed. Aha! We had them!

Very quietly, we crept toward the bathroom, the first door on the right. It was wide open. Nobody's in there – not even hiding behind the shower curtain. The next room, also on the right, was Christy's. The door was wide open. And once again, there was nobody in there. So we peeked into his parents' room. Again, the door was wide open and there was nary a soul in the room. The radio was silent this time. This left us with Jim's bedroom. But his room is right next to his parents' room and the door was wide open. We could clearly see that there was nobody in there. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ATTIC? Of course! That's why we didn't find them before, they must have been hiding in the attic!

In order to get to the attic, you have to walk to the back of Jimmy's room and right next to his closet is the door to the attic. The attic door was shut, which wasn't all that surprising, as the attic door was [i]always[/i] shut. Nobody went into the attic, and as far as we knew, nobody had been in the attic since Jim and I put the artificial Christmas tree away back at the end of winter break. But we'd heard the door slam, and it was the only closed door, so they had to be hiding in the attic. As we assumed we were going to be dealing with some of Christy's friends, the three of us reached for weapons. -We regularly sparred in the backyard, and our weapons of choice were kept in Jim's room. I chose a short cudgel made from a broken shovel handle, Jim always went with the axe handle, and Nick grabbed a mop handle with an evil jagged point at the end. We threw the attic door open and surged up the steps.

I noticed the change in temperature immediately. It was probably 70 degrees that night, but in the attic stairwell, the temperature had to be close to zero. I could see my breath and I was shivering pretty badly by the time we hit the top of the steps. I was already trying to figure out how Christy's friend's had done this. Maybe they had brought like four air conditioners into the attic and brought the temperature down. That was theoretically possible, right? I was expecting to have five or six high school seniors jump out at us from behind boxes and yell "Boo!"

That's not what happened at all.

Jim flipped the light switch, illuminating the low-beamed attic filled with dust covered boxes and bags of old clothes. There was absolutely nothing up there. The months old dust on the floor hadn't been disturbed. I'm not ashamed to admit that this is when I started to worry. There was very obviously nobody in the attic. Jim swore, turned off the lights and turned to head back downstairs. We were back down in his room when the attic lights came back on behind us. Something deep in my guts quailed at the thought, but I knew we were going back upstairs.

We ran back up the stairs, passing into the freezing cold air and reaching the top, just in time for the lights to go out. We were plunged into pitch black darkness. Not to be put off by whatever tricks were being pulled on us, Jim stepped away from the stairs and into the darkness of the attic. And that's when the screaming started. It came from everywhere and nowhere all at the same time. It had multiple voices and tore through various octaves, ranging from a harsh growl, a medium yell, and an ear splitting shriek. I

started to shake, whether from fright or the cold, I can't say. Probably both. The scream rattled the windows and the very floor seemed to tremble. We booked it, running blindly down the stairs, dropping our weapons in our haste. We fell into Jim's bedroom and slammed the door shut behind us. The screaming was still going on behind the door and it was getting louder.

And that's when the lights in Jim's room started flickering. It started slowly, just a quick dimming and then the lights came back on full. And then they did it again. And again. We left Jim's room in a hurry, heading for the stairs again. Behind us, the attic door crashed open and the shrieking came louder. The lights were flashing on and off like strobes, and all the radios and TV's in the house came on, blaring at full volume that same dance music that was playing before.

Jim and Nick hit the stairs at full tilt and tore down them. I wasn't far behind, but something grabbed me. It wasn't fully substantial. It felt kind of like a rope made from cobwebs, but it had no trouble at all pulling me off my feet. The screaming was all around me and inside me, bouncing off my bones and hammering away in my chest. An intense wave of nausea bored into me and I vomited convulsively, my vision going grey as I retched. I rose up, a good three feet off the stairs and slammed headfirst into the ceiling. And then I was thrown down the rest of the stairs. I landed in a crumpled heap at Nick's feet. Jim was frantically trying to get the front door to open, but it wouldn't budge.

The lights stopped strobing and died completely, leaving us in the glow from the TV. The screaming retreated, seeming to fade back up the stairs. The downstairs stereo, the big TV in the living room, and the little black and white one in the kitchen sputtered with bursts of static and died. The only noise left in the house was the slow dance music coming from someplace upstairs. The front door clicked open. Nick hauled me up and he and Jim dragged me out of the house. I couldn't walk. I felt completely drained and emotionally ravaged.

We went next door to the really nice elderly couple that let us swim in their pool every summer and banged on their door till they came downstairs. In gibbering bits and pieces, Jim explained what had happened while Mrs. Garfield poured hot tea down my throat. During the whole tale, they didn't say a word, but just listened and exchanged glances, as if they knew all about it. They didn't actually come out and say it, but I suspect that this sort of thing had happened before and they just didn't want to talk about it. We called my parents and my dad came and picked us up. We took Nick home and Jim came over to my place for the rest of the weekend. My dad told us that we just got scared, being all by ourselves for the first time in our lives, with no adults around to protect us, and I was probably sick from eating too much pizza and soda. After a week of trying to explain what really happened, I gave up. My folks are too fundie to believe in anything like ghosts.

While I did go back to Jim's place a few times after that, it was never at night, and I never left the first floor. In recent years, I've researched Jim's house. There's nothing that suggests there was ever a death on the grounds, no murders or suicides. Nobody except the Garfields seemed to know anything about the place, and they both took what they knew to the grave about five years ago. The town itself is very old. It was founded in Colonial days. So it's possible that something bad did happen there once upon a time and it's not in the town records. Although, the 40's dance music confuses me if we're going back that far. Jim's folks have moved and he and I kinda drifted apart. I

don't know the people who live there now, so it'd be a little weird to just walk up and say, "Hey, I got this shit scared out of me in your attic once and threw up all over your living room stairs, can I come in and look for ghosts?"

Some things that have been brought up in discussion of this encounter. We were, all three of us 14 years old and full of raging hormones. Possibly we were broadcasting all kinds of psychic energy and the house went nuts? Or perhaps we attracted something or woke something up that had been slumbering?

Also, my father's theory is valid. We could have just been waaaaaaaaaaaaay hyped on caffeine from all the Jolt that we'd drank and all had a simultaneous mind trip or something. And then I got sick and hit my head while falling down the stairs.

But having a bit more experience with these matters now, the extreme drop in temperature, the nausea, and the effect on nearby electronics are all things I've observed or experienced when dealing with a spirit, and this leads me to believe that I did indeed have a spirit encounter that night. While I've run into my share of pissed off spirits in the years that followed, nothing can possibly compare to this first one. I'd like to think it's because I'm stronger now and better equipped to handle spiritual energy than I was at the tender age of 14. After all, I have more experience in these matters now. I've expelled a few spirits in my time, and dealt with any number of 'ghostly' happenings and haven't encountered anything quite that bad. I half hope I do, just so I can see if I can do something about it this time, but the other half of me thinks I'm crazy.

Aaron Wagner

It was the summer of 1998. I was 19 and working in the deli department of a local grocery chain. It was late May and my friend Sarah was having her birthday party. I had to work that day though, so I wasn't able to attend. Around 5:00 pm that evening I started feeling ill. I had a terrible headache and I was very nauseous. I decided to go home early. I had no sooner walked in the front door of my parents' house when my phone rang. It was my friend Tony. He told me that I had to come over to Sarah's. They were playing with an Ouija board and they'd contacted me from a past life.

Yeah. Me from a past life. I ran this over a few times in my head and no matter how I figured it, there's no way they could do that, as my soul is currently in my body, not wandering the ether. I was about to tell him to stuff it and stop trying to be funny when he said that my past self was messing with my now ex girlfriend and she was scared. I told him I'd be there as soon as I could and jumped back in my truck for the drive over. As I got closer and closer to Sarah's my headache got worse and I felt like I was going to throw up any second.

--Now, before I continue with my actions I'll tell you what they'd been doing. It was a bunch of girls and Tony at the party and somebody had the bright idea to bring the board. They started playing with it, asking silly questions and generally being very foolish. Most likely, one of the girls was exerting more force over the board than the others there, and handling the answers, as most sessions end up going. But according to Tony, something suddenly took control. They asked who it was and it said that it was a violinist named Aaron Wagner and had been dead since the 1860's but now lived again in the form of someone they knew... Me.

My ex girlfriend didn't believe a word of it and started asking questions that only I would know the answer to. It answered them all. She started to get a little freaked out. Especially when it told her that she was the reincarnation of Evelyn Wagner, Aaron's wife and that they had been separated by bad blood before they died. She pulled her hands away and then was literally hurled up against a wall, where she put her hands to her throat as if something was choking her.—

I pulled up in front of Sarah's house only a few minutes after I got off the phone with Tony. Waves of nausea assaulted me and I had a very hard time getting across the street and up the front steps. Sarah's a very trusting person and so her door is always unlocked. I didn't even bother knocking, I just let myself in and upon seeing nobody in the living room and dining room, made for her bedroom, which was at the back of the house.

Something about the place felt all wrong. I'd never experienced anything like it before, and I have something of a considerable history with things like this. The air was heavy and oppressive and smelled like ozone and decay. The walls seemed like they were closing in and the ceiling felt like it was going to fall down on me at any second. Sarah's room has white painted walls and a very large frosted glass light fixture on the white ceiling. Normally her bedroom is a very bright place. Despite being well lit, her room was dark, as if something were keeping the light out. My ex girlfriend was up against the wall, turning blue and holding her hands at her throat.

I don't recall actually doing anything. And to this day, I don't know if I could intentionally repeat whatever steps I took to clear my head, but as I crossed over the threshold into the bedroom, the darkness pushed away from me, like I had a bubble of light around me and was filling the room with it. My ex's hands dropped to her side and she took a deep, gasping breath and slid down to sit on the floor. I walked to the board, which was still active, even though nobody was touching it anymore. I grabbed the indicator and forced it to 'goodbye' and then flipped the board upside-down. At that instant I heard two noises that did not come from anything physically in the house. I distinctly heard a mirror breaking. It wasn't the sound of a window or a drinking glass. For whatever reason, I knew for certain that it was a mirror, shattering into a thousand pieces. At the same instant, I heard a terrible scream of "NO!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Whatever it was that screamed, I can guarantee that it wasn't a human voice. I don't know what it was, and I have never encountered anything like that again. My ex was ok after a few minutes, but remained very shaken. To this day, she won't talk about the party or what happened there. In fact, of all the others that were there, only Tony and a girl named Cindy can actually recall anything unusual. Tony has total recall and Cindy remembers that my ex was talking to 'me' from a past life. That's it. None of the others remember anything.

This one's more than a little fucked up and it involves the dreaded devil board. Honestly, divination can be achieved through any means. The board isn't what does the trick, it's your intent to speak to the spirits. I know people who claim to have used Monopoly boards successfully. The board is just a tool. In this case, it appears that something evil came through an open gateway or was there to begin with and just took advantage of the situation. I don't know, interpret it however you want to.

SAPPER – THE ABANDONED HOUSE

When I was a little kid, the neighbor next door used to babysit me often. She was a very old lady, her husband still lived there but was going senile. They'd both been orphans, had met in the orphanage, and been together since they were teenagers. No kids. At any rate, she died (heart attack while driving, ran into another car) and he headed off to a nursing home, where he died shortly thereafter.

The house was abandoned, with all their stuff still in there. Myself, being a shitty teenager, figured out how to pop the lock barrel off the door (undoubtedly Frank had done it years prior after locking himself out), and me and a friend (or the neighbor kid) would "camp" in the backyard and sneak into there at night, and also during the long summer days when our parents were working.

The place was just as they'd left it, including dirty dishes in the sink, and the general packrat clutter that folks who lived through the Depression tended to accumulate. Antiques, old B&W photographs, and junk. Lots of junk. Supposedly, somewhere in that house was a starter pistol and a .22/410 over&under, and that was our Holy Grail. At first we broke in just for the thrill, but eventually, that became the end goal of our many expeditions. I've a lot of fond memories of that summer of misdemeanor crime. We never took a whole lot, although we did all but empty Frank's tool shed over time (my Dad wasn't very mechanically inclined, but I was, and we needed tools to build our "projects".) I still have a lot of those wrenches, as a matter of fact. Over time, sneaking in there became our daily thing, and the fact that it was becoming routine didn't make it any less thrilling.

The first weird occurrence was during the day, when Josh and I were dicking around in there. I was in the hallway, and he was digging through junk in the living room. Then I heard the door to Mary's bedroom at the end of the hall squeak, and heard Mary sigh, as I'd heard her sign many times before. Except she'd been dead for 3 years. I jumped out of my skin and bolted, grabbing Josh by the arm and dragging him to the door. After we'd escaped and I'd calmed down enough to speak, he confirmed that he'd heard it, too, although he thought I'd been the one who closed the door.

Took us a while to get the balls to go back. But we did, because we were stupid. During another 'daring' daylight raid, we were down in the basement. The light had burned out long ago, and the steps were just stringers with treads on them, open at the sides. Suddenly, we heard the door open and shut upstairs. OH FUCK! BUSTED! Panic took over, and the best we could do was shimmy into the space beneath the steps, carefully avoiding knocking over the stacks of empty glass jars hoarded there (with a legendary catch by Josh when I knocked one over.) Our hearts in our throats, our breath frozen, we stared out through the gaps between the treads. The only illumination was light reflecting in from the small window set high in the wall directly in front of us. The footsteps paced around upstairs for what seemed like hours. We were shaking like leaves.

Then came the sound that we'd been dreading: the doorknob to the basement turned. The door swung open and diffused yellow light seeped down the steps. Slowly the footsteps fell on the treads. We froze. Down, down, down, the stairs shaking with each footfall, dust shaking loose and drifting down on us. They reached the tread above us. Our pulses pounded in our ears, I could feel Josh shaking, as was I. They paused, then continued. Down. I watched the tread in front of me flex with the weight of the intruder.

That's when our hearts stopped. *There was no one fucking there, yet the footsteps continued! Down the steps, across the concrete floor, and into the other half of the basement!*

They stopped, and after a few moments, they started coming back. It was now or never! With tears streaming down our cheeks, we bolted up the steps and ran from the house. In a moment of clarity, I made a midair 180° turn at the breezeway door and leapt back to shut the main door, and we burst from the house, ran all the way up the hill to Josh's house, tumbled inside and locked the door (as if that would do any good). We collapsed in his room, shaking, cursing, vowing to *never* go back there, and finally simply sat on the floor in silence, staring at the walls and not wanting to believe what had just happened.

...when I realized I'd dropped my mom's red rubber-handled needle-nosed pliers. Aw, fuck. With a sinking feeling, we retraced our steps, slowly. We must have spent two hours looking through the yard, even digging through the weeds we came nowhere close to during our flight. As supertime approached, we came to the inevitable conclusion: they were in the house. Somewhere.

Fear of ghosts warred with fear of my mother once she discovered they were gone. Not smart enough to imagine we could come up with a suitable excuse, or simply deny everything, we resigned ourselves to our fate: we had to go back. And we had to do it soon, before she noticed they were gone. God help us, she might even help clean the place out when the eventual time came, and I'd be superfucked if she found those damned pliers in that house.

We had to go "camping". That part, at least, would be easy to convince our parents of, because we probably spent half our summer nights in my backyard with a fire in the drainage trench. At least the weather was nice. I spent supper trying not to glance at the junk drawer where the pliers should be. Permission was granted, and Josh came down after his meal and we set the tent up.

The problem? My father worked second shift. My mother went to bed at 11, and he'd be home shortly before midnight. We knew we couldn't make our run while they were awake; Mom would periodically come out to check on us, and Dad would always come out and bullshit for a little bit before going to bed. We'd have to wait until at least midnight. The next six hours were the longest in my life, and I've had a lot of "bullet time" since then. Finally my father went to bed, and we steeled our nerves for the task ahead.

As we snuck into the breezeway, our flashlights covered with electrical tape to allow only a thin beam of light to escape, I hit the first snag in our "clever" plan. I'd locked the door. I could pry the lock barrel out, but without my needlenose pliers, I couldn't turn the latch. Already shaking with anticipation, I tried desperately to turn the shaft with my fingers.

No dice. We needed pliers. So we retreated, and broke into the tool shed to find a pair. After a half hour of searching, we returned with a pair of bluntnoses to try. As I pried the barrel back out, Josh holding the wobbling light behind me, we heard it.

Footsteps. Coming down the hallway to the door. He clicked the light out and we froze. Inexorably they came, closer and closer, until they stopped in front of the door. In the dark, we waited. And waited. Nothing. Hearts in our throats, Josh clicked the light on, and I continued. I saw the curtains on the door ruffle in my peripheral vision, and I crossed myself and focused on the doorknob, willing myself to not look up; primitive

fear gripped me and I knew that whatever was looking out through that glass was not something I ever wanted to see.

Finally the mechanism clicked and the door was unlocked. But neither of us wanted to turn the knob. So we waited some more, until I steeled myself and gently opened the door, then stepped back. Nothing.

The plot thins from there. We searched room by room, growing bolder as time passed without incident, and I finally found the pliers in a side room full of junk, where I'd leaned over a mountain of rolls of paper towels to open a chest piled high with junk that we'd been certain had to be the resting place of the Holy Shotgun.

I'm almost positive that wasn't the last time we went back, but it probably was the last time we went back at night. Like I said, we were dumbass adolescents. During one particularly slapstick "mission", Josh brilliantly decided to take a shit, which is when we discovered that, though the electricity was on, but the water *wasn't*--cue fishing a turd out of the toilet with a comb, and wrapping it in plastic wrap to sneak it outside and into the trash can in the breezeway, then fishing it out of THAT (duh!) and tossing it into the woods.

The house was eventually sold while I was off in the Army, and bought by some nice but trashy people who are doing a fine job of destroying the place, "remodel" by "remodel".

Not a word of this tale is fabricated or even embellished, which is particularly troubling to me since I've become a reluctant agnostic, and I don't really want to believe in ghosts. I actually had to go outside and smoke, twice, while typing this, because of the terror that washed over me while I dredged this memory up.

We never did find that motherfucking gun.

SEVENTHREV – ABANDONNED SCHOOL

I've got a pretty long one that I think I'm ready to tell. I've lurked here for years on and off but never noticed the ghost story threads until now for whatever reason. It's a good ten pages in MS Word, so I'll break it up into chunks, to make it a bit more digestible. The first part is mostly set up, and doesn't get weird till the end, so I'll preface it with a little gem of wisdom my grandmother once gave me about night-lights to get into the swing of things and make this post at least worth something.

Like many young children, I slept with a night light. We had one in the hall and the bathroom too for night journeys. One summer, my grandmother came to live with us, and took up residence in the room next to mine. I'm not sure why she told me this, but I distinctly remember her saying it just before bed-time one night. She said, "you shouldn't use a night light." I of course asked why. She looked at me dead serious and said, "they only let the devil see you better." Needless to say I never slept with one again, and hated the one out in the hallway enough to shut my door at night. I was probably all of eight years old at the time. Thanks Grandma! Ok, on to the main story:

This is an event that happened to my ex-girlfriend and myself along with a few of our friends about 11 years ago. We were all in high school at the time, Juniors all of us but

my younger brother who was a freshman and his older Sophomore friend. I had a thing for haunted places, though honestly I really hadn't done much more than explore some supposedly haunted abandoned house out in the stix. Nothing doing there. My girlfriend, we'll call her Katie for the sake of privacy, was also mildly into the whole paranormal thing, as were a couple of my friends and my younger bro, Mark. As the story goes, my mother discovered that I was into these kinds of things, and sure enough, so was she. She really enjoyed the whole idea of ghosts and ghouls and such. None of us had really done anything though, that is to say, we'd never actually gone out to a cemetery or haunted house except for me and two of my friends.

Now at this time of her life, my mother liked to smoke when things got stressful. However, she tried not to do it often, and she never did it in front of anyone. It was her little secret, even though my brother and I knew it was going on. She'd sneak into the bathroom and turn on the overhead fan and open a window and puff a couple out. We'd always smell it sooner or later, but we played it cool. She could be drinking we figured, so a little cigarette here or there was better than some of the alternatives.

Anyways, around that time she was on the verge of divorcing our cheating step-father as well, so things were pretty tense on the home front. He was indeed cheating, and she eventually did divorce him, but after she found out, she allowed him to prove himself, if you will, by ending the affair. Anyways, she'd occasionally just get so stressed with work and her cheating husband, and surely of making dinner and cleaning house and working late at her shitty job and all the other stuff moms do for their families, that she'd just hop in the car and take off. She'd always tell us when she left, and eventually we got used to it. She'd essentially just drive around for a couple of hours, usually out in the boonies, and smoke. It was her way of letting off some major steam.

After one of these drives, she came home all excited. She was always in a much better mood after a drive so at first I didn't think much of it. But she kept looking at me like she wanted to tell me something, get something off her chest, but she was smiling about it so I knew it wasn't anything terrible. Finally I asked her what was jiving her up so much. She leaned in close, and the smell of cigarettes on her breath, mingled with mouthwash, was overpowering, but I stayed put all the same. "I found an old abandoned school," she said. At first I didn't get it. So what? A school? Out in the boonies? And it was abandoned? And then it clicked.

She leaned back and smiled. "You wanna check it out?" she asked. My interest was immediately peaked. Of course I did. However, I couldn't quite accept that my mother was just gonna let me go traipsing around some abandoned building far away from any form of civilization, even if she were chaperoning. I hesitantly nodded, but voiced my aforementioned misgivings about the matter. She promptly said that she knew exactly where it was, and that as long as I took a handful of friends and we all had cell-phones charged and plenty of flashlights and a decent first aid kit, she didn't mind my checking it out. I could hardly believe it.

When she'd found out about my former adventure in the not-so-haunted house out in the stix, she'd nearly launched into the stratosphere. She'd taken my car away from me for a month, she had paid for it after all, and I had to ride the damned bus to school, which was a major shock to my high school junior ego. So here it was, the answer to my previous longings to do something. All I had to do was let her know about it. Of course that seems obvious now, but as a teen the last thing I wanted to do was tell my mom I might be getting up to some trouble.

So she agrees to allow me to visit the site, but of course she lays on the Mother pretty thick. If anything, anything at all goes wrong, even a scratch on some rusty metal, she is to be called immediately. Also, all the other parents of my friends involved must be aware of our little outing as well. This was the gotcha. None of my friends parents would agree to such an excursion, especially not Katie's. However, my mother didn't ask us to prove all was well with the other parents, so we never asked them. Perhaps a bad decision in the long run, but again, we were all teens, and just because my mother was suddenly open to the idea of us mucking around inside some possibly haunted but mostly nature overrun school, none of my peers parents were likely to be. So, we didn't tell them, and mom didn't ask.

We decided to visit the school on a Saturday. It would give us plenty of time to check the place out, and we were all hoping that we might actually be able to spend the night there, with a quick call to our parents of course. The plan was to all pile into the van of one of the guys coming along, Joe was his name, and head out around noon. We'd go eat lunch someplace first and then make our way out there, placing us at the school around 2:00 in the afternoon. This way, we figured, we could argue that we'd not had enough time, and we might as well stay the night, if we could. And of course we'd only really be calling my mother. I felt certain she'd let us stay as long as her rules were obeyed.

We headed out, grabbed a quick lunch, and got to the place close to the designated time. All was well. My mother had been right when she said the place was way out there. There was nothing for miles around but cornfields dotted with thick tangles of woods. None of us could fathom why there would be a school so far away from anything. I later found out there had been a one street town there, within shouting distance of the school in fact. It had been abandoned after a fire gutted most of it, sparing the school, some forty years previous. None of us knew this at the time, otherwise we might have widened our search, for there were apparently a few old houses and remains of the one street and such in the newly grown woods in the area. We just figured it was a schoolhouse for the farm kids back in the olden times, before we were but a twinkling in our mother's eyes.

For the first hour or so we mostly stuck to checking out the perimeter of the school. It wasn't massive, but it wasn't tiny either. It was a good three stories high, rectangular in shape, probably had at least 20-25 good sized rooms in it, including administrative offices and such. It had probably served most of the region, as the city I'd grown up in had been tiny back when the place was built, as were all the surrounding hamlets. I discovered all of this upon doing some research at the public library shortly after our little excursion out to the place. I didn't find many records for the building, which I thought was strange, but what I did find indicated that it was the main school for some fifty miles in all directions. And the town it was built in had apparently burned to the ground. The school was saved but most of the towns survivors simply moved to one of the neighboring hamlets, which by then were growing enough to warrant building their own schools. So this one gradually fell into disrepair and was forgotten.

It was terribly overgrown with vines, bushes, even trees. The western corner was dominated by a massive oak that seemed to have grown right up alongside the building, destroying much of the exterior as it grew. None of the windows had any glass in them, not even shards. There was a bit of graffiti, but it was noticeably scarce. This place was truly off the beaten path. None of us had heard of it from anyone else and there were plenty of similar places, old houses, shacks in the woods, etcetera, in the area that teens ventured out to.

The road, if you would call it that, that we drove down to get to the place, was completely overgrown, never been paved, at least that much was clear. We had to park the van halfway down it due to a couple of several year old trees growing in the middle of it. You could see

some of the school from the main road that we took to get there. Of course it was barely wide enough for two cars and looked like it hadn't seen any maintenance in a decade. Joe was not happy about all the potholes he had to caress his van through.

The place didn't initially seem all that daunting to me. It looked like a semi-modern school that had been left alone for a few decades and mother nature had done her thing. I didn't get goose-bumps looking at it, and as far as I can remember, no one mentioned anything about being creeped out by the place when we first arrived. I was really kind of unimpressed by it at first. Our initial search revealed little. There were remains of a playground area behind the school, mostly just rusted playground equipment, a lot of it unrecognizable due to it's advanced state of degradation. We did notice what looked like a dilapidated old house, one story tall and probably no more than three or four rooms, off in the distance. But we decided to leave it be for the time being, focusing on the school.

The front entryway was completely overgrown with vines. Most of the building was covered in them. My grandfather owns a house in the town I grew up in near there with a similar vine problem. He actually mostly lives in Florida, but spends some time in town to make sure his sons are keeping his family business tip-top. Every summer, he has to either have one of my uncles or a hired crew come and trim down the vines growing all over his house. It's a yearly battle and the few summers he's simply let it go led to nothing but damage to the gutters and windows of the house. The vines growing all around this school were the same kind, ones you might find on some stately manor giving it an air of age and pomp. Of course, these vines had seen no attention for years, and were really doing a job on the exterior of the place. What little we could see of the actual exterior was made of limestone and granite, two very abundant rocks in the region.

Adam, another of my friends along for the trip, had thought to bring machetes, otherwise we would have had a hard time getting into the place. He had three with him and distributed them amongst our small group. He had one, Alex, a friend of my brothers, had one, and I had one. My brother, Katie, and Joe were equipped with pretty powerful flashlights. We decided that we'd split up into pairs as we explored the place, we all had flashlights of some kind, and at least one of us would have a machete in case some homeless guy or wild animal decided to attack. So, after a look around the outside, we hacked our way through the front doors.

The doors themselves were long gone. The clearing of the entry took longer than we expected, we could see the gap and the vines didn't cover it completely, but they were tough as hell. Finally, we cleared a hole and headed in. We were immediately met by the smell of an ancient rotting building. I wished we had brought some kind of masks or something, because the place was surely toxic. The walls were warped and caving in with mildew and water damage. The floors were slimy in some places, crusty in others, but all around fragile. It's a wonder none of us stepped through any of them. The front hall was in pretty bad shape, we figured because it had been open to a good deal of exposure with the doors missing. We didn't notice any remnants of them come to think of it, they were just gone.

Most of us had enough sense to bring at least one extra set of clothing with us, except for my younger brother. After hacking our way into the front entry we backed out to retrieve a shirt or some such to wrap around our noses and mouths. They weren't perfect, and you could still smell the place through them, but they were better than

nothing. My brother, being the douche that he can be sometimes, decided that he didn't need anything anyways, and refused to wrap a t-shirt of mine around his face. I gave it to him regardless and he stuffed it in his back pocket, most of it hanging out, "just in case" he said.

By this time it was getting into late afternoon. The month was early October, so the light was going to be failing soon. But we have enough time to get a good lay of the land before we'd have to rely solely on our flashlights, the interior was dim but not dark. We split up. Me and Katie were together of course, my brother and his friend Alex, and Joe and Adam are the final pair. Katie and I decide to head to the top floor, my brother and Alex take the middle, and Joe and Adam poke around the ground floor, with the idea that we'd meet up in an hour or so at the entry way again and each take a different floor. This way we'd all get to see the whole place before it got too dark and we could decide upon a good place to crash for the night, or whether or not it was a good idea to do so at all.

So we all head out. Luckily, the stairs had been made of concrete, at least the ones at the entry, so going up to the top floor was not difficult, though the stairs were strewn with several decades worth of debris from storms and peeling ceilings and walls. Katie and I made it to the top floor without too much trouble and started moving through the school. The place was interesting, to say the least. Most of the classrooms still had desks and cabinets and such in them. In the few that we could open, however, we didn't find anything but rust, mold, and rot. I felt no heebie-jeebies while I was there, at least not till the end. Even Katie remarked that the place was not what she expected. I don't recall hearing any weird sounds that weren't explainable by the creaks and groans of an ancient building, nor did I see anything strange; no children running past a doorway, no old schoolmarm eliciting rage upon their former pupils, no silent-hillesque monsters looming out of the shadows. Of course, that was the case at first. Then, for some inexplicable reason, Katie simply disappeared.

I say she disappeared because one minute I was checking out the corner of some moldy room, the next I was asking her what she thought of some huge hole in the wall that looked out of place, and she didn't respond. I looked around and she wasn't with me anymore. At first I didn't panic. She'd simply stepped back out into the hallway again, on to the next room. I called for her, no answer. One of the reasons I digged Katie was that she could play a good practical joke. I was the type of guy who loved pulling one over on a buddy or whoever, and Katie was the first girl I ever dated that actually enjoyed the occasional prank and loved to one up me whenever she could. So of course I figured she's about to spook my ass. Nothing to worry about. She'll jump out at me any second, or feign being injured or whatever to unnerve me.

So I call out for her again, kind of playful like I'm onto her. No answer. Typical, I think to myself. She's just reeling me in. I leave the room I'm in and make my way to the next, glancing over my shoulder every few moments to try to catch her sneaking up on me. I never see her. The next room is empty. The room after that is empty as well. Two rooms later and I'm at a fungus covered wall at the end of the hallway praying that the shirt wrapped around my face will keep all the nastiness out. I check the last two rooms there at the end of the hall and she's still not around. Now I'm starting to feel the beginnings of anxiety. Usually by this point she would have sprung her trap on me. But no dice. So I carefully backtrack, searching every room again, opening closets where they actually still had hanging doors, looking under rusting and rotting desks, glancing through vine infested windows to make sure she's not outside looking up with a grin on her face. She

is simply nowhere to be found. I checked the entire top floor, as thoroughly as I could.

I'm thinking by this point that I need to do what mom asked me to do; call her if anything goes wrong. But I just know that Katie is playing a prank on me. She has to be. How could she just disappear? She had to be somewhere, and wherever that was, she was probably laughing her ass off about it. But my gut was churning and something was definitely wrong. I held off on calling mom. I figured Katie might have headed back downstairs and outside to do the necessary or something. I found it strange that she wouldn't have said anything to me about it, but this place was obviously toxic, maybe she had gotten sick and just couldn't stay long enough to say "hey, I'm out."

So I headed down to the second level along the main stairwell. There were at least two other stairwells going down from each end of the hall at the top level, but I figured I'd have a better chance of catching her down the main one as the side ones were wooden and did not look safe at all. I found Mark and Alex on the second floor, and they hadn't seen Katie either. Neither of them looked like they were faking to prolong the prank, and Alex actually looked upset. I didn't take the time to ask him what was up and instead started shouting out Katie's name. By now I'm getting pretty worried and hoping to hell this better pan out as just one hell of a trick on her part. Still no answer. My brother and Alex and I all head down to the ground floor after a cursory look in all the rooms on the second floor, all pretty worried about Katie.

After a few minutes of searching, we find Joe and Adam, and they seem to be pretty bored with the place. They ask what the other floors look like before we get a chance to mention Katie's disappearance. My bro and Alex just shrug while I blurt out "where's Katie?" They both look at each other, and then back at me with blank stares. Joe starts to crack a grin and suddenly I feel better and angry all at once. Surely he's in on it and just can't hold it back any longer. He's about to tell me she's waiting in some closet somewhere close and I just have to keep looking so I can get the shit scared out of me by my girlfriend. The joke was going to be, after all, on me. He asks me if I'm kidding him. I freak out and say of course not. He doesn't get it and I suddenly get very angry. I'm confused and worried and this prick is seemingly playing around with me. I'd had enough of the joke and was about ready to pound his face. He suddenly realized I wasn't kidding around and got really pale, said he didn't know where she was, asked if I'd looked everywhere. Of course I had, I told him. But surely I had not. I realized that this place could have a basement.

It was then that we heard the scream. It was like nothing I've ever heard before in my life. It was obviously Katie, but I've never before or since heard anyone scream in that kind of terror. It sent my body into animal mode. Every muscle tensed up, from my ass cheeks to the cheeks on my face. For a moment all any of us could do was stand there and listen to this banshee wail of a scream. It was petrifying. And then another came. And another. By the time Katie had screamed a third time I was on the move. Halfway down the main hallway I heard what sounded like a large heavy door slam shut. She must have screamed another half dozen times before I finally found her, at the bottom of a stairwell, a level below the ground floor; the entrance to the basement.

Ok, I'll go ahead and post the last two parts, figured I'd spread them out a bit for the sake of sanity but, I guess I'll cut to the chase. Here's the second part of our misadventure, the third to follow on it's heels:

Things of course got very strange at this point. The stairs, as I mentioned earlier, were

wooden here, and looked completely unsafe. I hesitated, but only for a moment as Katie screamed again, before heading down them as lightly as I could. It was also, obviously, pretty dark near the bottom of the stairwell. All three of the upper stories of it were lined with windows, but they had mostly been covered over by the vines on this part of the building, so the whole place was dim. I flicked my flashlight on as I made my way down the one flight to the basement landing, but did not immediately see Katie anywhere. She let out a gurgle of a scream, and then another real peeler. I wondered if her wailing might not bring the stairs down from under me.

Finally, I get to the bottom, the other guys are all clustered at the top of the first floor landing looking down at me with pale faces and nervous eyes. None of them seems willing to follow me down, for the moment I didn't really care. I just wanted to find Katie and get the hell out. And from the sound of her screams she was right there with me. A quick look around the landing revealed that it was just that. A doorway was built into the wall to my right as I left the stairs. The corner of the building was in front of me. There was a little stretch of concrete floor in front of the door that led to a corner on my right. Katie was seemingly over there somewhere. I flashed the light and saw her huddled in the corner where the stairwell came down, as far from the door as she could get. The light obviously startled her because she let out another scream.

I started towards her but she got visibly more shaken the closer I got. It was as if she didn't see me. I say see me rather than recognize me because she really seemed to be looking through me, but not at my face. Clearly, though, she could see me approaching, so it was pretty unnerving. I slowly squat down next to her, and she's moaning the whole time, still looking through me and not at me. She starts slapping me and scratching me like some wild animal, screaming and kicking and lashing out. She knocked me on my ass and I went sprawling towards the door. Her eyes got really wide, like she was either finally recognizing me, or something worse was going on in her head, and started moaning again. Her hair was a mess and her clothing looked like it had been torn and was filthy in places.

So she is clearly out of her mind. Instead of approaching her I start talking to her, telling her that it's just me, her boyfriend, that everything will be all right, that nothing is gonna hurt her, there's nothing to worry about. After a few minutes of this, she seems to calm down a bit, and finally stops looking through me and at me. Suddenly, and finally, she recognizes me, and just starts sobbing at me. I move in close and she hugs me to her, babbling through her tears about something on the other side of the door. I don't want to stick around, and of course I need to get her out of there, so I didn't mess around. I picked her up and truded up the stairs as fast as I could. She was basically wrapped around me like a little frightened kid the whole time, her legs locked around my waist, her arms around my neck, and holding me in a vice grip.

Finally, I get her to the top of the stairs, but she doesn't let go. I don't care and push my way through the guys just standing there, like they were statues frozen to the ground. A moment later, we're all outside in front of the place, the guys just standing around scratching their heads. My brother at least tried to help me comfort her, but she only moans and cries louder when he comes near, so they all just kind of backed off and let us alone for a moment. I manage to get her to loose her monkey grip on me and we sit down in the tall grass, her on my lap with her arms around me under my arms and her face buried in the nape of my neck. And still all she can do is sob and moan a bit. I tried to talk to her about what happened for a few minutes, but she just gets all panicky and says she wants to get the fuck out of there. All I wanted to do was oblige her, so I

hollered at Joe to start up the van so we can head home. I tell Mark to call mom and manage to get Katie to actually stand with me and walk to the van.

We all pile in and are about to go when suddenly Katie starts to freak out again. She suddenly shouts "wait!" and we all look at her. I'm still holding her next to me and she's still shaking all over, and she looks at me and says, "my purse." I'm a little confused at first, but then I realize she had brought it in with her. I had asked her why at first and she showed me a little first aid kit inside and a bunch of extra batteries. She had emptied out most of the other stuff she normally carried in it but still had her wallet inside. She had told me it was our survival bag with a wink, pointing out a couple condoms as well. At this point, I'm ready to leave the damn thing wherever she dropped it, because she clearly does not have it with her. She would have as well if her wallet hadn't been in it, I'm sure. But important stuff was there, some cash, her social security card, her driver's license, the usual. She didn't want to leave any of that behind, or have to come back out here and get it later. She was getting much calmer by the minute, happy I'm sure just to be out in the sunlight again, but she refused to leave without the thing.

Rather than argue with her I hop out of the van and start making my way back towards the school, machete and flashlight in hand. I figured at least one of the other guys would follow me in, my brother maybe. I looked back and they're all still sitting there in the van staring at me like I've got tentacles growing out of my eyes or something. I gesture at them to follow me and Joe leans out the window and shouts, "she's your girlfriend man, I ain't going back in there!" Everyone else shares the determined-to-stay-put look on their faces.

By now, I really don't give a fuck. I haven't seen or heard anything weird other than my girlfriend freaking the hell out. So I head back in. This is when I do actually begin to feel the heebie-jeebies. The whole place just felt oppressive. I didn't notice it at first, or brushed it off for as my own internal worry for Katie, but halfway down the hall to the stairwell, around the same spot I had previously heard what must have been the basement door slamming, it started feeling really bad. It was like a bad case of acid reflux or something. My stomach started churning and I felt like I was still carrying Katie, like something was pulling down on my shoulders. Still, I persisted. It'd take me no more than another three minutes to get down there, grab her purse, which was probably right where I had found her sitting, and jet out. Then I started thinking about that basement door.

I hadn't really paid much attention to it before. I'd just sized up my surroundings, homed in on my girlfriend, and forgotten about where I was for the sake of getting her out of there. But as I made that last little jolt to the stairwell, it dawned on me that I had actually heard a door slamming. My mind started to wander, and I tried to place it into a nice snug little box of logic. Maybe a door down the other end of the hall had been blown shut, or on at higher floor. The thing is, none of the rooms that any of us investigated had any doors on them. There were of course large metal and wooden cabinets in most of the classrooms, so surely it had been one of them. But my brain still insisted that this had sounded like a large door, not a cabinet, being slammed shut. And of course, the only real door I had seen so far was the one in the wall of the basement landing.

I don't really consider myself some kind of tough guy or anything. Never been in a fight, not even with my brother. I get scared just like anyone else I'd imagine. I can't stand deep water, even if I can see right to the bottom of it, in fact that makes it worse. And

spiders freak me out. But for whatever reason, I kept pressing on. Katie would not let it go if I left her stuff behind, and I'd likely have to make another trip out there to get it to make her happy. So I just kinda sucked it up and plowed forward. I resolved to get that purse so I could be rid of the place and that was that, screw the tension in my neck and the weight on my shoulders. The oppression of the place did seem to lighten a bit as I mustered my courage, and I found myself at the top of the staircase peering down into the gloom below.

And the final part. (This all took place in South Central Indiana, and really that's as much as I want to say about the location.)

I start making my way down the steps, a little more carefully this time. The sound of the wood creaking under me is really noticeable now without the screaming and sobbing to drown it out. I figure I'll be lucky if I don't slip this time on a well rotted step or patch of mold, or worse, step through the wood. I'm about halfway down and moving the light around on the steps below me, not paying much attention to the landing below so as not to lose my footing, when suddenly the sound of the van's horn honking makes me want to climb the walls and shout bloody murder. Joe honks again as I realize what I'm hearing, and anger washes over me. Now I'm not scared at all, just pissed, and off balance. I started moving down the stairs a bit faster.

I'm nearly to the bottom when suddenly I feel what must have been fingers pinch my Achilles tendon on my right foot. This time I actually do jump, because now something is screwing with me. It's not a car horn or weird smell or the weight on my shoulders, it's someone's fingers on the back of my foot. They were only there for a moment, but they pinched pretty hard, enough to bruise when I checked it out later. I thought I'd go toppling over, but managed to right myself and rush down the last remaining steps. I wheel around and without much searching find that there is a pretty good sized hole between two steps a ways up, right were my foot had been when I got the pinch. The hole looks large enough for me to stick my own hand through so I figure there has got to be someone down here with me. I side-step towards the door to my left now and shine the light on the wall of the descending staircase. Of course, there is a hatch there. However, it has a lock built into it. No handle or anything, just a flat little square door in the wall that previous tenants of the school probably stored something behind. I'm pretty amped up, and starting to get scared all over again. The place really seemed to be pushing down on me once more. But I don't care if there is someone back there or not. I just want to grab Katie's shit and get.

So I pass the light over the ground where Katie had been squatting, she was pretty close to the hatch actually, and there's nothing there but some leaves and twigs and debris seemingly from past flooding. This is when I notice the door I'm standing next to is actually open, just a bit. It was enough to really get my blood pumping. I hadn't paid too much attention to it before, as I said above, but I had been pretty sure the thing was closed. And of course I had heard something slamming down here. Maybe it had been the hatch in the wall under the stairwell, to this day I'm still not really sure. It could have been anything. But nonetheless, as I stood there in the murky light cast from the vine-crowded windows above and the slight glare of my own flashlight, I couldn't help but feel truly pit-of-the-stomach scared. I broke out in a cold sweat staring at that door, wondering what the hell might be beyond it and why Katie's purse wasn't right here.

I hadn't managed to get anything out of her before I'd trudged back in other than her babbling about something on the other side of the very door I'm standing in front of.

Again, I wonder if she had been talking about this door or the hatch. Regardless, I'm freaked. But I just stand there for a moment. I still need to find her damned purse, and I'm not quite ready to give up. I'm just overreacting, I tell myself. There is nothing down here but rotting wood and dripping pipes and a pile of leaves in the corner. Everything is cool. Find the purse, and get the fuck out, yelling and shitting yourself as you do it if you have to, but do it. So I steel myself for a moment, and finally reach out for the door.

Slowly, I pull it towards me, shining the light around it as soon as I can. Thankfully, nothing jumps out at me. But the feeling of weights on my shoulders intensifies again. So for a moment I just stand there with the door open, moving the light slowly through the room before me, letting my eyes adjust to the darkness ahead as best they can.

Clearly, this was some kind of maintenance room. I see brooms against the far wall, an ancient mop bucket with a molding mop in it next to a huge porcelain sink covered in black cracks along one of the side walls to my left. To my right is a jumble of junk, a lot of it unrecognizable. The place looked like it had been inundated a few times and I could only guess that the pile of stuff I was looking at was old decaying boxes of books. The place stank far worse than any of the other rooms we'd been in up till then. Without really thinking of anything but finding that damned purse, I move into the room quickly, shining my light to the left and right, ready for something to jump out at me. Nothing does. This is when I notice the light coming from under the door on the far wall.

Either my eyes adjusted to the gloom, or someone or something had actually just turned on a light on the other side of that door. It was really dim, and my immediate thought was that it had to be candle light because it seemed to fade in and out a bit as if it were flickering. There wasn't a window in the door or anything like that. I of course flashed my light over on it. It was a large metal door, rusting pretty badly. But it looked thick as hell, and not yet ready to give up the ghost and fall off its hinges or crumble to nothingness. I could only imagine horrible things behind it, but it was probably the door to the boiler room or some such. For a moment, I dared not move. Then the purse came to mind again and I made a cursory search of the room I was in along the floor to find it. This, however, was as far as I was going to look. I had made up my mind about that if nothing else. I couldn't stop looking at the other door while I searched the room once more with my light, and that almost not-there light was still seeping out from under it. I had made up my mind to finally check out when I heard what sounded like a bolt being thrown.

I jerked my flashlight up towards the door, frozen in place. I felt like I was underwater or something, the pressure on my shoulders was palpable, and my ears started ringing and popping, as if I were driving down a really steep hill. Even my stomach felt like it was up in my throat. All I really wanted to do was bolt, but momentarily, I could do nothing but stand there like a deer in the headlights, shining my light on that door and waiting for whatever it was that was going to happen to happen. I have no idea how long I stood there, but it surely wasn't long, because before I knew it I was leaping up the stairwell and breezing down the hallway to the entryway of the building. I burst out into the sunlight, dazzled by the brightness, though it was overcast, and made a bee-line for the van without taking a second look back. The guys inside could clearly see that I was freaked out and Joe started it up as I approached.

I hopped in and we tore ass out of there. Back on the main road, Joe suddenly didn't mind the pot-holes so much and we were halfway home before we knew it. My brother finally looked around his seat at me and Katie, now clutching each other, and asked us

both what the hell had happened. We both just looked up at him. Katie finally said, "not now Mark." We drove the rest of the way in silence. She didn't even mention her purse. The look on my face and my behavior must have told her it was gone and there was no going back to that place because she never did bug me about it again.

Whew! This has turned out longer than I figured it would. Anyways, a few days go by, and we don't mention a word of anything about the school to anyone. My mother is noticeably concerned when we get home, but I told her nothing at the time. Eventually she stopped bugging me about it, just glad nothing truly bad happened. Finally, after a few quiet nights just hanging out together and watching the television in my basement, Katie and I decide to talk to at least one another about what happened. She refuses to tell me anything until I tell her what happened to me. So I lay it all out for her. Her eyes open wide and she kinda nods when I mention the pinch on the back of my foot. I finish telling her about the way I felt and the room behind the door and the hatch and the light and the bolt sliding, and she is pretty shaken up. So she starts to tell me about what happened to her, slowly and almost pleadingly at first. And bit by bit, her story really starts to freak me out all over again.

So we had been up on the top floor, and sure enough, she'd gotten it into her head that she'd prank me. So while I was distracted she ducked out of the room we were in and rushed down the hallway to the top of the stairwell at the end of the building. She figured she'd head down it and jump out at me as I came down either it or the middle stairwell from around a corner or something. The steps are pretty bad of course so she has to take her time, but she doesn't want to get caught either. She said she can't really explain why, but for whatever reason, she didn't want to stop at the second floor landing. She could hear my brother and his friend, but they seemed to be down at the other end of the hall, so it's not that she's worried they'll find her, she just has this impulse to head down to the ground floor and get me there instead. So she kept moving down. By now I was actively looking for her and was nearing the other end of the building.

She got to the first floor landing without incident, but as she's arriving, she says she sees light ahead and below in the stairwell leading to the basement level. She figures it's Joe and Adam and thinks she can maybe get a twofer and scare the shit out of them too. So she begins moving down the stairs. As soon as she does so, the light she saw goes out. She said she actually hesitated at that point, but still figured it was Joe and Adam, they'd probably heard her and were waiting or something. So she kept going, not bothering to turn on her flashlight so that she might still creep up on them. Near the bottom of the stairs, she starts to get that same weighted feeling that I described to her, like something was sitting on her shoulders. But she presses on. On the very step that I received my pinch on, she got something much worse. She claims what felt like a hand wrapped around her entire ankle and yanked back. She went toppling down the last half dozen stairs and landed in a heap, apparently knocked unconscious from the fall.

This is where it gets really terrifying. She finally comes to, who knows how long later, but it couldn't have been too long as it only took us ten, maybe fifteen minutes to eventually find her. By this time myself and my brother and Alex are down on the ground floor making our way to Adam and Joe. So she's laying there in the darkness, wondering what the hell just grabbed her and starting to get freaked out, when she realizes she's not at the bottom of the steps where she should be. She's back in the corner where I found her, next to the hatch under the stairs. She can kind of make out the door to the right, and it is clearly wide open. The hatch is also ajar in such a way that

she can look in at the darkness beyond. I'm really not sure that I can do this part any justice, I'm glancing over my shoulder just typing it down. The whole ordeal sends shivers up my spine every time I willfully recall it and I'm probably not going to sleep for shit tonight. It won't be the first time, but at the very least this will hopefully be somewhat cathartic.

So she's sitting there in the dark, and is stone cold petrified to move. If Adam and Joe are trying to freak her out they are obviously doing one hell of a bang up job. She decides to try to get up and find her flashlight, which isn't anywhere near her that she can tell, and get the heck out of there. She has made up her mind that spending the night is out of the question and she just wants to go home and slip into a warm bath or something, shake this place off and forget about it. This is when she notices the eye in the opening between the door of the hatch and the wall. For a moment all she can do is stare at it.

She said it was pretty small, and the face surrounding it, though covered in shadows, seemed to be terribly wrinkled. She doesn't remember a mouth of any kind but just telling it to me she broke out into tears again and once more wrapped her arms around me on the couch, shaking and sobbing a bit. It was just one eye, small and black. It didn't glow or wink or anything like that. It had whites, but not much, otherwise she figured she might not have seen it at all. Suddenly, the hatch closes and she hears the lock turning. She's not into full out screaming mode yet but she says by this point she started to get audible, letting out little chokes of air and sucking them back in as if she couldn't breath. Who could blame her. Her ordeal was not over.

Now she notices that the light she'd seen earlier is back, and it's coming from the room beyond the open doorway to her right. She looks up and begins to finally start screaming. Standing there were two figures, one about a foot taller than the other, but both small. She figures the small one was no more than a couple feet tall, and the other, maybe three, three and half feet in height. They both appear to be wearing some kind of dark heavy textured robes of some kind, like sack cloth, but black as pitch. They've got hoods on and are just standing there staring at her. They instantly make her think of the single eye she saw not a moment before, for these things, though their pasty colored faces are in pretty deep shadow due to the hoods and general gloom of the place, are horribly wrinkled. They have mouths but without lip structure of any kind, like narrow slits in their oval faces. And the eyes were just like the one she had seen in the hatch, black middles with a sliver of whites around them. One of them had what might be a nose, some kind of protuberance at least, but the other had just a flat spot with a single black hole in the middle where it's nose should have been. They had hair but it was stringy and tangled, though long, as it poured out of the hoods they wore and down their fronts. The hair on both was jet black by her recollection.

Suddenly one of them flicks on her flashlight and is moving it around, looking at it, making the light dance all over the walls. The other seems only a bit interested, and they both take their gaze off of her for a moment, but eventually the taller one looks back at her while the smaller one clicks the light on and off repeatedly. Then it shines the light right in her face for a moment before turning it off again for good.

Of course by this point, she can't hold back the screams any longer, and starts really belting them out. And the things both start to move towards her, kinda shuffling a bit. She doesn't remember seeing their feet or hands or anything else, the black robes covered them up pretty well. Her first instinct is to toss her purse at these things before

they can get to her, and luckily, it was still around her neck and shoulder. So she yanks it off and chucks it at the two figures. They instantly retreat out of sight. She kind of curls up into a ball in the corner and plants her face in her knees and just screams, hoping to God one of us gets there soon. When I arrive with my light, she thinks I'm one of them again which is why she started bashing me, but finally when I start talking to her realizes it's just me. She doesn't remember hearing the door in the basement slam shut.

From there she doesn't remember much until she was back in the van, realizing that she had just flung her purse at these things in the doorway. She's not thinking clearly, and all her mind can latch onto is that she has to have her purse back. It was like she needed it for comfort or something, some kind of way to ground herself again. If she could get it back, then maybe she didn't throw it after all. Maybe none of it happened and she just tripped on the way down the stairs and had one hell of a nasty concussion-induced nightmare. By the time I get back and she can see the way I look and that I have no purse with me, she just went into lock-down mode, like I myself did, for a few days straight. She claims that she actually had to make her mother let her sleep with her while her father slept on the couch for weeks after. They were pretty pissed with me and let me know about it every time I came over to pick her up or called asking for her.

It's a wonder I guess that they didn't just keep us apart, but she seemed to be better around me, I knew I felt better around her, just being close to someone who had gone through something similar. As far as I know, she never told her parents what actually happened, or anyone else for that matter. I ended up telling my mother and brother, and he told his friend Alex who let the other two guys in on what had gone down, but they didn't spread the story around to anyone else as far as I know. They were all pretty shaken up about it as well. We rarely spoke of that day and they never pushed me to tell them myself what Katie and I went through, thank God.

The story mostly ends there. Katie later told me that she would occasionally wake up from nightmares where she could see the two figures coming at her from her closet doorway. I was really thankful that I had seen nothing of the sort myself, but still had my own similar nightmares. Over time, we grew apart, and eventually broke up the summer before our senior year. We hung out a few times that year but really, our previous comfort in one another seemed to just grow into a sense of dread. I hate to say that this thing pushed us apart, but I really think it did.

She became really dejected and quiet, completely unlike she'd been before, and I just felt strange around her. It sounds cowardly I guess, but I just didn't want to deal with it anymore and was the one to break it off. I felt like a huge jerk doing it, but like I said, our relationship had really soured in the months since going out to see the abandoned school. I have no idea what eventually became of Katie after high school. Hopefully she's well. I still have nightmares about whatever those things were, not so much lately, but for years they haunted me as I'm sure they did her. Anyways, it feels kind of weird to get it off my chest. I'm not sure that I feel any better about it, but things have gotten better since then, so I shouldn't be too worried I guess. So there it is, my long ass creepy ghost story, or ghoul story, or whatever you want to call those things in the basement.

JIP-BIP-JO - ROTTING MEAT

The following events occurred during a two week vacation stay at a rented house in Cape

Cod. I was not particularly old; I believe I was 9 and my sister was 4. My mother, however, was in her 30s, so I can't chalk up her experiences to an overactive imagination.

For the first few days, things were fine. We learned the layout pretty quickly; there was a basement with a washer, dryer and a tv in a seperate room. On the main floor was the kitchen, a proper living room and bathroom. And on the second floor were the bedrooms - three in total.

One day it was particularly stormy, so there would be no trips to the beach or nature walks. My parents, really eager for as much private time as they could get, sent my sister down to the basement to watch what little tv we could recieve. My sister and I managed to get a decent version of PBS, which meant the static wasn't too bad at all (antennae only at this place). We continued to watch, I absentmindedly playing my Gameboy, my sister more enthralled by some show.

And then it all stopped. My gameboy shut off. The lightbulb popped. The tv did not go off; instead it showed nothing but static.

And then the smell.

From the other room, the one with the washer and dryer, there was a smell that is not even partially described by the word rank. Imagine a bag of rotting meat kept in the summer sun for days at end, and you can begin to imagine it. "Let's go, please" my sister whimpered. I took her hand and we walked back up.

My parents were not terribly pleased. They listened to our story, sighing as we spoke. Finally Mom smiled and said "Alright, if I go down and check, and it's all ok, will you go back down?" We agreed, knowing if anyone could make it all better, she could.

She disappeared into the black basement, flashlight in hand, replacement lightbulb box held in the other. We expected her to return quickly. She didn't. After ten minutes that stretched into eternity, she finally came back up. "Ok kids, you can stay up here. In fact, I don't want you going down there again."

We didn't know what that meant, but accepted it gladly. Mom never went down in the room either; she insisted on doing laundry at laundromats in town. I would not ask her what happened for years.

Another night I was woken by a horrid scream from my sisters room. My Dad burst from his room and slammed her door open, picked her up and took her downstairs. It took over an hour to calm her down and a couple smores, but she finally agreed to tell us what was wrong.

She had seen the entire room soaked in blood. Top to bottom. Handprints in blood, streaks, dripping splatters. We wrote it off as a dream, but she refused to go back up for the rest of the night. Mom took a look in the room, and I caught her whisper to Dad: "That smell is there."

Finally, my encounter with whatever it was. My parents had taken my sister into town, planning on doing some shopping with her. I voiced my dismay and they said I could stay at the rented home if I wished. I whiled away some time watching Disney videos, and

eventually started to read a book.

Eventually I had had enough reading. I put down the book - and my eyes shot open in surprise. Near the ceiling, slowly circling about as if it were some ethereal shark, cruised an orb, fire red and yet translucent. I didn't move as I watched it, hoping not to scare it away. Part of me was fascinated by it, as if it were as ordinary as a bird on the porch.

Then I heard the car door slam. My parents had arrived, and the orb, a trailing tail following, raced towards the wall, vanishing. "Hi Scott!" called Dad as he walked in, cooler in hand. "Anything good on TV?"

As for what happened to my Mom in the basement - when I finally did ask her years and years later, she suddenly became very still, and quietly spoke. She had intended to simply change the lightbulb downstairs, figuring the bulb had simply died and I had turned off my Gameboy in surprise and that one of us had nudged the antenna out of clear reception. So, she had taken out the old bulb and put a new one in. It didn't work. She tried a new one. It also didn't work. As she tried the remaining two bulbs, she began to smell something too, but this time it had an oily stench to it.

She figured that one of the machines in the washing room had broken, or perhaps a breaker went off or something. She put down the bulbs, and walked into the room. She shone her flashlight on the machines - nothing. Then she looked at the other end of the room - only to see it.

"It" was a short man, crouched over, a piece of maggot covered meat held in its hand. It looked at my Mom, smiled with sharp teeth and black eyes, and whispered "Hello, Laurie".

Then it sank into the floor.

Mom left in a god damn hurry after that.

MAYDAY MAYDAY – ANNA AND MARMALADE

When I was about ten, my friend Anna's parents came into a little money, and she moved into a lovely old neighbourhood by the sea. The house was a pretty little Victorian place, with a columned porch and a gabled attic, and thick glass in all the windows. It looked sort of charming, in a quirky crooked way. Very peaceful, too - despite being on a major road, it was always almost completely silent inside. I mean, really - there's "good insulation," and then there's "mom is blending stuff in the kitchen, dad is using a power drill in the garage, and it's still absolutely quiet upstairs." It sort of seemed absorb sound, and the windows had those thick old panes that turned all the light faded and pale, even during the day. It was always entirely still. (I'd later think it reminded me of a hospital, after hours, but that might have just been hindsight.) You felt completely alone in that house, even if you knew there was someone right around the corner - and there were loads of corners. The house seemed to have been built by someone with a hatred of straight lines, with almost every hallway changing direction at least once. The electricity was terrible - the lights flickered and and buzzed all over the place, so they were mostly left off, and it had heating issues, too. Radiators would stick on and off at the worst times, and need to be fixed with a wrench. None the less, it was

a beautiful house. Anna's parents called some electricians about the wiring, and they moved straight in.

Anna moved into the attic, and loved it immediately. It had pretty floral wallpaper, and a sloping roof and a window that looked out over the sea - and a wrought iron bed frame, which couldn't be removed from the room. There was no electric light in the attic anyway, so she wasn't bothered by the constant flickering, and if she got too hot or too cold due the malfunctioning radiators, she just opened the window or put on a sweater. She loved that room.

Back then, Anna had this little orange cat called Marmalade, and he was just about her favourite thing in the world. He was two, maybe three years old, and she'd been given him as a christmas present. He was a pretty sweet cat, I have to say - friendly and chill and generally un-catlike. Never scratched anyone, never yowled or shredded furniture. He slept on the end of her bed every night, curled up in a little ball, looking adorable. Or he had, anyway, in her old house.

He absolutely refused to go up the stairs in the new place. Like he turned into a little ball of fury if you tried to carry him up, and if you put an open tin of catfood on the top step, he would just sit at the bottom looking at it forlornly. It took ages for Anna's family to get him in the house at all, actually, but eventually he was coaxed into the kitchen, and then the living room, and so on. By the third week after they'd moved in, he was pretty comfortable on the ground floor - but he still wouldn't go up to Anna's room, for love or fish-shaped kibble snacks. Worse, he started to shy away from Anna herself - and this was a cat that liked strangers. If he was in a room and she came in, he'd skitter away; if she accidentally cornered him, he'd hunker down and put his ears back and watch her with huge eyes. It was as if she'd taken to kicking him or something. Obviously, this just about broke her heart - she loved that cat like her tiny orange child, I swear.

And then one day in early summer Marmalade disappeared. To this day, this is one of the things people remember about Anna, when they remember her - any time someone mentions Anna Andersson, someone else says "hahaha, remember when Marmalade went missing?" She must have called everyone she knew. She put up posters on telephone poles. She made her mom drive her around to all the local vets to see if anyone had turned in an injured cat. She'd call me late at night - well, late at night for a ten year old, anyway - and tell me her theories about what had happened to poor Marmalade. This went on for days, until basically everyone knew the cat was not coming home - except Anna. We tried to hint that maybe he was gone for good - maybe she should go look at kittens at the SPCA or something - but she said she knew he'd come back eventually.

She called me at 11 o'clock on a Saturday night, in secret. I had to come over, quick, and pretend she hadn't called. She was grounded. Her parents didn't believe her. But she knew where Marmalade was.

He was in the walls.

She'd started hearing the scratching a night or two before, and from the first, she knew it was Marmalade. He must have found some hole in the roof and fallen down inside. Anna knew it was him. She'd immediately told her parents, but they said she was imagining things, and they weren't going to go knocking holes in their new house looking for a cat that had probably been dead a week. Anna had shouted at them,

screamed, but they'd just told her to get a hold of herself. I had to come over, right away.

I was pretty skeptical, myself. Anna was the sort of girl who might just imagine noises, and if there was something in her wall, it was probably a huge vicious rat, or a squirrel or something. I didn't want to tell her that, though. I dutifully got on my bike - in secret, of course - and rode over to Anna's house.

Maybe it was just because I was now imagining the huge nest of rats swarming in Anna's wall, but by the time I'd tiptoed halfway up the back stairs at her house, I was already uneasy. The back door was directly under the attic window, and all the hair prickled on the back of my neck as I climbed. I had the very distinct feeling that someone was standing directly behind me, on a lower stair, and it made my shoulders twitch. I quietly unlatched the door - it was unlocked, as promised - and stepped into the dark, silent house.

It was a harrowing experience just getting to the narrow attic staircase - all those blind corners, the crooked hallways, everything absolutely still, absolutely silent. With every step I was more certain that someone was going to grab my ankle, or that I'd see something I didn't want to - some dark shape in the mirror at the end of the hall. It was a strange, oppressive silence - it's funny how you don't notice all the little noises in a house, the clocks ticking and the refrigerator humming and the tiniest creaks of floorboards, until you can't hear anything at all. The radiators must have been on the fritz again, too, because it was hot as hell, and it smelled of - absolutely nothing, not new paint or hot radiators or even old houses. It smelled unnatural, like the absence of a smell. It was like being blind and deaf and senseless, except for the heat.

When I got to the attic stairs, I paused for a moment. The stairs were a single long, narrow flight, with a door at the bottom and the top; they were unlit, with no railing. The top door was shut tightly. Even compared to the rest of the house, they were dark. I couldn't reasonably run up them full tilt without waking Anna's parents, even though surely the house would muffle the sound - but I still felt as though someone was standing right behind me, and I had to steel myself for slow, methodical climbing, almost sure I could feel hot breath on the back of my neck, fingers brushing at the small of my back. The stairs were dark and steep. I took a deep breath. And then something moved in the dark, halfway up the steps.

I swear I screamed, but no sound came out of my mouth. It was like screaming into a vacuum.

And then Anna's voice said "I'm glad you came," incredibly quiet. The shadowy shape on the stairs resolved into her, sitting sideways with her knees drawn up, her long dark hair falling over her face. She was wearing a nightdress, navy blue, pulled down over her feet, which is I guess why I hadn't seen her. I let out a huge sigh of relief. I was so relieved that I didn't even think it about how odd it was for a ten year old girl to be sitting on a closed staircase, in the pitch black, with the doors shut.

I followed Anna up to her dark room, much more relaxed. If it had been hot in the house below, it was sweltering up there. The window was open, but no breeze came in; within a thirty seconds I'd started to sweat, and the whole place felt like a dry sauna. There was no electricity in the attic, as I mentioned, but Anna had a flashlight on her night table, pointed up at the ceiling to cast a steady, sick glow over the whole room. She'd

sat down on the edge of the bed, and even in the low light, I could see she looked awful. Exhausted, sick, dripping with sweat - her bedsheets were tangled and tossed, and one of her pillows was on the floor. There were long red marks on her arms and legs, crisscrossed and uneven. I wanted to ask her what was wrong, but the instant I opened my mouth she shushed me. "Wait," she said. So we waited.

It took about two minutes for the scratching to start, but there was no mistaking it once it did. It didn't sound like a cat at all - it sounded like fingernails on cloth, like a person scratching at a sore, faster then slower, occasionally pausing entirely and then starting up again, quicker than ever. There was a sort of rustling noise that went with it, which didn't sound like anything at all. It started in the far wall, by the door to the stairs, but it didn't stay there; it circled the room, moving under the window, slowly coming towards us. I jumped up off the bed, but Anna stayed where she was - and now I noticed that she was scratching, too, in time with the scratching in the walls, idly rubbing at the welts on her hands and feet. I wanted to grab her hands and stop her, but I was too shocked to do anything. The scratching was directly behind her, now, and she reached out and put a palm against the wall, right where the noise was coming from. She looked up at me with blank eyes. "It's Marmalade," she said. "We have to let him out."

I don't know what was in the wall, there, but luckily I never had to find out. Just then, Anna's dad came bursting up the stairs, looking frantic. He grabbed me by the shoulders and shoved me into the stairwell, muttering that I shouldn't be there - but I still saw what happened next. It was like the bubble of silence popped, then, and the heat, and even the absence of smell - I could suddenly smell iodine, incredibly strongly. Anna flew at him, shrieking, scratching at his face with her ragged fingernails, clawing and tearing. I think she might have tried to bite him, but I'm not sure. She was sobbing and red eyed, screaming about how it wasn't fair, and she'd done nothing to deserve it. At first I thought she was talking about being grounded, but then it stopped making sense - she was shrieking about how she didn't want to die, and she was lonely, and it wasn't fair that she was the last one left. It was a full on fit, kicking and punching and wailing, animalistic. For a while I thought she was going to overpower her father, a tall and well-built man. I wondered if I should call the police. But eventually he got her back into bed, and she flung herself down, weeping and sobbing. He ran for the door and slammed it behind him, turning a key in the lock and putting it in his pocket. Then he turned to me.

"Anna's not well," he said. "You shouldn't have unlocked the door."

Of course, I hadn't unlocked the door - I didn't even have a key - and Anna had been out of the room before I'd even arrived, but I was so traumatized that I didn't even think about that. I just turned around and walked straight out of the house. I thought about calling social services, but in the end I thought Anna was far more aggressive than her father, who was clearly trying not to hurt her. Fever dreams, I thought. She was having fever dreams. I tried not to think about the scratching I'd heard so clearly.

I never went back to that house, though I saw Anna when I started school in the fall. The scratches on her hands were entirely healed. She told me, eventually, that she'd moved into the downstairs guest bedroom, and her parents had shut up the attic. She seemed very distant when she told me. We grew apart.

Years later, I saw a photo of Anna's house in a local newspaper. It seemed that the new owner - one in a series - had opened up a papered-over crawlspace, nearly a room, in the attic, and discovered an old trunk full of dresses and pressed flowers - and a small

box, at the bottom of that, marked "Bandages. Pox." Why it hadn't been burned, and who lived in that house, and who died there, I don't know, but I still remember the smell of iodine, and the sound of scratching, and the stillness in the dark downstairs.

Oh, and he found one other thing, quite mysteriously - a cat's collar, with bell. No one had any idea how it got in there, since the crawlspace was sealed tight. It must have been trapped in there when the room was shut up, sometime in the 19th century. There's no other explanation.

TEWBRAINER

Creature in the desert (from Tewbrainer's uncle)

I got stuck out in the middle of fucking nowhere in Iraq, in a tank we called Shit House. Yes, it had a real name and a real call sign, but we called it Shit House. Deal with it. Anyways all they had us provide fire support and run patrols during the day so that people see us and think, "Oh shit, a tank, I better not stir shit up tonight". Mostly it seemed like they looked at us and thought, "Damn, That is one loud and annoying piece of machinery".

We finally got a chance to see some combat, or at least a break from running circles around broke-ass farms. Soldiers on the ground north of us were getting fired on every night, and when morning finally came, there were no enemy bodies to be found. So brass sent us a little south, along a river bed that they thought the enemy was using as a highway, and we were to sit way off and watch this dried-up river bed through the thermal and cauterize any movement.

So we're moving along near sunset in a 3 tank V when the first position tank hits the breaks, tells us there's a civilian in the road ahead. Ricky, Shit Houses loving commander, looks out the top, along with the other two, and see what's up. Nothing out there. We pull back in and start moving. This was a fairly common occurrence, the heat out there can literally mirror ground ahead of you. Really neat actually, when it happens.

We hit spots the next night and pull tight, checking the scopes for anything hot out there in the river bed. It was about this time that the feeling started. I would describe it as static. In a tank you get used to it being hot and stuffy, but this was more like an abundance of energy that made the muscles in your chest pull up and your heart beat too fast. I leaned back from the thermal and made a little small talk with Rick, when we started to here little clinking noises on the outside of the metal.

We immediately shot into action, as little clinks typically mean some stupid ass is shooting at us with small arms. I look through the thermal and am completely confused by what I see. Solid white. Well that can't be right, I kept looking through it. Then, a circle came into view, less hot than its surroundings, and pulled back, forming a silhouette of a head. Someone was on the tank. It seemed to hear something, as it straightened up like an alert animal and looked off in the distance, then vanished in a blur. Well, everything in thermal leaves a blur, I guess.

I told Rick and he got on the radio and asked the tank nearest to us to come and scratch our back [shoot whatever was on us off], the other tank started moving. That's when tank number three came on the line and said that something had tried to pull their commander out of the hatch, and the only reason it didn't succeeded is because the

gunner and loader grabbed onto him in time, but he got “clawed up” bad. There was absolute terror in the voice of tank 3’s commander, whatever he saw “wasn’t right.”

I watched the other two tanks form up on IVIS, when our driver said could see someone on the ground in front of us. I checked my scope, sure enough there was a white object on the ground about 100 feet in front of us. A crouching, seemingly naked object. “Run that fucker over” was Rick’s response to this, and as soon as the driver touched the gas the thing started running at us on all fours. I just caught site of it as it ran over the top of the tank, silently hoping to myself that whatever it was got toasted by the exhaust as it ran off the back of the tank.

“He’s still on you Shit House, want me to clear him?” We heard over the radio, to which Rick replied “Toast him. We’ll inspect the pieces.” Which was quickly followed by nice, satisfying little clinking noises against our thick, bad ass hide. Three bursts, then silence, followed by “Looks like you’re cleared.”

Rick cocked his side arm and popped out of the hatch, turning left and right, filling the tank with glorious fresh air. He seemed to hear something, as he leaned over the side of the tank. Then, panic.

Four shots off from his sidearm, and a scream, and started to fall back in the hatch. Something had him by the collar. It looked like a human hand, only black and leathery, with long, sharp nails. Both I and the loader started trying to unwrap it, God was its skin hot. Somewhere in the struggle I remember looking up and seeing the reflection off of two black eyes, silhouetted against the Iraq stars, and could hear the sound of labored breathing. This whole even lasted less than maybe a second, when Rick got himself together and lunged forward, breaking the things arm backwards on the hatch opening with a sickening crunch. I mean sickening. That was the first time I’ve ever heard a bone break, and the first time I heard a scream anything like that thing. Think dying rabbit multiplied by 10. A high pitch scream that you could only hear where your spine attaches to your neck.

Whatever it was decided it had enough of that and ran off, and we sealed up the tank until sunrise. Tank 2 had watched it all happen on their thermal, but still couldn’t believe Rick’s or tank 3’s commander. It guess it’s understandable, because those thermal’s make the world look like a giant blob. When they were finally able to see each other in person though, everyone believed. Rick showed his torn shirt, but tank 3’s commander took the cake. He had scratches all over his face, neck, and left arm.

I don’t know if it was some sort of desert wild man or what, but shit aint right over there anyways. That’s the tamest of most of the other ghost stories that get passed around. I’ll see if I can get any of the infantries and forward them to you.

Liku posted:

I loved this story; does your uncle have anything else?

I have the rest of that story, which takes place over the next two or three years. If you want to hear really scary stuff, just ask someone on the front lines. The scariest thing in the world can be a child walking up to you with a covered basket over there.

Rick was pretty popular for a while after that event, but since he absolutely hated telling the story, things died out pretty quick and nothing really happened for a few months, and pretty soon it was winter. We were in a house doing one of the many impromptu

briefings, when a feeble old man walked in and sat down. He was the father of the village elder, too old to actually rule, but still a prominent figure in the communities. He was well respected by us too, unlike his son, but that's getting too far into personal stories. Let's just say that the Elder liked to kick ass and his son was a coward.

So the briefing cleared up and Rick grabbed me and an interpreter and caught up with the elder, and asked if he had the time for a few questions.

The old man threw up his hands and smiled, motioning us to the shade, speaking Arabic laughingly through worn out teeth and a sharp grey beard, "If only you Americans spent as much time letting us ask questions!"

Rick told the story of that day. The translator's eyes got bigger, the Elder gradually closed his eyes and relaxed, looking like he fell asleep, but drumming his fingers together to let us know he was still awake.

When Rick was finished, the Elder spoke in slow sentences, repeating things a few times to the interpreter. I only heard one word I recognized; Al-Mawt -- death.

"He says 'It is the wild man, the thorn finger, the many deaths. He comes in the nights and takes the weak, the alone.'" The old man tapped his finger, "He has a long claw on his left finger, he pokes a hole in your neck while you sleep, and takes your blood."

Rick said he broke the fucker's arm, and the Elder seemed delighted.

"Pain it caused him, and it will be time before he is well again, but he will be. But a sinister enemy you've made, one that five of us would give our lives to see dead. Have you seen him again?" Rick shook his head, "Always watch over your shoulder. Never be alone, never be in the deep sands. A man in our village once shot Thorn Finger, and we rejoiced, but we found him dried like a raisin in his bed the next season" During that last part, the elder sucked his cheeks in and crossed his arms across his chest. Rick asked a few more questions about other experiences, but there weren't too many. Apparently Old Thorny was pretty good at his job. Later that night, the Elder found us and pulled a lightly wrapped cloth out of his tunic, an action that would have got him killed if he wasn't known to us. I can't tell you how high strung you have to be over there.

It was a knife, with a bone handle, and a yellowish-reddish-silver blade. Very old.

"My Seenahash, my right arm. Before the cowards came, the peace-speakers, this was what ruled. In my arm it was war, but in yours, it will be salvation from revenge. Keep it close, keep it warm." Rick started rummaging around for something to trade, "Blood will be enough. Black blood is worth its weight." And he left.

Even though this doesn't relate to the story, I'm going to go a little off topic of how in awe I personally was of the Elder. He was probably 40 years older than me, and I still think he could have killed me in a fight. He had survived through countless raids and attacks, puckers and stitch scars covered his arms and chest. He was missing his ring finger on his left hand, "A good trade," he once told me, "He took my finger, I took his head, and his wife."

But he was a double edged sword. He was ruthless and vigilant at the same time. If he was on your side you would call him a hero, but if you were against him you would call him a tyrant. Luckily we were on his side. But, as you walked with him through the

streets, you would see men lower their heads and step back, women pull their children close. "Americans are too kind." he once told me. "If I were in your position, I would have ruined this country. I would have killed everyone who had ever stood against me." He said clenching his fists. "Only the strong would be left, whether allies or enemies, they would be strong, and the weak would be rooted out." He reminded me a lot of John [Steve's grandfather, my great grandfather], in some warped, twisted way. Sorry for that digression.

Spring came, and with it a mix of fog, rain, and light dust storms. In other words, tank hell. Missions kept coming in, people kept saying we were going to get withdrawn, then more missions would come in. Moral was not well. We were eventually placed on the outskirts of a city, and tilted high to offer fire support for a push that was happening later the next day. As noon came, we watched a light dust storm on the horizon move close, and locked everything up. This wasn't going to be a big one, just an inconvenience.

The inside of a tank is a strange place during a dust storm. It's ungodly hot, and quiet, and somehow you feel like you just got teleported back to training, and as long as you didn't look through the para-scope, you were back in the states. Then we heard the clicking. It was a nice, clear, tik-tik-tik on the roof of the hatch. Rick looked at me and shook his head. It went like that for a few hours. Tik-tik-tik, silence, Tik-tik-tik. I kept checking the scopes, waiting for the storm to die down, and each time I did I expected to see a small, black eye peering back at me. Finally the storm ended, and Rick pulled the knife out of his belt and drew his M9, telling the loader and I to do the same with a nod. I grabbed the M4. I don't know why Rick always went with the pistol. He went out of the hatch first, us right behind him.

Now, there isn't a whole lot large game in Iraq. Mostly some goats, or scrawny ass cows, but its not like they are walking around out in the middle of the desert or something. But, there we were. The tank that was splattered with goats blood, with the puckered corpses lined up in a neat row by our right tread. "Fuck me" Said Rick. I declined. There were maybe 8 or 9 goats there. I hadn't seen more than 5 up till then.

We walked around the tank a few times, but there wasn't much to see other than sand and blood. We packed it up and got back in the tank, got an order over IVIS to move North a ways.

Sitting in the cabin, the loader and I made small talk, while Rick was getting real friendly with that knife of his, looking up from time to time at wisps of sand coming in the hatch. The tank lurched to a stop with "FUCK FUCK FUCK" shouts from the driver. We flew into action, I hit the scope, catching the loader slide open the shell door as I turned around (at this point we thought we were under fire), jumping out of my skin as Rick yelled behind me. I turned around just in time to see his boots get pulled up through the hatch.

I followed after, but didn't see anything. Not a god damn thing. My pulse was pounding in my ears, heart jumping in my chest. I heard Rick shout somewhere, and as I turned around to look at where his voice was coming from, I slipped on that damn goats blood and fell face first in the sand. I felt a knee land in the center of my back, and a hand wrap around my throat, another hand pushing my face into the sand. Then the scream, followed by hot liquid on the back of my neck that smelled like raw sewage. Immediately the weight on my back jumped off.

I rolled over and saw Rick running up the tank, hopping in the gunner hatch and cocking the M240 while spinning it around 180 and firing it off in the distance. I pulled myself up and dusted off while I ran over to the tank. Thus we survived our second encounter.

Rick wouldn't say much else other than "I kicked its ass, then it saw you", but he was visibly shaken by the event. He wouldn't tell anyone what it looked like, the only thing I had to go off of was that black, leathery arm and a crouched Thermal image. "Its black paste now, its not going to survive a cut like that." He wrapped up the knife, with the blood still on it, and gave it to the elder the next time we were there (much, much later).

Later, Tewbrainer's uncle finished his story:

I'm glad to hear you guys liked Rick [he has been reading the thread now], I might have a picture laying around to send John. I haven't really described what he looks like, so hopefully it won't ruin any mental images of him. Also, we thought Chupicabra when we first messed with this thing, as it seemed to be a 'real' thing with a body, instead of ghost-alien creature.

Our deployment took a rough turn, and Old Shit House went to hell in back in northern Iraq where there are 'no terrorists, and peace is taking over' apparently, quoting a Fox News briefing we watched on a mini black and white TV in the evening while eating whatever we could find. Iraq has a way of burning your ass off during the day, then freezing it back on you at night, and we were just starting to feel the chill of night leak in under the door of our make-shift mini-barracks. One by one we fell asleep, but were woken up shortly by a yelp from one of the soldiers near the door. Yelps were common out there, as the native spiders have a love for human faces.

"Something was touching my face!" He yelled, Rick was up now and started lighting up a pipe. Looked like Rick was enforcing his own personal watch tonight. "I woke up and heard something breathing over me, I thought it was one of you guys trying to prank me or something, so I just layed there still. Then it touched my face..." a shiver went through him and he pulled his uniform tight. Rick was at his feet now, looking at the clay floor. Little black dots were sprinkled sparsely around, just five or six, but enough that you could see that something had walked too and from the door. Something leaking black, smelly fluids.

That poor guy got teased bad, most of the men in there probably did think that it was a prank, and the pranker had gotten away un-noticed. Rick and the rest of Shit House knew better. "Get some shut eye, I'm staying up a while" said Rick. I did.

We woke up the next morning, I noticed Rick was gone. I walked outside into the sun to look for him, no sign. Maybe he took a walk? Not like him. I did a short stroll around the building, and found a set of his boot prints. They headed off into the desert. I followed them with my eyes up to the horizon, then yelled out. There was a single, line of black smoke rising up over the horizon, a neat little line. Not the big plumes of acrid black smoke we were used to seeing. Withing minutes I and the crew were in a Humvee, zipping along the sand, with two others tailing. I sat in the passenger seat.

Part of me remembered the previous night, the look on Rick's face as he sucked on that pipe he had bribed off of a farmer, a look of calm. Not the expression you would expect from someone who survived two attempted maulings from some desert wild man. But I knew that look well, it was what he looked like before he kicked ass.

A figure formed on the horizon, which was rising fast as we sped along. I tensed up a little, but

relaxed as I saw that it was standing upright. We could hear static over the radios, "What the hell is he doing out here?". We got closer. Rick was standing with his back to us, a small fire in front of him. His head, which was standard military bald, had scrapes and cuts along it. Part of his left sleeve was torn. In his right hand he held his bone-handle knife, in his left a gas can. We pulled up and spun around him.

He was watching over a fire, burning lightly in the middle of black stained sand. Most of the soldiers around us had their hands over their face, and cussing to themselves. The smell was terrible. Their cussing increased as they got closer to the burn. What looked like wood from a distance was actually a skeleton, charred and black, with small bits of burning flesh still clinging from the bones. It was a small skeleton, you wouldn't put it over a child, but it was all wrong. Its back legs were bent double-backwards like a dog's, with feet that ended in toes with long, curled nails. The skull had a small face on it, a jaw filled with rows of small, sharp teeth, like a piranha. Its right hand was missing its pointer finger, and seemed to be reaching up at Rick's neck, trying one last time for revenge.

No one really asked questions about that event. No one was reported missing, no one with sharp teeth anyways, so the idea of Rick kidnapping and murdering someone was quickly forgotten. A group of brass drove over the next day to check it out, but the skeleton was gone. Only the black stained sand remained.

Not long after that, on our tour back through Iraq, we stopped at the Elder's house. We sat and waited a long time in his "lobby", I guess you could call it, until him and his son emerged from a back room. His son was terribly beaten, bleeding badly out of the nose and left ear. Senior (which I'll call the elder for clarity) was breathing heavily, and wiping his hands with cloth. Junior started to leave, but his father pushed him down in a seat across from us "Sit [son's name] and listen for once you damned idiot." He said to us, translated via our interpreter. Both Rick and I noticed him (interpreter) readying himself for combat (tensing shoulders, moving his rifle forward ever so slightly). Damn newbies. I sort of feel sorry for him in retrospect, he came with us with absolutely no previous knowledge of these events.

"I've come to return your gift," said Rick, "It was well used." As Rick talked he pulled the wrapped knife out of cloth and handed it to Senior. Senior grinned and slid his finger around the hilt of the knife, showing the black residue on his finger to his son, who seemed to be playing in and out of consciousness. "I also brought a gift of my own." Rick pulled out a little wooden box, I'd seen him use it for tobacco before. Great, I thought, he gave the Senior tobacco. The Senior looked curious and opened the box, then gasped and dropped it to the floor, sending the finger in it bouncing along the tile. The finger's skin was black and leathery, and it had a single, long claw, almost a talon, erupting from the end. Both the son and our interpreter jumped at the sight of it.

"What did you do to it? He will come to reclaim..." Senior started.

"He's not coming to reclaim shit. I burnt his ass out in the desert. I stood out there and called him out, and he lost."

"Burnt..." mumbled Senior as he picked up the finger and turned it slowly. "You see, [son's name] this is what you should have been. This man seeks evil, and destroys it. If

you sought anything, imagine where you would be now." Our interpreter started to relay this to us, but Senior held up his hand and motioned for him to leave. Rick waved him off. Senior jabbered at junior, who was starting to slump forward. I wasn't really in the mood for a family argument, and neither was Rick, but we sat there out of politeness until he gave us motion to leave.

The son jumped up suddenly and grabbed his father by the throat, Rick and I stood up on reflex. You are always ready for someone to grab someone else by the throat. My instinct was to raise my hand to calm him down. Rick's instinct was to lunge over to Junior and smash his face in with the back of his Beretta. Junior toppled backwards onto the floor, and started bleeding heavily from a wound in his side. Senior was still holding the knife, now dripping with his sons blood.

We were on the flight back to the States, crammed like sardines into a plane. Rick stared forward, not much for small talk, and I chattered back and forth with some other soldiers.

"Steve, what did you hope to get out of all this? Why did you join up in the first place." Asked Rick, surprising me enough to have me completely abandon my other conversation.

"I don't know. College I guess, for the good of America, that sort of thing. Why did you join up?"

"I joined up in hopes that I wouldn't have to come back." He said, and I saw his thoughts wander to a bone handled knife that was hidden away in his personal sack, and a small tobacco box sealed shut with a bead of wax. "Damn that thing, and damn that place to hell."

"What happened that night?"

"I went out there with the gas can to burn it, to kill it. It followed me a long time, teasing me by tapping its damn finger on rocks. Finally it jumped, and I got the best of it after a while." He didn't grin or smile while he told me this, and I heard the undertones in what he was trying to say to me. When he left that night, he didn't want to come back.

After being asked about his war experiences:

I can't say much other than we were in the first wave sent in to the Persian Gulf War. You'll have to read between the lines I guess to get any more information than that. About Fox news, they have always been retarded. I've had sent out a few E-mails to old friends asking for stories, only got one back so far from Michael [one of Steve's school friends that joined up with him]

'God, there was all sorts of weird shit ove there, but only one thing that happened to me personally. One of the big things that the people talk about over there, especially out from the major cities, are these "Well Tricksters", which is what we called them. They were described to me as a 'big ass lizard thing' that crawls backwards into wells at night, so that most of their body is underwater and only their head is above water. The tip of its nose has a pattern like a human face on it. The next day, when people drop the

buckets in, they come up dry because they landed on the lizards nose.

The lizard also has a more sinister side. When it is hungry, it will start calling out in a voice that you know. Soldiers, trained soldiers, would say they heard their wife or kids calling out to them from inside of the wells.

I would like to say that I wasn't a believer in the supernatural, but I was nuts at that time about ghosts and what not, so I took every opportunity to walk around wells. Nothing happened for a long time, until...

I think I was just on the Iraq southern border, either that or we were still in Kuwait, I don't really remember where it was. I remember the event well though, we were walking along when AK fire started up, sending us scattering against walls and corners and whatever we could get behind. I got behind a well. We began returning fire.

For some reason I started thinking of my sisters, there in that fire fight, especially the youngest one. For some reason I thought I could hear her calling my name. My body was on autopilot, popping and shooting, then covering up again. But deep in my brain, I could here her calling me, telling me she was in trouble. The fight stopped as soon as it started, like most did over there, and I found myself leaning over the well. I could almost see an outline of a face in the water far, far below. I dug through my jacket and pulled out a glow stick, popped it, and threw it in. The face disappeared, and the glow stick floated there for a few seconds, then vanished with a splash. The face reappeared. I decided I didn't want have much to do with Arabic superstition after that.'

Girl On A Cliff – Sent by Howard B.

I immigrated to New Zealand in 1974 with my wife, and after bouncing around from house to house, we finally settled on this fantastic little home stead that stood about 150 feet from a cliff face that dropped at least 70 feet into the ocean

We were thrilled when we moved in, it was exactly the house we had been looking for. The kitchen sink had a nice little window on it that we could look out at the ocean through, the kitchen had a side door that went into a little green house, pretty much our dream house. So that's how we ended up in that house, and nothing at all ever happened there. We had a son, who moved out when he was 19, and we we enjoyed being empty nesters for a few years until he got married and, surprise, his wife was pregnant.

One of the mornings after we learned the news, less than a week, my wife was washing dishes and yelled for me (I was in the garage renovating a car [drinking beer]), I rushed into the kitchen expecting to see one of NZ's huge bugs climbing on her, but instead I caught the back of her summer dress going out the back door. I followed, hearing her yell "Wait! Wait! Don't do it! Get away from there!"

As I got out the door, I saw what she was yelling at. There was a girl, maybe around 7, standing on the edge of the cliff. I can remember exactly what she looked like now, but at that time I only got a brief glimpse of her as she tilted forward, stiff, and went over the edge. My wife screamed and fell to her knees, I ran past her and looked over the edge, seeing nothing but the crashing waves below.

We called the police, they said we did everything we could, but were still a little suspicious of us from then on. No one reported any girls missing, and there were only a

few Kiwi's out there, so it would be obvious if someone were gone. My wife was horribly scarred by that event for a while, and we finally agreed that she needed to take a vacation with some of her friends to get out of the house.

It was another morning, after she left, that I was in the green house picking some herbs to dry, when I saw through the grimy glass a blurred figure of someone standing by the edge of the cliff. I yelled and ran out, but started to feel a little...wrong. Like something is going on that shouldn't, that feeling you got in your stomach that one time you shoplifted. It was the same girl from days before, standing in the same place, wearing the same outfit.

I remember it clearly. It was a black sweater, fuzzy and home-made. She had short blonde hair, which was blowing wildly in the ocean's updraft. She had a red skirt with dull floral patterns on it, and neat black shoes. I watched her tilt over the edge one again, and once again was met with the waves when I looked down. I didn't tell my wife when she returned.

Our son moved to San Antonio on a job offer after college, and our grand daughter was born there. We flew all the way over to see her, and she was beautiful. I have to hold myself back from describing the feeling of having your first grandchild, but hopefully someone out there will be able to relate. We flew home nearly a month after, and my wife was asleep in the passenger seat of the car as we drove past the airport.

"Please Ellie, don't fall..." she started murmuring to herself, as we neared our house. As we drove down the highway that ran along the cliff face, I made out the figure of a girl standing on the edge by our house. I pulled to a stop and watched her from afar.

I was sure by this point that we had witnessed something "paranormal", because obviously the girl wasn't falling and climbing back up over and over. As I watched her across the cliff, I could almost feel her looking back at me, and could make out her pale white face from her black sweater. Then she fell, sliding under the water without a splash or any sign of impact, no sound over the waves.

Years went by like that, I would wake up in the morning and see her there, my wife would be exceptionally frazzled some days and refuse to tell me why, but I knew she had seen her go over the cliff again. Then one day our son called, they were flying down next month to see us on our wedding anniversary/wife's birthday. The month went by quick, as we cleaned up the house and the yard to make it look presentable for them.

The morning of their arrival, I saw the girl go over the cliff again, just as I heard the crunching of our driveway gravel under my son's car. He got out of the car first, and I couldn't believe how old he looked. Sales is a hard job, I always told him, it will take a toll on you. Then his wife got out of the car, and she had also aged, but in a good way. Gone was the 23 year old who-gives-a-crap, and here was a 30 year old business woman. Then we saw our grand daughter. My wife dug her nails into my arm to keep from falling over.

She wore a black sweater, a red skirt, and had a pink bow in her blonde hair.

It took a lot of explaining, but my wife finally convinced them to let us put them up at a good hotel, and not come anywhere close to our house. I'm not sure if they thought we had turned senile, or that we were murdering people in the house, but we couldn't risk

seeing her go over for real. After that, we never saw the 'ghost' again. My wife said it must have been a warning. I'm not sure why, and I didn't say it to her, but I thought it had a more sinister purpose. Maybe it was that white face that I saw from far away, so pale the sun reflected off of it. Maybe it was the simple, black dots it had for eyes, like a life sized porcelain doll.

We moved out of that house years after that, and moved inland a ways, but stayed in close contact with our old neighbors. A family finally bought that house, more expats, with two sons and a daughter. Not long after, their daughter was found dashed against the rocks under the cliff, no one could figure out how she had gone over. We knew.

Tinolc

Here we go, freshly translated and straight on of my Great Grandpa's journals! For those of you that missed the beginning of the threads, my Great Grandpa was the son of a Gaelic medicine man, and left journals of his and his fathers travels. I posted a few in the last thread (or was it this one?) if you want any more, I'll keep digging to find more good ones! I tried to keep in as much of the Gaelic as possible while still keeping it understandable.

Tinolc

Pronounced Tine-Oalk, or "Bad Fire"

A man came to us today, with three of his friends. They needed treatment for burns on his arms and legs. One was lashed to a branch like a slave, and was screaming in pain and madness as they brought him in and laid him on the table. His arms were covered in boils and scars, forming two brands in the shape of hands upon his wrists. There, on his legs, they were too - many hand prints that had been burned in, recessed but not bleeding - much like hot metal to cattle. What are we but cattle!

My father came in and put ointments on the three who only had minor burns, but made them leave the 1st. He told me to get many things - Sáiste (sage), honey, Fiogadán (chamomile), and the Gealacharade (Moon mirror - water that has been blessed in a full moon). Alas, we were out of the Allow that is so fine for burns, which does not grow in the cold north (aloe maybe?).

He had me put the sage, honey, and chamomile in a pot and warm it, and apply it to the wounds. While I was [doing] this, he poured the water around the man and burnt sage around his head, whispering blessings and the chant –

Na cosantóirí, dias linn (Those who protect, gods be with us)

Immediately the mans breathing slowed, and he stopped struggling. My father spoke,

"Son, what happened in the woods?" For the man was a hunter by dress, and still smelled of the cold pines.

"Lia" he spoke [lia short for leigheasóir - healer. Kind of like saying 'Hey, Doc!'] "I will tell, but you will not believe me. Was it not for my burns, or my horrid dreams, I would not believe me. This is what happened on our journey!

We were walking among the stones to the North, coming from Trou [a city?] to gather

news from the south, and to purchase goats to replenish our flocks after this horrid winter, when I saw something on the misty horizon!

It was a man on fire! Walking calmly between the stones, casting hundreds of shadows before him, and turning the mist around him red and yellow with his blaze. I called out to my friends, but he was gone. We ran quickly to investigate.

We found charred foot prints in the pine needles, I started to put them out before they spread when Kolous spoke, 'What good fortune! Some forest spirit has seen fit to start us a fire! Load kindling, we will have hot food tonight!'

I was uneasy. When I blinked I could still see the burning man, like when you catch the sun's reflection off of water. I felt the stones and they were warm to the touch - he had been here. But the allure of fresh cooked spring fish was too great for this hunter!

By dusk we had a fine fire going, and were eating and telling stories when Kolous shrieked and sprang back from the fire. 'Eyes!' he yelled, 'There are eyes in the fire!'. He was frenzied - but we looked in the fire and saw nothing. The others joked and teased, we all knew Kolous was liberal with the drink. I said nothing, nor did I laugh. I knew we had seen the same spirit.

We settled restlessly to sleep, and I was given first watch. Normally we can sleep peacefully abroad, but the harsh winter has driven the wolves mad. I sat up and thought of my wife, and watched the fire. The ashes shifted as it burned down. Then they shifted again...

I peered carefully into the fire and saw an arm. It was horridly burned, the skin was peeling and some had begun to turn to ash. Its sinews were seen clearly between burnt holes in the flesh. Another arm reached up, followed by a head. Like a man crawling out from mud. The face!"

At this the man shuttered and seemed to recess back in to madness, but my father forced whiskey down his throat. "Worry not, my son. You are not mad, what you saw is real. But you must tell me the rest!"

This seemed to settle the man down, and he continued-

"The face was horrible! It had no eyes, just empty sockets that burned red like a blacksmith's stove. The teeth burned white like iron in a tongueless mouth. And it called to me! With a voice like a snake it said my child-name, and told me it had watched my mother die, that he had watched one hundred mothers die. 'For I am Tinolk! And I am the creator and ruiner of everything!' he yelled. I noticed a burning from my legs, and saw that I was being pulled towards him, the land seemed to slope down towards the fire, he was like a spider in the midst of a burning web!

I struggled to get away, but he grabbed on to me with his burning hands, a fury seemed to over take him, and he began to pull madly at me while screaming. It was a twisted scream, the screams of a man burned! And his motions were chaotic! He flailed at me with his fists and pulled me further, finally latching on to my wrists. I felt my life leaving me, heard my beating heart slow. This was the end!

Then a blanket landed atop of him, then another! My friends had seen me screaming

and laying in the fire, and pulled my out while stamping out the fire. The blankets moved and shook, as Tinolk tried to get out. We left the blankets there in the forest, for none of us had the courage to lift them up." He paused and took a drink, "But I have seen him again, many times Lia. My friends lashed me up because I woke up screaming every night. Now, the whole way here, I have watched him follow behind us. When I call to my friends, he vanishes."

My father sat a long time. And thought. He told me to fetch a vial, small and corked. He gave it to the man.

"Listen, this is what you must do, or you will never be safe from him again for Tinolk is like the fire that killed him - he will not stop until you are consumed. You must take this vial to a spring, and fill it with the water that comes from between two rocks. I cannot go with you, nor can any other man. It must be you alone. Once filled, you must always wear it around your neck for the rest of your days, and give it to your first son, and to him to his. This is the way it must be! Now your wounds are bandaged, you may stay for some time, for Tinolk will not siege this house, but he will not wait patiently either, and will come up with some craftiness. You must go quickly!"

The man stayed two nights, and gave my father every item of value he had one him in thanks, and left the dawn of the third. We heard nothing of him for weeks, until a runner brought news of a burnt corpse found by the base of a creek, the runner had found the vial on the body and had recognized my fathers brand on the bottom. That night we held a silent funeral, and my father buried the vial. My father told me to go back in the house, and he walked out into the woods. He was gone for three days.

When he returned, his coat had been charred and burned, his hair was singed in many places, and his face and arms were red and flushed. He brought out a leaden case, the size of a fist, and showed it to me, but would not let me touch it. It glowed faintly red hissed faintly. After showing it to me, my father took me and four other men to the head of the Dia-Soula spring to the south and wedged the box between two rocks, where it hissed and boiled the water around it, its heat died out. I reached out for it and my father stopped me, "There it must stay, John. He is not gone, just imprisoned." So ends the story of Tinolk.

Bonus!

The history of Tinolk, as told later by my Great Grandpa's father.

No one knows Tinolks real name, but there are few who still know from whence he came. When the world was still young, there was two men and a woman. One man was strong and brave, the other small and crafty. They fought one day over the woman, and the small one was easily killed. He awoke in the dark recesses, in the forest of dead trees where all evil things sleep, and came upon a dark spirit. He told the spirit that if he could be brought back to life, he would eternally serve the dark spirit, for he wanted no other thing but the woman.

The spirit laughed and said, 'Do you think she would love you? You were small and weak, and now buried and maimed. Wouldn't you rather just have the body of the strong man! Imagine how she would love you then!'

The crafty man loved this wicked idea, and wanted it done.

The spirit laughed again and said, 'But, you cannot fight! Even in a strong body you would be killed. Wouldn't you also want eternal life?'

The crafty man was cautious - he knew not to trust any spirit, good or bad. He asked what he would have to give in return.

'Only this,' said the spirit, 'When I want something done, it must be so! If you do not obey me, you will instantly perish where you stand. And I am not a greedy or wanting master!' said the spirit. 'There would only be one thing, when you say yes, you must wait a while I prepare, and then you will be in the body of the strong man, who is sleeping in bed with the woman you love at this moment!'

Upon hearing this last part, the crafty man agreed instantly. The dark spirit vanished and began his preparations. The spirit lit a spark in the woman's house and started a fire, and let it progress to a roaring flame while the strong man and the woman slept. He then went back to the realm of shadow.

'Everything is ready, crafty man! I will snap my fingers, and you will have everything you want!' And with that, the dark spirit snapped his fingers.

The crafty man awoke to the house burning around him. The woman screamed for help, but the house's doors were strong and locked shut, for the dark spirit had entrapped the house. The crafty man was forced to watch the woman he loved be burnt alive, while himself burning eternally - for the fire could not kill him. His spirit became Tinolk, the fire wanderer who spread his embers to the fields and wooden houses of the north, until he was entrapped by my father [my Great, Great Grandfather].

UNKNOWN GOON – NICE APARTMENT COMPLEX WITH DOORBANGERS

I've never been one to believe in ghosts or aliens or much supernatural doohickies. Frankly there's enough real world weird shit going on that I've never felt the need to assign meaning to random events but I lived in one apartment complex that really challenged that.

I went to college in a well known downtown Chicago art school but due to the very high costs of living downtown I ended up living at the ass end of the blue line out by the airport (the Cumberland stop.) This gigantic, seriously several hundred apartments spread over 7 connected buildings) was actually a ghetto-fied student housing situation where we were given three roommates and 2 bedrooms and told to figure shit out. My now fiancé was also living in another wing of this ginormous apartment complex however he had gotten much luckier and he had 3 bedrooms for 5 guys. My fiancé's roommate at the time was named Scott.

Scott was a bit of a pothead but a pretty stand up guy overall. Generally dependable and not really given to creativity. At the time of the story none of the other roommates were in town - it was spring break so it was just me, my fiancé and Scott in this 2 floor giant penthouse apartment. The apartment had entrances on both the lower floor (on the 15th floor) and on the upper floor (16th floor) in a 16 floor building.

Scott worked downtown until closing and generally got home about 11PM. He got off the train, walked to the apartment building and got into one of the elevators with 2

other gentlemen who pressed the 5th floor button while he pressed the 16th floor button. They got off the elevator at floor 5 and he was alone in the elevator. A moment later he felt as though someone else was in the elevator with him so he turns around and there's this chick standing in the corner. He described her to us as be facially proportioned like an African American woman(teen anyway) but all pale... not white, just albino-ish.

Now Scott was, as I said, a pretty stand up guy he also loved the ladies so he starts chatting with her. Or, rather, at her. He laughs, mentions how he didn't see her get on the elevator, asks her her name, what floor she lives on, what button he can push for her, etc...

She doesn't say a word and she won't look at him so he starts to get a tiny bit freaked out because, remember, he didn't see her get on the elevator with him. Because of this he decides to get off on the 15th floor instead of the 16th floor and so he pushed the button and rides the rest of the way up in silence. At floor 15 he gets out by himself and the door closes and he checks and sees that he is all alone in the hallway(for reference our apartment was at the very end of the hallway). Not even a moment later he gets that feeling again, that someone is behind him. Turning around he sees the same girl who most definitely did not get off the elevator with him. At this point he is definitely freaked out but still being the ladies man that he is he jokes about living on the same floor as her and asks if there's something she needs.

She finally looks at him and her eyes are solid black bulges and there's an unearthly noise as she goes for his throat with needle like teeth. He does what any red blooded American would do, he drops a steaming load in his pants and books it for the door at the end of the hallway. This is the part of the story where my Fiance and myself come in.

We had heard the noise but just ignored it as 'not our problem' and we getting back to some heavy petting when we hear Scott's freaking out at the door begging us to let him in as he scrambled for his keys. We let him in and he slams the door behind him and tells us "Dudes I just got chased by a monster!" Obviously we laugh and start making fun of him all the while checking out in the hallway. There is nothing there.

As we start to give him hell though SOMETHING hits the door and just start beating on it. These are massive solid doors and it's shaking fit to come off of it's hinges but there is nothing outside the door to be doing it.

I could leave it be if not for the fact that every so often at around 11:30PM it would happen. It would sound like something hit the door and then started beating on it. Going down to the bar in the building's lobby and telling some folks(much later) about the event had other residents and security guards telling how they had seen this strange pale woman walking the halls.

You know now it seems fakey and clouded, like nothing like that could ever freakign happen. But all I can say is it did, it sounds like a fake b-rated horror movie but it happened and weird shit like that continued to happen in that apartment until we left. It happened. I don't do drugs, I don't drink heavily... It happened.

Like when my Fiance's best friend came and stayed with us over summer break. It's him and us in the apartment, no one else. My fiance and I slept downstairs in the bedroom and did not wake up AT ALL the entire night(I am a light sleeper so my fiance would have

woken me up by moving and I certainly didn't do it nor did I hear anything happen that night.) Our friend slept upstairs on the couch in the living room.

When he woke up every single goddamn chair in the apartment was in a circle around him. Even the ones that were in the roommate's locked rooms(which were still locked). Maybe he did it but the next time he came to visit he slept on the couch once again. This time I did wake up.. to him screaming bloody murder. My fiance and I run upstairs to find him screaming about how something was going to kill him with a cleaver.

The cleaver was stuck into the floor next to him. I say 'the cleaver' but actually I was MY cleaver that was in my locked work knife kit in the closet in the bedroom with us. Our friend eventually told us the story that he had woken up to a sound and above him some shadowy form stood with the cleaver above his head ready to strike.

Maybe he faked it, I don't really know for sure. But I do know that he slept out in his car for the rest of his week long visit and refused to come into the apartment at all ever again.

Never had anything weird happen anywhere else. Though the hairs on my neck are raised just typing this, I really don't expect anything like this to happen again. But I certainly would never live in those apartments again. Fuck that. Seriously fuck that sideways.

And it happened, for real, in these apartments.

<http://www.pavilionapartments.net/>

KHAZAR-KHUM

Intruders

I grew up in a haunted house.

It was a big Moderne/Streamlined house, not the stereotypical Victorian mansion, with turrets and gingerbread, waiting patiently at the end of a tree-lined lane for fools to wander in. Oh, it had its own circular driveway and plenty of trees, but that's where the resemblance ends.

The man who built it was a genius with concrete. In places the walls were 3' thick, lined with lead and rebar. Everywhere the house was built of reinforced and lined concrete, making serious renovation all but impossible. He had peculiar design ideas: no walls were exactly even, no room precisely square. My bedroom, for instance, was 13'3" x 15'2" on the east/south walls, and 13'4" x 15'4" on the west/north walls. No windows or doors were centered.

Downstairs the living room had a barrel vault for the ceiling, with indirect neon lights. There was a massive Palos Verdes limestone slab fireplace, full of fossil shell. The dining room had the most bizarre ceiling in the place: it was a pyramid, with a big brass lamp suspended from the center. The kitchen was long and wide, with a backdoor that seemed to be a refugee from somewhere in the midwest:it had windows that rattled whenever the door was touched.

We had been living there for a couple of weeks when this particular incident occurred.

The old wool carpets had to be pulled as I was allergic to them. My dad still complains about having to get rid of them. Anyway, the new stuff hadn't yet arrived, so we had bare concrete floors downstairs. We had big moving boxes everywhere while my Mom decided what needed to go where.

They had to go to a meeting for the horse show committee, which meant I would be alone for a few hours. It wasn't a problem: I had my dog Kimba, the phone was right outside my room, and I had a ton of homework. I said goodbye to them and went up to my room. By force of habit I shut my door.

My bedroom was right over the dining room. Off of it was a little sun deck/patio that linked to one off the master bedroom. I planned to enclose that one day for a studio for myself. It would be a couple of years before that happened. Right now I moved out there to do homework, since the house tended to be stuffy. By the time I finished math it was getting dark, so Kimba and I went back inside.

I found a good station on the radio and settled down to draw. I had been working on a big project for history and I wanted to make a map. So I was merrily shading away when I heard the back door downstairs open and slam shut.

They were home early. Cool. Maybe we could go get ice cream or something.

I heard my dad drop his keys on the kitchen counter, followed by movement in the living room. I figured they had brought back junk from the meeting, so it was no big deal. I heard the TV come on, with the voices drifting upstairs. Someone started for the stairs, their shoes clicking on the floor.

Kimba growled.

At that moment the temperature in my room dropped. Not plummeted, but definitely colder. I grabbed Kimba and hung on.

Someone started on the bottom step. The first three or four stairs creaked, and I could tell that whoever was coming up was much bigger than my Mom. It was eight steps to the landing, and eight more to the top. I counted them until they stopped.

We had three bedrooms and one big bathroom upstairs. My Mom always insisted on opening every closet door & looking under every bit of furniture in the house. I would have thought that was what was going on, except that she didn't call my name. I heard whoever it was go into the guestroom. The door clicked shut.

They went down the hall to my parents' room. I heard the door open and close, followed by footsteps as they walked around the room. Kimba snuggled close to me, which worried me because she wasn't really a snuggler. Finally they came back down the hall, and stopped at my door.

The room was icy cold. I clung to poor Kimba, who was no longer growling. Instead we sat there, waiting for the door to open.

I don't know how long we sat. I didn't look at the clock. All I know is that we stayed still until I heard the backdoor open and slam shut, and heard my Dad call up to me.

I shouted back that someone was in the house. He came upstairs, and then we all searched the place. No one was there. Nothing was out of place. I told them what had happened, and they insisted it was my imagination.

Two days later, there were cop cars in the driveway when I got home from school. My Mom was sitting outside, smoking, talking to one cop. I asked her what was up. Just about then a deputy came out and said that he didn't find anyone in the house.

She admitted she'd heard people in there, talking and moving around upstairs. The cops told her it was OK, she did the right thing by calling, you can't be too careful, all that good stuff.

She finally apologized to me over the whole thing. It was good, because after that we started to see them. But that's another story.

It wasn't midnight here. Yet.

Telephone Man

If I were to list every thing that went on in the house it would fill this forum and a couple others, too. My Dad owned the place for 25 years. I lived in the house & in another house on the same land all that time. So I have quite a trove of stories to tell.

If you ever watch the Ghost Hunters on TV, you know that they want to see some kind of evidence before calling a place haunted. There's one little problem with that: ghosts are like fish. You're in the boat, you've got the lines out, you know that there's fish in the lake; but if they're not in the mood to bite, forget it. With ghosts, you can place all the high-tech gear you want in the place, but if they won't or can't appear, there's nothing you can do.

Anyway, just about everybody's favorite story involved the phone man

When we moved in, the place still had party lines. My Mom wouldn't settle for that, so we had the phone company come out and place a single line. Everything was OK outside: they ran the lines to the house and outbuilding, a long, low construct that had housed the man while he built the house. We later converted it back into an apartment for me when I got married.

He did the downstairs, and then went up. To get into the very large attic, you had to open a closet door and then climb up into the opening. There were shelves in there, which could be used as a ladder if needs be. The phone man was able to hoist himself up in with no problem. My Mom left him alone and went back downstairs.

A short while later, he came down, got some tools or somesuch, and went back upstairs.

And disappeared.

We never saw him come down. The phone company had to send someone to get the truck. They never spoke to us, and we never signed off on the work order. But we had phones, so it was OK.

And that was it. You'd think it was a joke, except for two things. One, he left his flashlight in the closet. We used it for years, until it finally got lost. And two, when

people came to install AC & add insulation, they found a hard hat in the attic.

So what did happen to the phone man? I don't know.

Telephone Man – Second Version

When we moved to the house in Norco, the are was still on party lines. Party lines are pretty much like you see in old movies: you pick up the handset, and if someone is talking you can either listen in or wait for them to stop. For a 15 year old from the OC this was exotic and fun. For my folks it wasn't. They started the process for a private line.

One day the telephone company truck pulled into the driveway. The telephone repair/installation man got out. My Mom showed him the two phone lines in the house, both at built-in telephone tables. The man made some notes about the one downstairs, then asked about the attic.

Access to the attic was through a very wide closet in the hallway leading to the master bedroom. There was a series of shelves and drawers, which were climbed like a staircase, and then the access panel in the ceiling of the closet. You had to be reasonably tall, or agile, to get into the attic that way, but it was doable.

The telephone man thanked my Mom. He went downstairs, got some stuff, and went back upstairs.

That was the last anyone saw of him.

Around five another telephone company truck showed up. A man got out of it and into the one the telephone man had driven over. They both drove away.

My Dad went upstairs. The access door was open, and there was a telephone company flashlight sitting on the top shelf.

And no telephone man.

Many years later we had air conditioning installed. While laying the ductwork, they never found the telephone man, either.

Someone once asked if he could have gotten trapped inside a wall. Well, the walls on the house ranged from 1-3 feet thick. They were concrete blocks, reinforced with lead & steel, and then covered with more poured concrete. So, no, he wasn't in the walls.

What really happened to the telephone man? To this day, I do not know.

Ghostly Phone Sex

In my Dad's house, we had many many things happen.

There was a building behind the house that the owner had lived in while building the main house. It had a bathroom, the making of a rudimentary kitchen, and a phone. The line was separate from the main house.

We used the place as a garage/storage/whatever for years. Then when I got married, we decided to convert most of it back into a living space. We laid carpet, tile, put in a

shower, stove, etc. My folks had turned the phone off to prevent anyone from using it & running up a bill. Now it was time to turn it back on. They had to replace some lines and naturally that meant climbing the poles.

We were inside when he fell off the pole. Fortunately the neighbor was a fireman. He kept the phone man quiet until the ambulance came. Someone went up in a cherry-picker to finish the job because they couldn't just leave things as they were. According to the new man, the guy's harness wasn't loose or anything--he just fell out of it. No one could figure it out.

And then the phone bill came. \$850.

From the time the guy climbed the pole to the time the second guy finished the job was roughly 2 hours. My Dad called the number that the bill said had been dialled something like 3000 times. It was a long-distance pay phone-sex line.

So we went to the phone company to complain. The lady at the desk had to get her supervisor because they'd never seen anything like it. They calculated that the actual number of calls that could be placed was something like 80. But even that didn't make sense, as the calls were made before the phone had been connected.

They sent someone out to check the lines, I guess to see if someone was tapping them. But no.

Who or what made the calls?

Sealed Window

Still more stuff from my Dad's old place.

We had an outdoor riding arena to work the horses at night when it was cooler. My Dad put up a light pole so we could see what we were doing. Friends would ride over and we'd play around with the horses all night.

This one evening my best friend and I were out, playing games on horseback. We could see my bedroom window quite clearly. I had the curtains closed because my room faced west & I didn't like being blinded in the morning.

My folks left to go shopping. They drove past before leaving so we'd know.

Anyway, we're playing tag or whatever it was, when we saw the lights come on in my room. We hadn't seen my folks pull up, but thought maybe they were around front and we just missed seeing them. A few seconds later the curtains in my room get drawn open. We stopped to see what was up. My folks never bothered my curtains, so we wondered just who was up there.

Just then one window opened partway. That was a good trick--a real good trick. We had the windows sealed shut because of the wind & dirt. There was no way to open them unless you used a special tool to break the seal.

Now we thought someone was robbing the place. We had a phone in the barn, but it was locked. I'll have to tell the story about that phone and why it got locked another time.

We decided our best bet was to stay put and try to get a good look at whoever was in there. Since my room was at the back of the house, AND had a separate enclosed patio room that led onto the lower roof, we figured that they were planning to go out that way. Why they'd opened the window we saw made no sense, but hey--we weren't the robbers.

We saw one person--male, we were pretty sure--walking back and forth. We didn't see him moving anything, but then maybe he was just trying to decide what to take. He left the main room for the patio room, which had no windows on our side. It did, however, have my stereo & TV. We could see the light from it flashing out onto the lower roof--so he was in there, probably bagging all the stuff.

The headlights from my Mom's car came up the road. We rode over to them and told them what we saw. My Dad was convinced we were screwing around. While he was telling us to cut it out, the lights went off everywhere--the house, barn, street, everything. Power was flaky there, so this wouldn't normally have been a big deal, but with someone in the house it was. We went back to the barn for a flashlight because the one in the car was dead.

Once we had the lights, we started in. We took maybe three steps into the house when the lights came back. My Dad made us stay down while he went upstairs. Nothing. Nothing was taken, everything was OK.

Except the window had been opened & then closed.

UNKNOWN POSTER – THE BLUE BEDROOM

When I was little, my sisters and I went to daycare at this old lady's house. The house had two stories. The main floor was where Betty lived and spent almost all of her time. The second floor had two spare rooms and an apartment where her son, Rick lived. Since this was a small daycare in a small town, we pretty much had the run of the place. My friend, Michele and I would spend most of our day either playing outside or just poking around the house. Betty, being old, crabby, and not particularly good at watching kids, had no problems with this arrangement, save one very important rule.

We were not to set foot in the blue bedroom.

Betty never gave us any reason for this rule beyond saying, "I don't want to kids messing around in there!" in her typically cantankerous way. The door to both bedrooms could be seen by someone standing at the base of the stairs, and she always seemed to know when someone was about to try that knob (and be waiting at the bottom of the steps to dole out a spanking... really sweet woman). Eventually, Michele and I learned to stop trying to get in there: it wasn't worth it, and the brown bedroom had plenty of toys in it anyway. We were satisfied with the mystery of the blue room staying a mystery, until Jenny came for a visit.

Jenny was Rick's daughter, who lived with her mother in Kentucky, but came to visit her dad and Grandma about once a year. She was maybe 6 or 7 years older than us, making her one of the cool kids and an authority on everything in our 8 year old eyes. Every year, we'd follow her around and just generally bug her for the entire week, but this year was different. This year Michele thought to ask Jenny about the blue bedroom.

"I hate that room. You could pay me to go into that room." Jenny replied with a shutter. This wasn't like Jenny at all; usually all she did was scoff at our little-kid ideas and say how bored

she was cooped up in this house. Our interests were peaked as we begged her to tell us more.

“Okay, I’ll tell you the story, but y’all better not go repeating this to my Grandma. So, my Grandma has lived in this house since she was a little girl. Growing up, it was her, her mom and dad, her younger sister, and their little brother, Alex. Alex was always trying to tag along with Grandma and her sister, or spy on them when they tried to keep him away. They’d sit upstairs in their bedroom (the brown room) whispering to themselves and sooner or later the door handle would begin to jiggle. They’d unlock the door and, sure enough, there’d be Alex, trying to get in. One day, to get rid of him, the sisters told Alex that they’d play hide and seek with him. Well, he runs off to hid and the girls abandon the game and go off to their room to do whatever. Eventually, Alex figured this out, and went up to the room, and heard them laughing about how they’d tricked him. Alex must have wanted to get back at them by hiding really good...at least that’s what everybody guessed after the fact. He decided to hide in the blue bedroom...which was kept locked because it was used for storage, and there were a lot of valuable things in there.

Anyway, Alex took the key from wherever it was hidden, snuck into the room, and waited. Eventually, the girls started looking for him, and when they couldn’t find him, they got scared and went to their parents. Nobody thought to look in the blue room, because it had been locked the whole time and no one knew that Alex had found the key. It was a couple of days before anyone decided to check in there. When they went in they found Alex, crushed to death under some boxes. No one is sure what happened, but they think that he was trying to hide better and accidentally knocked the boxes off balance. Ever since then, nobody has used that room for anything. The few times Grandma went in there after that, she said she was overwhelmed by feelings of being watched...being watched by something angry. She won’t go in there, because she’s sure that Alex is still in that room, and that he is very angry at her and her sister for what they did to him. Sometimes at night I can hear the door to this room jiggling when I’m trying to sleep in my dad’s apartment. Sometimes we hear scratching in our kitchen...it shares a wall with that room. Anyway, that’s why I don’t like to visit very often, and that’s why Grandma doesn’t want you guys in that room. Let’s go downstairs...I don’t want to be up here anymore.”

Michele and I had gotten a great scare out of that story, but neither one of us wanted to admit that it scared is enough to avoid the upstairs. A couple days later, we decided to go up there and hold a séance, to prove how un-scared we were. Being dumb little kids, our séance consisted of us turning off the lights, closing the curtains, and trying to “awaken the spirit” of Alex by pretending to be Betty and her sister. We even batted around the idea of bringing a little mirror up there so we could chant “Bloooody Maaaary!” Yeah, it was pretty legit.

Michele and I sneak up the stairs, and go into the brown bedroom. It’s important to mention that, when we got up there, the doors to both rooms were shut, as they always were. Anyway we go into the room, shut off the lights, close the curtains and sit down on the floor, ready to wake up some ghosts. At this point, I was starting to get a little scared. It was really dark in that room, darker than I felt it ought to be, but no way was I going to let Michele see how freaked out I really was. So hell-bent was I to look brave, that I actually was the first one to attempt to contact him. Our conversation went something like this:

Me: "Alex...it's your sisters.

Michele: "We're in here trying to ditch you, Alex. We don't want you bugging us all the time!"

Me (giggling nervously): "Alex, we know you're angry! We know you're listening!"

Michele: "Yeah, let us know you're here, Alex!"

At this point we stopped and listened. At first, we didn't hear anything, but then it started. Softly, at the other end of the room, came the sound of a door knob being lightly jostled. We were, of course, freaked the hell out by this, but still wanted to save face. Michele said that it was probably just sound echoing from Rick's apartment...despite the fact that Rick was at work and Jenny was downstairs. I said that it was probably just the wind or the house settling (words my parents used to explain away the things that went bump in the night). Neither one of us was quite ready to run downstairs with our tails between our legs, so we kept taunting him.

Michele: "Oh come on Alex? Are we really supposed to believe that?"

Me: "...yeah! You're just stupid. We're glad you died!"

Looking back, I have idea what possessed me to say that. I must have been caught up in the moment, desperate to best Michele and prove that I was no coward. I honestly can't think of anything else I've ever done that I've regretted more than saying those words. No sooner had they left my mouth than the handling started jiggling with more force than any wind or echo could produce. In one fluid motion I jumped up and flipped on the lights...saving face be damned, only to wish that I hadn't. In the newly lit room, we could actually see the door handle moving, like someone was trying to open it. The force of the jiggling got stronger and stronger, until the whole door was shaking, like someone was trying to force their way in by any means necessary. As quickly as the jiggling had started, it stopped. Michele and I sat there, too scared to move or talk. After about thirty seconds, I had relaxed enough to breathe again.

Me: "That wasn't really him...do you think?"

Michele: "...No way. Hey! I bet you anything that it was Jenny, trying to scare us!"

Me (wanting really badly to believe this): "You're right! She probably made that story up to scare us. I bet there never was an Alex."

As soon as I said the word "Alex" the jiggling started again. By this time I'd had enough of blue rooms and brown rooms and ghosts. Michele and I jumped up and made quickly for the door, angry at Jenny for scaring us, angry at ourselves for being scared, and anxious to get out of there before we let ourselves realize that we hadn't heard anyone coming up or down the creaky wooden stairs. We quietly unlocked the door and flung it open, ready to catch Jenny in the act.

Only Jenny wasn't there. No one was there. Only the empty landing facing the door to the blue room, which was wide open. Michele and I immediately tore down the stairs, screaming bloody murder. I felt such a primal fear looking into that room. A fear that something in it was evil, that something in that room wanted very badly to hurt us. Of course our fear was amplified, because that evil something had a face, had shown itself to us as gaped in horror at that blue room. Standing parallel to the door of the room had been a small, flickering boy.

I never went back to that daycare after that day. Betty had been charging way too much, and neglecting us, so my begging and pleading to not go back became the push my mom needed to finally look into taking us somewhere else. Eventually, Betty died, Rick moved, her house fell into disrepair and collapsed during a particularly bad storm. Every time I drive by that house, I hold my breath and try convince myself that the destruction of the house destroyed Alex along with it. I try not to think about how the house being destroyed could have let Alex out. I try

not to think about how the door of my dorm room jiggles at night.

SWEET8CTANE – THE FORD FALCON

I just have to give my dad credit for this story, I'm typing it exactly as he is telling it to me over the phone. I honestly think it is fake, it's just too horror movie-ish, but god damn did it freak me out as a kid.

I was, and am, a car connoisseur. Read that as a collector of old jalopies that have no hope of ever working again, but what can I say, I enjoy collecting them. As a collector of anything you begin to find other people as crazy as you, and I did. We always met at the Hardees on the west side of town at a sort of "see who can get their piece of shit car there and back" party. Doesn't that sound fun?

At that time I was driving a restored Fiat, the little "Red Devil" I called her, and had just driven up. All the regulars were there, we BS'd for a while until this nasty old man came in. I mean nasty, he smelled like a sewage plant, was missing most of his teeth and fingernails. His clothes looked like they hadn't been changed in 5 years. He was far past homeless level of nastiness. Even his face seemed to have a thick layer of mud/shit/death on it, especially in its many deep cracks and grooves. Imagine my horror as he looked directly at me, then came up and rested his hands on my table. The table I was eating off of.

"You shidders innoooo...inoooo....cars?" He said [I typed that phonetically to emphasize the accent dad gives him]. He proceeded to slide into the booth across from me, leaving oily handprints on the table. "I might...I got...I have this car sitting in my front yeerd... been there since my wife (God blessir) died giving birth to that sack of shit son of mine, ain't done a damn thing with his...I've got this car in my yard. It's...it's been there a while. Yellow." This whole time he was starting and restarting his story he was fiddling around in his many Vietnam-jacket pockets, until he produced a poleroid and threw it down on the table, adding two more brown thumb prints to its already soiled rim.

I pulled it over and looked at it, feeling a twinge of envy in my heart, as I looked at a beautiful Ford Falcon sitting in a mountain of weeds. It didn't look like it had been there long, it looked like it had just been driven in actually. Damn that was a nice looking car.

"Yeah, so what?" I responded, trying to sound as uninterested as possible. Just this man's smell was ruining my dinner, let alone his looks.

"I'll give it to you...free like. All you have to do is drive and pick it up. Just come pick it up. I'll even drive you to it." He brought the keys out and laid them on the table. "Or you can have someone else drive you there...there...I guess." He produced a single ford key and laid on the table, almost violently, certainly using more force than required.

I wasn't about to get into a car with a stranger, but here he was offering a free car to me. He said if I didn't take it, he was just going to leave the photo and the keys on the table. We came to the arrangement that I would drive my car home, a friend of mine (a big friend, with a gun) would come pick me up, and drive me to the car. When we asked him where it was, he simply turned the Polaroid over, revealing a miniature, crudely drawn map of cross streets, with a little X on it. In the back of my mind, it registered

that the cross streets were on a good and well lit part of town. Good.

My friend came to pick me up as planned, and we started heading off to the said Falcon. I fondled the Polaroid in my hands, at the same time almost afraid to touch the big, oily thumbprints all over it. Something caught my eye – did the photo just shift a little? I played it back and forth in the light, but didn't see anything. But the damage was done... I shuddered as I remembered what I saw. A person in a white shirt, slumped over in the front seat. The white shirt stained red.

We got closer and closer to the car, it was about 5pm now, my friend and I were talking back and forth about how weird that guy was. Not scary weird, like a murderer or anything. Neither was he weird like a homeless person, our town is full of them and they are usually pretty cool guys. This guy was just...nasty. So nasty, I now started to remember, that back in my head I had had an almost physical response. The type of response that starts deep in the subconscious, and only surfaces later. The thought: Get the hell away from this man. Get away from everything that has anything to do with him. Except for his Falcon, I joked.

As we pulled up to the X, we were met with a slightly over grown lot with a "FOR SALE: BY OWNER" sign stuck in it, probably for years (it was covered by vines and grass). There was a small loop worn into it, probably from people parking their cars, or doing U-Turns. And that's where the Falcon was. Sitting there, a glistening candy yellow. We walked cautiously around it. The word "Pristine" seems to come to mind. That car looked like it had suddenly appeared there right off the lot. Nothing was wrong with it. We unlocked the car and I shoved my head in without thinking, and was instantly met with this horrible, noxious smell, so bad it was almost a liquid that forced itself down my throat and nostrils. It was terrible. We opened up the doors and popped the trunk, partially to air out the car, partially to check for the nasty weird man. Nothing.

I started her up, listening to that sweet, sweet sound of a well maintained motor purring calmly under the hood, trying to ignore the prevailing stench of...rotting meat...coming from somewhere in the car. The weird thing was we sniffed around in there, sniffed the seats, sniffed the air vents, and nothing in the car smelled specifically like it. It was like the scent was a separate entity, that simply existed inside the car, without actually touching anything. That sounds ridiculous, but it's the only way I can describe it.

We pulled out, my friend behind me, and started to head home. I've got to say I had forgotten about anything weird at this point. This car rocked. Even if it was stolen and he was just trying to fence it, I didn't give a flying fuck. The police could have it if they wanted, but until then I was going to drive the shit out of this thing. I even had the man's thumb print who gave it to me. As I thought that I ran my hand along my pants pocket and pulled out the Polaroid, giving it a quick glance, then looked into the rearview mirror to check to see if my friend was behind me, and screamed.

Looking back at me...or I guess I just looked at it...was the corpse of a woman with those huge blonde 60's curls, bright red lipstick, an almost powdered white face, slumped against the back seat, casually looking off to the right with eyes that couldn't see anything, eyes that were dead. I took all this in a brief second before I panicked and hit the brakes and moved over to the shoulder, taking my eyes off the cadaver so that I didn't hit anything, but I could hear...hear the body slide across the seat and bump into the sidewall.

As the car came to a stop I jumped out and looked in the back seat: nothing. My friend came to a stop behind me. I was prepared to defend the fact that I just saw a dead woman in the back seat, prepared for him to call me crazy, but as he jumped out of his car with his pistol in his hand he asked "What the fuck? Who's in the back seat?"

He saw it too. He thought the guy had jumped up from somewhere to murder me. A little extreme, I know, but he was a jumpy guy. We stood there a long time trying to figure out what to do. I did not want to get back into that car. Once again, that twinge deep in my brain: get the fuck away. Once again, I rejected it and sat back down in the car, ready to drive the rest of the way home, watching that fucking back seat the whole time.

It was on the edge of a knife, or on nails, whatever the phrase is, but I made it home and parked the Falcon in my driveway, giving it a second glance as I got out. The type of glance you give someone you don't trust. Or something you don't trust...

My friend and I nervously joked about the incident, he drove back home and I made myself dinner and fell asleep watching TV, waking up suddenly from a...gunshot. Was it a gun shot? I felt my heart racing, I tried to remember what I heard, then remembered the TV was on. It was some late night action movie. I just heard the TV gunshot...that's all. Then I heard my neighbor scream.

Said neighbor was a wonderful nice old Mexican woman with a bazillion kids, and she made me damn good food. If someone was going to mess with my taco connection, they were going to get their head blown to pieces. I grabbed my coach gun from behind the couch (I hid it between the couch and the wall) and walked outside loading it, nearly shooting the woman as she ran around the corner of my garage.

I will leave out the part of me trying to understand her through her hysteria, but even through that it was easy to tell what had happened. She had seen a woman "Marilyn Monroe" she called her, dead in the back seat of the car. We both peered around the corner and looked at the Falcon, and were met with an empty back seat. Now one thing was certain, I said it out loud there in the dark "I have to get rid of this damn Falcon. Something is fucking wrong with it."

Get rid of it I did. I drove it to the auto auction the next day and got a nice bonus, came up with a story about how I was late on payments and the girlfriend said we couldn't live in the car (a story easily believed by classic car collectors), and sold it to some poor, unsuspecting man and his son. Well, that's over, I thought to myself as I slapped my hands together, like I was cleaning dirt off of them.

To celebrate my personal accomplishment of getting rid of that terrible car, I even invited a few of my friends over for a little party, not giving them a reason other than it had been a while since I broke loose.

Not many people came on short notice, only three, but they were all good friends and we had a good time, I went to sleep before they did because I had to work in the morning. I should mention right now that these three friends had absolutely no connection with the friend who followed me home. The night passed quickly, I fell right to sleep thanks to the copious amount of alcohol I had consumed.

The next morning I woke up with a horrible headache and went out in the living room

and started making myself some eggs. My friends were comatose on the couche, one was moving a little bit and opened one eye. "Man, you didn't tell us you got a chick. Judging by those legs she looked like a babe. Did she have a nose bleed or something?"

My stomach tensed up, I felt like I just swallowed a handful of ice cubes. All I could get out was a whimper.

"We came in there to prank you, put shaving cream on your hand, but we saw that girl laying next to you and thought you guys were...you know...we didn't see anything or nothing, you were both under the covers." He winked at me, "So, are blondes really more fun?"

ARTHYARTHYARTHY – THE DAM MAN

My dad was an engineer, and when I was 17 he took a job renovating a dam about 40 miles away from our house. At the beginning it was just a normal job, but he started coming home more and more...I would almost say frantic. You could tell there was something wrong at work, maybe a bad coworker or something. My parents relationship was strained as it was, and this stretched it to the limit. They started yelling at each other late at night, and one day at the dinner table the straw broke. Dad told what was bothering him.

The dam was haunted, he said. Mom and I stared at him. Me in interest, my Mom in...annoyance, waiting for him to crack a smile and say he was just joking. The smile never came, he just got up and went to his "office". Mom stared at her food a while then followed him, I hung around within earshot to see what was going on. The conversation started out with my Mom's raised voice, but gradually it became quiet, confidential.

Dad agreed to refuse the job, to work a few more days until they could find a replacement - no more. This is where my intelligence came into question: I asked if I could come with him to work, and see the "ghost". He agreed, but told me to bring a friend. I called Josh, and he was stoked, and by the next day we were riding in the cramped back seat of my Dad's pickup towards the dam. Josh and I checked out flashlights, nothing fancy, just those little penlights you get at gas stations. We were a far cry from professional ghost hunters.

When we arrived at the dam, both Josh and I were struck by the somber mood that abounded in just about everyone. You could have told us that we were in a morgue, and it would have been easily believed. We followed Dad down through the concrete labyrinth, past the bypass', past the generators, deep down into the access and maintenance tunnels below, where the construction was going on. Dad grabbed a 1mil candle power light and two radios from one of the carts, not really stopping as he walked.

It wasn't construction really, just patchwork to make sure the dam didn't explode under pressure, necessary little injections of concrete into compression cracks and that sort of thing. We went down some stairs that took an abrupt turn to the right, and were met with a 100 foot long unlit hallway, with another set of descending stairs at the far end, lit by a single naked light bulb.

"Alright," Dad started, "This is it. All you have to do is walk down to the other end of the hallway and back. Feel free to turn back and come here at any time, I'll be standing right here with the torch. Just yell at me and I'll light up the whole hallway. Take one of the radios with you just in case, noise has a way of...getting trapped down here." He said while gazing down the hallway. He was talking quietly, the sort of way you would if you were surrounded by sleeping creatures.

Josh and I lit our flashlights and started walking down the hallway. Almost immediately we began to feel...pressure close in around us. It seemed the darkness itself had weight to it, pushing down on our shoulders, sneaking into our throats and choking us. We both walked slowly, concentrating on that light at the end of the tunnel, on our little bouncing pen lights.

Dams are creepy places in general, and this one was no different. Minute shifts in the lake caused the damn to...moan in a way, but not in a way you could hear. More like you could feel it moan, somewhere deep in your stomach. Little drips would become gunshots when reflected the right way, ventilation shafts would seem to form whispered words, voices from far off managed to appear right behind you. I had experienced these things before, in other dams, but this one was different - completely different.

I suddenly snapped alert, Josh was whispering my name from somewhere. I became aware that we were laying down on the cold, moist concrete floor. The light at the end of the hallway had gone out. Our penlights did little to hold back the wet, seeping darkness that was constantly encroaching on us. I pulled the radio out of my pocket, whispering into it: "*Dad...dad...turn on the light...*".

No reply, just a that silent static that filled the air around us, Josh and I turned around and looked behind us, we could see Dad still sitting on the steps. I wanted to yell for him, but I couldn't. If I opened my mouth...the darkness would come in, pour in, drowning me. The radio crackled up in my hand, "*Turn on the light...turn on the light...turn on the light...*" whispered someone. It wasn't my voice.

It was a sick, wet, almost gurgling voice. Guttural and deep, it originated from the gut instead of the throat. Josh and I pointed our flashlights at the radio, and he curse as his light flickered and died. We were stuck, trapped in that hallway. We couldn't yell, we couldn't move, we couldn't use the radio. "*Josh...we have to try to get back.*" He nodded back, his face eerily lit by the pale blue penlight. I tried to ignore its brief flickering, as we both started to crawl back down the hallway, using the penlight to light the way in front of us. The darkness was complete, filling the edges of my eyes. Our whole world existed in that circle of dim light before of us, everything else was black. Then my hand touched something...

I jumped backwards and pointed the penlight where my hand had been...nothing. But I knew without a doubt what I felt - a foot. I had layed by hand down on the ankle of a human foot. It had been wet, slimy almost. The skin felt soft and bloated, ice cold. It was so vivid, I thought to myself. I had felt the callouses on the back of the heel, the wrinkles of skin...the tension of the dead muscle. I had surprised whatever I touched as much as it surprised me. Suddenly, Josh was yelling at me.

He was gasping and spinning around on all fours, his eyes wide with fear. "*What the fuck was that...*" he started, "*Something touched me, put its hands on my back.*" He turned around and showed me the back of his shirt, a grey T-Shirt that he wore in case it got dirty. Two defined hand prints were set in it, right behind his shoulders, showing easily against the rest of the shirt - whatever hands had touched him had soaking wet hands. His face set as he looked

forward, I followed.

Up ahead, we could see Dad still relaxing on the stairs, with the light behind him, erasing all the details of his face. But there was someone else now...

It was wearing a poncho, the heavy wet gear that dam workers who have to do deep work wear. Brief reflections of light around the silhouette showed its emergency-yellow color. It was wearing a hat too, one of the rubber seal hats I had seen my Dad wear on so many occasions. Someone else had come down to talk to Dad? Then I felt it...look at me. From far away, even though Josh and I were in total darkness, I felt it look at me and knew - absolutely knew - it saw me. Then it started walking.

It was a hurried walk, with a heavy limp. A determined walk, the walk of a man who has something important to do, someone who is late, someone who wants...to kill an intruder. I was paralyzed, there on the floor, shaking from the cold water seeping in through my shirt off the floor, from fear of whatever it was that was walking at us. Closer, closer, closer. I pointed the flashlight at it - him.

He was maybe thirty feet away now, his walking had picked up pace. Little details shimmered in the penlight. His face was a sickly white, the eyes grey and swollen, only one pointing directly at us, the other lazily drifting off to the left somewhere. His cheeks had dark blue veins showing through, and his lips were torn and rotting in places. Shimmers of light reflected back to me as droplets of water caught the light - whoever the man was, he was soaking wet. Still closer...too close..

The radio! Dad was talking through the radio! "Are you boys OK back there? I'm turning on the light, cover your eyes." I couldn't see him any more, the man was close enough that he filled our view. His wet boots heavily slapping against the concrete, his wet, labored breathing seeming to slide across the walls until they reached my ears. It occurred to me that my flashlight had gone out, and at the same time the boot steps stopped. I could hear the breathing though...only feet above me. Wet rubber squeaked against itself, and I felt a wet, swollen hand slide down the side of my face, then violently grip my hair and yank my hair back. Then the world erupted in light - bright, unbroken light filled every corner of that damn hallway.

"Why are you idiots laying down? Whats wrong with Josh?" I heard my Dad yell, unseen behind the bobbing light, he was running towards us. I looked over, Josh was face first on the concrete. He had passed out. I started shaking him and he woke up, pushing me off him in fear at first. Dad reached us and helped me pick him up. Then pointed the light down the hallway and dismissively shook his head. "Lets get out of here, I'm seeing things now. I thought I saw one of the other workers just go around the corner down there."

"Was he wearing wet gear?"

"Yeah, why? Are you OK?" He squinted his eyes, almost knowingly at me. He had a unique experience, I thought to myself, probably every day for the last two weeks. "Why is your hair wet?" Was the last thing I remembered him asking.

I find myself waking up late at night now, soaking with sweat, thinking about that tunnel. Sometimes I can feel that wet hand on my face, sometimes I feel the foot, other times I just see his silhouette at the end of the hallway, any hallway.

Afterwords:

Dad fronted an effort to quintuple the amount of wired and emergency lights in that dam, and the personnel were more than supportive. He also suggested to change the emergency gear to red, so that everyone wasn't jumping out of their socks every time they saw another worker.

ROUGH LOBSTER

The Three

I was about eleven when this happened. I used to live in this cramped, crappy 3 story townhouse with my two brothers and my parents. It wasn't in the bad part of town so much as in a really secluded area. The only connection to any real civilized areas was what amounted to a single long, unlit side-road. It was the kind of place that made you feel like you were living in a tiny island of suburbia surrounded by vast, dark, and uninhabited forests. I still drive up that way sometimes, if I'm feeling nostalgic.

Anyway, most of my childhood was spent at this place. As many childhoods are, mine was filled with wonder and exploration and a few moments of pure, exhilarating terror. There was the time I crawled into a big water runoff pipe and had a tussel with...something. That's coming up next. There's the time me and Alex dug up what we were pretty sure was a woman's hand. The time we valiantly fought a huge snapping turtle and almost got bit on the neck. Anyway, this is one of those strange childhood experiences.

My best and only friend at the time, Alex, lived a fair bit down the road. It would probably be about a 45 minute walk for a child. As he was pretty much my only friend at the time, and I his, our parents took the effort to drive us to each-other's homes fairly often. We'd spend the time playing Nintendo, or doodling, or traipsing about outside with supersoakers looking for hornets' nests to lay siege to.

It was one of these very days, a day ripe for adventure. Alex's dad picked me up and drove us to his house. We spent most of the daylight trying to make arrowheads from rocks in his backyard, hunting for scorpions (they don't even live in this part of the country), and watching Inspector Gadget on tv. Eventually, the daylight began to wane. Alex's dad asked me when my mom was picking me up. I hadn't thought about bothering to tell her. I just told him that she said it was ok to walk home. After all, I just had to follow one road pretty much the entire way uphill to my home. He seemed concerned, but I must've been convincing enough. After saying farewell to Alex, I was allowed to depart.

As I mentioned earlier, the road was mostly unlit, punctuated by a few ill-placed streetlamps. There was a fairly wide clearing on each side of the road, maybe 200 feet or so of pure grass. Beyond that on all sides was dense, oppressive woodland.

There weren't any cabins or homes out there, either. It was rough, hilly terrain. So I'm following the road closely. No cars have passed. I reach one of the streetlamps, basically the halfway point. The sun has begun to fall fast. You know that golden time that happens at summer, at the very end the day? This was about right after that.

I see movement out of the corner of my eye to the left and look over into the woods. Three ragged kids are emerging from crouches behind the thick brush. They were hiding there, and now they walked an interceptor's course directly towards me. I immediately sprang into one of those cold, nervous sweats and quickened my pace. I didn't want to acknowledge them, but cast a quick look back after a few seconds. They were lightly jogging now, each with a

cretinous grin on his face. I stopped and turned to face the inevitable.

When they saw that I had stopped they slowed down again into a casual walk. Three boys, each looking a bit older than me. They wore ripped up, shoddy clothing, and had matted hair. On their faces was that mean-dumb expression you see sometimes on bullies. They had teeth like rats, yellow and gnawing. Their skin was the most sickly gray/olive I had ever seen. As they arrived into speaking range, I tried to play it cool, and said "Hey".

The biggest one immediately gave me a two handed shove that I was just not ready for. I fell onto my ass and scrambled to my feet just as another one of them tackled me and held me to the ground. His breath smelled like a pile of burning assholes. I shouted as loud as I could as one of them sat on my legs. The big one grabbed a handful of my hair and swung a meaty fist back. I cringed and felt the blow land right on my cheek bone. One of them was kicking me in the ribs, and I managed to grab his foot and bring him down. That bought me enough time to get scramble out. The big guy made a lunge for my foot so I kicked him in the face as hard as I could. He kept holding on to my shoe so I kicked it off and let him keep it.

I didn't really have it in me to run at that point. I was too shocked, too scared and winded. I sort of just started fast walking home. I cast a wayward glance behind me. They were following about 50 feet behind, keeping pace, no longer smiling. Their plan had failed. Instead they had the ugliest, meanest frowns on their mugs. They weren't even rushing, as if they knew that would catch me. This went on for a few moments.

Suddenly they rushed off back into the woods. In the dim light I could see a car winding down the road. It looked familiar. Thank god, it was that shining bastion of light and goodness that was my mother.

Of course, she had gotten a call from Alex's dad to see if I was home yet. She freaked when she saw me all bloodied and bruised. I told her some bullies did it and she made an attempt to locate the boys. Nothing ever came from it. I asked my dad to teach me how to fight. He dug around in the VHS cabinet for a few minutes, and upon coming up empty handed, told me to "float like a butterfly and sting like a bee. That's why my name is Muhammed Ali." Thanks, dad.

So yeah, not really a ghost story. Just three weird fucking inbred kids with weird skin and breath like leprosy. The whole time none of them had said a word.

I have a few more, notably the time I fought off some kind of unnameable beast inside a huge water runoff bunker and the time I'm pretty sure my uncle tried to have me killed. I'm feeling writey, so I may type one of those up now.

AVEVA

The Eye On The Wall

When I was a little girl, about age 8, we moved from my parents first starter house into a bigger one. It was a ranch style home, 3 bedrooms, 2 baths, basement and a garage. It was plenty big for my parents, sister and myself. My sister was 6 at the time, and she was pretty upset to have moved from the house we both grew up in, so it was my job to make her feel better, said my mother.

The game we designed was that one of us would run down to the basement and stare up the laundry shoot, until the other poked open the laundry shoot and waved. We would squeal with laughter and then run to change places. My mom either didn't care, or didn't notice, since we were out of the way of the movers.

The basement was half finished, one whole area had been done with wood paneling and multiple rooms, one included the laundry area. This area even had carpet. The rest of the basement was green concrete floors and this cement/concrete popcorn walls...that's the best way I can describe it. The unfinished area took up most of the basement, and had two small windows that let in light. This area became the main play area for me and my sister, along with any new friends we would bring over.

At one point, about 3 months into living there, my mom let a few friends of mine come over for a sleepover. We were having fun drawing with chalk and crayons on the basement floor. My mom didn't mind this, since it could easily be washed off the concrete. At some point, we decided to all climb into our sleeping bags for bed. We told the best ghost stories that 8 and 9 year olds could tell and went to sleep, scared out of our minds.

Nothing happened to wake us during the night, but when we woke up the next morning, most of us rushed upstairs to the smell of french toast. My younger sister, however, took a bit longer to wake up. When she came upstairs, she was giggling and giving me an odd look. After breakfast, I asked her what was up, and she said to me, "Mom is going to be so mad at you for drawing chalk on the walls!" I was most confused...as I was sure neither me or my friends had drawn on the walls at all, at least no when I was awake.

So I ran down there, determined to avoid punishment for one of my friends blunders, when I stopped short of reaching the wall. Up, high as it could be before hitting the ceiling, was a single picture. I knew instantly that I, nor my friends, could have drawn such a thing. For one, it was too high for any of us to reach with any ease, and secondly...the picture itself was...well, let me try to describe it.

The picture was most simply, of an eye. But, I don't think anyone could have drawn a more perfect eye with chalk if they were paid to do so. Its symmetry seemed perfect, eyelashes were there, pupil, iris, even the whites of the eye were there. It was nothing more than an eye, but it terrified me, because I knew it was impossible. My mom was no-where tall enough, nor good enough of an artist to do such a thing, and my father was out of town. I was baffled. I asked my friends, and they all said it wasn't them.

Finally, I told my mother. She went and looked at it, then looked at me with a very odd look, and simply said "I told you I didn't want you drawing on the walls."

No matter how much I begged and pleaded, she wouldn't believe it wasn't me...nor would she accept the oddity that the eye was, itself. She washed it off quickly and went back upstairs, leaving me and my friends to look at the spot on the wall where it had been.

We never slept down there again.

Weird Sounds And Claw Marks

This is a story from the same house, about a year later.

My friends and I were playing in the basement, we weren't afraid because it wasn't night time :P

We began hearing a very odd noise, it was deep and gutural...and I really don't know a great way to describe it other than that. It seemed to be coming from the concrete wall that looked like a popcorn ceiling...I have no idea how that wall was accomplished anyway.

The noise seemed far away at first, but then began to get louder, and closer, until it seemed to be right next to us, inside the wall. We ran up the stairs and I tried to convince my dad that something was going on down there, but he was napping and dismissed me easily.

So, we stayed out of the basement for the rest of the day, and without incident. We never spoke of it between us friends again,

My mother returned home about 2 hours later and I begged her to go down to the basement...I just wanted some reassurance.

So, we venture down the stairs. I was walking behind her, and once you get about halfway down the stairs, you can see the opposing wall where we heard the noise. At this half-way point, my mom stopped short, which made me run into the back of her. She began calling out for my dad, who then came lumbering down the stairs. Now it was a Sara sandwich!

My dad passed both me and my mother on the stairs and stood at the bottom, looking at the wall. I was the only one who did not have a view of the wall in question, due to my position. My father then began to grumble about never getting a break from fixing things, and my mother sighed.

I was eager to figure out what they were talking about, so I pushed my way past my mother (gently) and stood next to my dad. I instantly reached up and grabbed his arm, and what I am sure was a look of pure terror and confusion appeared on my face. On the wall was...what I can only describe as claw marks. Deep grooves were torn into the concrete wall, like maybe a three clawed tiger had ripped into it. It terrified me, as these marks were NOT there before.

My parents of course, blamed their 9 year old daughter for tearing holes in the concrete. They fixed it promptly and told me to be more careful. They almost had me convinced that it WAS my fault...somehow.

At any rate, this re-enforced my decision to not play in that part of the basement ever again, and CERTAINLY never sleep down there.

SARAH HOORAH – THE GREY MAN OF BEN MACDUI

I'm here mostly to beg for more out of you, Ant. However I'll leave a story that my (Scottish) step-father told me regarding 'am fear laith mor'- or the grey man of ben macdui. Ben Macdui being a peak in Scotland.

There are long standing legends of something either akin to a yeti or some sort of spirit that ghosts the footsteps of climbers when the (fairly common) heavy fog and sleet sets in. So my step father ('John') and three of his friends decide on a day-trip to the summit.

They set out relatively late in the day, having been inspired to undertake the climb more so by the pints consumed at lunch and the bravado of young men than by any story of spooks on the mountain. But as is the case with British mountains, it wasn't a long trek to the peak. The most common route to the peak, and the one they chose that day, takes you on a gradual but long

and desolate ascent across the moors of the highlands. The first of John's friends excused himself from the expedition early on, volunteering to hold their table at the pub and wasting no time in disappearing down the slope as the remaining three ascended higher into the already gathering gloom.

Now the thing with fog is, along with its ability to disorient and isolate visually, it also distorts sound. The wind over distant crags can sound hauntingly close, and the clatter of disturbed rocks terrifyingly so. But this was as much a test of their testicular fortitude as it was a way to kill an afternoon, so they laughed a bit to keep dread from creeping in, and continued. Then the wind kicked up the fog swept in with a vengeance.

And so they lost friend number two, who never even gave an excuse- just stopped mid-stride as another lick of fog cut off his view of the group, and with a strangled farewell turned and just short of ran back down the mountain. John and his last mate, with what amounted to a scoff and a shrug, decided to double the effort and make the summit in good time. They set a quicker pace, and fell easily into the rhythm of their steps, gaining ground one not more than six inches from the other in the dense mire. The pattern of their footfalls became so familiar that neither one could later remember when it altered. At first it was easy to dismiss as another trick of the wind and fog working at their tired minds, but as the third set of footsteps moved undeniably closer John's last friend grabbed his arm.

"Sorry, mate. Come back down with me now or you're on your own." Strain in his voice through the thick accent. "It does-nae want us here."

But despite the argument that followed and his friend eventually abandoning him to storm back down the grade, John would not be deterred. By now the distance, lengthened artificially by the weather and stress, could not be so great. He resolved to take the summit, huck a stone on the cairn, and have a laugh and a drink at his cowardly friend's expense. His reckoning proved correct, and it was not long before he felt the ground level off. As he ventured forward the sky cleared enough for him to catch a glimpse of the cairn (a pile of stones at the highest point, assembled one at a time by people climbing the peak) a ways off along the ridge, and to his great relief, a man circling its base as though looking for a good place for his stone. John watched as the man seemed to give up and simply set the stone he was carrying atop the others. Just as quickly as it had cleared, the fog choked his way again, and he lost sight of the cairn, now a stone higher. But having confirmed his course, John called out into the gloom so as not to sneak up on the other climber, reached down for a stone at his feet, and moved through the fog with his hand extended in front of him like a blind man. The fog broke again as he realized he had strayed slightly and turned to face the cairn again. The stone in his hand never made it onto the pile, instead clattering to the ground at his feet. He never heard it though, as he was too busy sprinting away from the summit praying that he kept his footing. The cairn onto which the man had placed his stone with ease had been well over twenty feet high, and the stone as big as my step-father's head.

UNKNOWN POSTER – HAUNTED SHIP

Three Encounters

1. While the ship is in port, most of the equipment in the Reactor and Machinery Rooms is shut down and everything is aligned so that only a skeleton crew is needed to maintain the equipment. In the Machinery Rooms (which contain the

propulsion machinery, distillers, and electrical generators) this consisted of one Shutdown Watch and one roving watchstander, with occasional visits from the crewman who was the overall supervisor for the plants.

The Machinery Room has three levels. The topmost level (4th Deck) is a single story high, and there is a steep staircase that descends about 30 or 40 feet into the middle level (called the Upper Level), and another that goes down another 10 feet to the lowermost level (called Lower Level). On Upper Level was a desk, at which we spent most of our time while on Shutdown Watch. There's very little to do while overseeing a shut down engine room, so between about 10pm and 6am, the Shutdown Watch tries fighting against falling asleep, while simultaneously staving off boredom. Unless you're in #2 Main Machinery Room around 2am.

Like I pointed out, there's a long steep staircase from 4th Deck to Upper Level, and it had a "tray" along the underside made of aluminum. It was impossible to "sneak" down the steps, because the slightest vibration would start the aluminum vibrating and rumbling (think about those sheets of aluminum they used to make "thunder" sound effects). When 2am rolled around, the sounds of footsteps and rumbling would be heard, and the tray would be seen to vibrate. Then, there would be the sound of a foot on the metal deckplate and if you were sitting at the desk, you'd then see a man in a khaki uniform stop at the bottom of the stairs, turn to his left to face you, smile and nod, then turn to his right and walk around the distiller and out of sight.

The first few times I blew it off as some watch supervisor doing his tour of the plant, and would wait at the desk to review my logs. He never came back, so I asked about it

"Shouldn't the Watch Supervisor check my records every time he comes down?"

"He should, but he came and checked my records before you went on watch and said he wouldn't be back until morning. When did you see him?"

"About 2am."

"Oh... If you find anything out, be sure to tell us"

Nobody would tell me what that was supposed to mean.

A week later, I was on that late watch again (as the new guy, loser = me) and found myself struggling to stay awake, even with coffee and the ventilation making the place into a freezer. I was wide awake, though, when I heard the footsteps (getting caught sleeping = you are so very fucked). Sure enough, same thing - look, smile, around the distiller. I called out to him "Do you want to review my records?" and followed him around the distiller, but didn't see him. I picked up a phone and called to the control room to have him paged. They informed me he was not in the plant, but had asked for a 5am wakeup.

Next time, I was set to find out what was up with this guy. I thought maybe he was some clueless guy from Damage Control or Deck doing a tour of the ship and not knowing he wasn't supposed to be in a restricted area. I heard the steps, and got up from my desk. I got my first good look at the guy and realized that I couldn't make out a lot of details about him. He walked around the distiller and I went the other way to intercept him. I rounded the corner, and saw nobody.

The guys I worked with told me their experiences were the same, that nobody had ever gotten any response from the ghost but a smile and a nod, and that nobody had bee

brave enough to get close enough to him to see what happened when he rounded the corner. If anyone was waiting at the bottom of the stairs, he would not show, and only rarely did he appear to both the Shutdown Watch and the roving Patrol Watch (I tried this on several occasions, and he only appeared once).

2. There are a series of compartments that contain the bearings for the shafts that run from the turbines in the Machinery Rooms to the propellers at the aft end of the ship. Known as Shaft Alleys, they double as auxiliary equipment / pump rooms and storage areas. Two such rooms have steam generators used to produce the cooking and heating steam for the ship. One is divided into two levels, and is accessible by a ladder running down a 7-story vertical shaft. Several hatches are spaced along the shaft.

In that room, the steam reboiler has an alarm panel. When the water level gets too high or low, an alarm sounds. the watchstander then has to turn a knob from "On" to "Standby" to silence the siren. When the water level is normal, another sound is heard, and the knob can be returned to its normal position. I had heard stories about strange workings of that panel, but it had recently been overhauled and was found to be mechanically and electrically sound.

I was working on repairing some valves on the lower level when one of the alarms came in. I stood up and walked toward the steps to the upper half of the room when the alarm silenced. I went back to work thinking that it was a spurious activation (it happened occasionally, and was expected and tolerated, to a degree). Soon, the sound of the alarm clearing came in and was silenced. I checked the panel - all the knobs were in the normal position and everything was in spec. Back downstairs to work, and another alarm came in. i walked to the panel, checked the water level gage, and sure enough, it had risen too high, but was starting to come down. The High Water Level alarm was in "Silence" position. I was the only one in the room, and the hatch above my head was shut securely. A little nervous, I went back to work.

The alarm cleared, and on inspection, the switch was back in its normal position again. This continued for a few more cycles, and each time I investigated, the switches were alternately in normal and standby positions. Getting very freaked out, I turned the switch that cuts the sound of the alarms out and tried to forget the weirdness going on above. Fifteen minutes later, i nearly pissed myself when an alarm sounded. Sure enough, when i got there, it was in standby and the cutout switch for the audible alarms was back to normal position.

I had heard some stories about other goings on in that space, such as hoses coming off their racks and falling to the floor next to a pocket under the floor that needed to be pumped out, or ropes and hoses moving back and forth while the ship was still, and then experienced the one that I'd been told about most frequently.

Above me, I heard footsteps on the metal deckplates. A quick inspection of the hatch showed it was still shut. i figured someone had been hiding and was fucking with me all along, so I went upstairs to see who was making the noise. Nobody there. I heard the footsteps downstairs and ducked to look (there are only two ways to get from the upper to lower deck, and they're only 30 feet apart). Nobody. I went back downstairs to pick up my things and heard the footsteps above. I shouted out "I don't believe in you, bitch." and heard a few quick steps on the floor moving toward me followed by a slap against my wrist that sent my pen flying across the room. I was through the hatch and up the shaft in record time, shutting and securing every hatch on the way. I refused to

go back down there for weeks, and after that, did not go alone.

3. In another Shaft Alley was a cage with a lot of old equipment. People used to hang out there to smoke and BS, because, although it was against the regulations, it was more convenient than going to the designated areas and nobody ever came down to check out the room. Even so, there was always an uneasy feeling there, and nobody stayed down there for more than 20 minutes or so, claiming that they started feeling "bad vibes". A few times, people who spent time there (myself included) claimed to feel a malevolent presence staring at them from the shadows inside the cage.

Investigations

One friend of mine had his wife send him a ouija board and offered to let us use it. We snuck it into the various spaces we felt were "haunted" and tried to contact whatever spirits were responsible for the odd behavior in the rooms. We got minimal response in the Machinery Room, and I was not present for the attempts in the Reboiler room, but was told they didn't get much response there, either. So, into the "creepy" room we went.

Jackpot.

We managed to contact somewhere between four and six separate entities, but we suspect that it was two, plus one that answered by several names to deceive us. Nobody else was knowledgeable with religious esoterica, numerology, or Qabalah, so I asked questions on those topics as a test of the spirits (and to be sure nobody was "fudging" the board) with very positive results.

The spirit in the Machinery Room was the first attempt. After determining that it wasn't someone else pushing the pointer, I asked it "Who are you?"
(K - H - A - K - I)

"That's what WE call you, but what is your name."
(No. K-H-A-K-I. M-y n-a-m-e i-s K-H-A-K-I.)

"Is that because that's the name WE gave you? Or because you don't want to tell us your REAL name?"
(Yes. No.)

We could get no further with its name, after several attempts.

"Why do you walk down the stairs? Where do you go after you walk behind the distiller?"
(N-o-t S-l-e-e-p-i-n-g. H-e-a-r l-a-d-d-e-r n-o-t s-l-e-e-p-i-n-g.)

"What happened to you? Were you sleeping?"
(F-i-r-e. S-l-e-e-p-i-n-g. F-i-r-e.)

"And you want to make sure WE'RE not sleeping?"
(Yes.)

"Khaki" didn't tell us much else, and gave vague and contradictory answers about the fire in question. We asked around, but nobody knew of a fire in that machinery room, although it is very possible one did occur. We were unable to find any records of a fire,

and when I left the ship, the "walkthroughs" were still going on.

Contact with the thing from the Reboiler was tougher, and at times we were not sure we were always talking to the same entity, so we would test it to be certain. In the end, we were fairly sure that the entity was confused and had a "short attention span". Conversations were very short and it often strayed from the topic at hand, or asked us to sing a song before it would talk. Some of the others tried contacting it under varying circumstances, and told me the only information they got that seemed consistent was that the ghost, who they called Patrick (although it usually referred to itself as 'Me' or 'the Captain') seemed to be that of a young boy who loved ships and who had visited the Vinson and was shown the "machine with the red lights and the siren". It seemed implausible, since civilians were not allowed in the space, and certainly not a small boy. However, the stories, checked by independent testers, came up the same each time. Over a few weeks, he became more talkative, but did not answer many ship-related questions, instead asking us about places we'd visited on the ship.

We tried to speak to the "thing in the cage" and met with a lot of resistance. Either the board would not work, or it would spew forth random letters or obscene words, or it would behave in a very difficult or contrary manner.

We suspected that most of the entities, as mentioned above, were this single ghost "playing tricks". It claimed to be a woman who died in the 1920s (long before the ship was built), a mechanic who died on the ship, and "the devil". When using the board to speak to it, the malevolent feelings grew and people using the board began to feel very paranoid and uncomfortable.

After one "argument" with it about my intentions when contacting it (I h-a-t-e y-o-u. F-u-c-k y-o-u-r n-u-m-b-e-r-s a-n-d q-u-e-s-t-i-o-n-s. W-e h-a-t-e y-o-u.), I did not try to speak to it again. In time, it / they began to ask for specific people to use the board, and would not talk until they were brought to the room.

Six of us held a conference and decided that we didn't want to pursue it any further, as some of the guys were really shook up over the incidents and those seemed to be the ones it most often requested. Our investigations stopped shortly thereafter and my friend took the board off the ship after several of the newbies who had "heard about the ghosts" continued to pester him about borrowing it.

UNKNOWN POSTER – KIRAN

Well, I have one to share and although it involves my friend more than me I did get caught up in this whole affair pretty badly.

My friend, let's call her Kiran, belongs to a pretty strict family, rife with rivalry with their relatives who live in India. Many years ago before Kiran's birth there was a huge argument between the family, which led to one of the relatives (who was believed to dabble in black magic) putting a curse onto Kiran's immediate family. The curse was that the whole family should be destroyed in some way or another.

From that day a ghost of a young boy came to the family and actually tried to kill them all. First he attacked the mother and killed her first baby, he then attempted to kill the

father by causing a severe heart attack (twice) and then during the birth of Kiran he attempted to kill the mother and Kiran, but he failed.

The ghost vanished for a short period of time.

Soon they discovered strange things happening in the house, a room in the house where the father suffered a heart attack suddenly became a mass of paranormal activity. For instance, blood or some sort of blood-like fluid would seep up through the floorboards and the ghost of a boy could be seen in the house trying to lead the children away.

Eventually they had this ghost exorcised and they moved house, thinking it was all over, but it got much, much worse.

Coming up to the present day there has been what Kiran describes as a 'demon' following the family, Kiran in particular. I suspected it followed her because she is the child that SHOULD'VE been murdered, and she lived. The demon watches over her every night at her window, it is a pure vortex of evil and blackness. I didn't believe her at first when she told me but then when I realised how pretty damn scared she was by this thing haunting her I decided to try and help.

Since I had recently been 'practising' Astral Projection/ induced lucid dreaming I thought that I could perhaps find out what this demon was. I was pretty ill at the time and because of my inability to sleep I found it much easier to project or enter a state of lucidity. Somehow I entered a state of concentration, purely by accident, where I could 'see' outside of Kiran's house, and I attempted to call the demon out to me instead to see if this whole thing was real.

Then the most terrifying thing I have EVER witnessed happened. I saw a shadow move across the top of my window. It startled me at first, but then the shadow approached right next to my window, and I could see its exact form. For some reason it couldn't get into my house (Kiran also said it couldn't get into her house either.) But God it tried, all the windows began rattling, there was tapping on the glass and horrific noises. I was pretty scared for my parents rather than my own personal safety. So taking advantage of the situation I decided to see if I could contact this demon type shadow. I found out that it was a spirit of a teenage boy, perhaps around 16 or so, utterly consumed in hate. He was looking for his mother or just a companion, maybe he thought killing someone would give him companionship, who knows.

Because I know that it's a good idea not to hold burdens against otherworldly creatures I gave it a wish that it would find what it was looking for and that it should be taken away so that he could learn not to hate.

The scary thing is the demon left Kiran... for about a week.

The day before it returned I had the worst dream I've probably ever had, it went like this:

I was in Kiran's house and she was making me look at something out of the window. I looked and I saw a horrendous black shadow moving along the sky, it's weird because I never feel emotions in dreams but this time it felt real and I was VERY scared. It's hard to describe what the demon looked like.. if you imagine the blackest black, and a silk-like

substance with such graceful movement making it hard to believe it's made of pure hate, then you're close. Perhaps the closest thing I can think of is Madonnas dress in the 'Frozen' video.. crappy comparison but hey, it's the best I can do.

I managed to see the demon up close and it was pretty gruesome, a grey mangled figure of a boy, black veins writhing over him and feeding on him, and he was reaching out for help, which was pretty sad.

There was a message in the dream which was a form the demon conveyed to me, it was the form of the grim reaper. I woke up and phoned Kiran urgently as I felt I had to tell her what the message in the dream was for her own safety, and she told me she'd had a tarot reading the day before, and the grim reaper card kept coming up.

So the demon came back on that night... it's practically been there ever since, we just think it's going to remain there with her until she lives her life out and there's no escaping it really. But I admire her a lot for being able to cope with it, the only thing is that I'm really really self conscious about the damn thing following me about now, but I guess it was my own fault for trying to help.

COSTIMO – WEIRD DREAMS

Well, this is nothing really like anyone elses stories, in fact, this could all just be my imagination.

Some kids can't go to sleep without their door ajar, and a light on in the passageway. This was never the case for me; i always slept in complete darkness. When i was a child, i dreamed more than anyone ive ever discussed it with, i had several dreams that i could remember a night. And in every one of my dreams, i died. I died a thousand deaths, being shot, stabbed, poisoned, i fell from cliffs, i burned in fires.

Most of these nightmares i just put down to an overactive imagination. The dreams i was shot, it was usually by some soldiers in some war. Too many movies. But some dreams, i knew were different. They all involved places i knew, as opposed to the other nightmares, where i was killed in all sorts of locations id never been to. These particular dreams, i was prey. I was being hunted by some beings that i couldnt see, couldnt feel, but i knew they were there. When they caught me, they tried to kill me. But they were non-corporeal, so they couldnt physically injure me in these dreams. When they got me, i couldnt breathe, and i felt them draining at me. Normally, when i knew i was dreaming, i could wake myself up very easily. But not when they had me. I could feel them keeping me in the dream, and it took all my will to drag myself away from them and wake up.

All my other nightmares, i could wake up and say to myself "it was only a dream", and forget about it. But these particular dreams i couldnt get out of my head. I somehow knew that they were real. And that scared the hell out of me.

In the nightmares, when these beings caught me, i was trapped, and couldnt breathe. I would slowly, intentionally, claw my way back to consciousness. I am an only child, and for the first 12 years of my life, i slept alone, in a bedroom at the opposite end of the house from my parents.

Occasionally, i would have friends sleep over. And i would completely freak them out. Because i discovered that when i was dying in a dream, and couldnt breathe, i couldnt

breathe in real life. Sometimes for extended periods of time. Some of the times, id wake up, and whoever was staying at my house would be shaking me, trying to wake me up cause i was choking, unable to breathe in. As soon as i regained consciousness, i could breathe again.

This didnt happen every night. Just the nights when i knew the dream was real. Sometimes i would be having a normal dream, dreaming about being a champion footballer or whatever the fuck young kids dream about, when i knew that the being searching for had me found me in the dream, and all of a sudden the dream became real.

Over time, i realised that not all of my real dreams involved me being hunted down. Sometimes, i would be talking to other beings. One group of beings in these real dreams tried to help me. These were not like the dark, invisible things which tried to kill me, these other beings were semi visible, shorter than me at the time, making them quite short. They tried to teach me things in the dream world. There were three in particular. I cant remember the names of two, but i can remember the name of one distinctly: "Ry-ing". Ill explain why i can only remember that name later. These beings taught me, and i think they tried to help me hide from the hunters, but they couldnt protect me, or fight the hunters off.

I learnt that in these real dreams, i had powers i didnt have in the real world. I could fall great distances without injury, because i could slow how quickly i fell. It was as if i could affect gravitys effect on me. This also meant that i could almost fly. It was more levitation, it required all my concentration in the dream, and i could never get more than a meter or 2 off the ground, and couldnt move very quickly.

There were other creatures that inhabited my real dream world. One was a small creature that looked a little like a hedgehog. It was a misty, semi transparent creature, which made it easy to accidentally step on. If you stepped on it, you wouldnt feel normal pain from its spikes, but a strange pins and needles feeling. The other strange thing about these creatures was that where they died, this pins and needles effect would stay where they died, even if their carcass was moved, or decayed.

There was one corner of my grandparents house that my father grew up in where i knew one of these creatures had died, because i got that effect in my foot wherever i stepped there in my real dreams.

All these dreams happened when i was about 10 and younger. I guess i started having them less and less often, and i forgot about them. I mean completely forgot. I never thought about them once.

When i was about 15 or so, i can remember one sepcific dream i had. Some invisible beings i could sense were trying to get me. And in the dream, thats when i remembered. I remember all the dreams i had when i was younger. The realisation was so shocking i felt like it hit me. The closest analogy i can draw is the effect you see in movies where the camera draws away from the subject, but zooms in, so it looks like the subjects face doesnt change in size, but the background rushes in at them. I remembered having real dreams. The strange thing was, the being that was attacking me suddenly drew away and disappeared.

When i woke, i could still remember everything. I could remember the dreams i had as a child as if they had just happened. I found it strange. But as a 15 year old, i had stopped

believing in things like that. I thought it was just my imagination.

A couple of years ago, i was talking about dreams with my dad while we were having a few beers. He told me that when he was a child, he had two friends that came back to a lot of dreams he had. He told me their names. I didnt recognise one, but hearing the other one nearly made me drop my beer. "Ry-ing". The same name as one of the three that tried to help me in my dreams.

My father told me how they used to be his friends in his dreams when he was young. And he went on to describe one particular dream, where one of his pets in his dream, a little creature he said looked like a "shadowy brown echidna", died. He told me exactly where it died, just in between the crabapple tree and the kitchen. This was EXACTLY the spot that i had dreamed of knowing one of these creatures had died, because i had walked over the place it had died in one of my dreams, and had felt the strange pins and needles feeling that these creatures gave the place where they died. The place was outside at the time of my fathers dream, but by the time i was young the kitchen had been extended, and the spot was indoors in a corner.

This blew my mind. Most things in my life like that i put down to coincidence, but that was just too close.

I told dad about the same dreams i had had as a kid, and to my surprise, he wasnt shocked at all. He said that his mother had similar dreams when she was young, and so had her father (my great grandfather, who died a long time before i was born). I have spoken to my grandmother about this, and she remembers vividly talking to 'the little people' in her dreams, and talking to her father about it. She seems to treat them as perfectly normal. Having an Irish background, she believes in 'the little people'. I had never even heard of them until i talked to her about it, and that was a long time after i had these dreams.

I havent had real dreams for years now. I havent seen Ry-ing or the other two in my dreams for years either. But i know that they are still there.

What really bothers me is that my father, grandmother, or (from what i have heard) great-grandfather was ever hunted in their dreams. They knew that other, evil creatures existed in the same world as the little people, but they were never attacked. I was attacked every real dream i had.

The other difference was that 'the little people' taught my family, and spoke to them, but they didnt teach them what they taught me, limited flying, controlled falling etc. Why was i different?

I cant explain how i know these dreams were real. I am agnostic, im not sure theres a God, im not sure of much in this life, but some things i just know. I knew that of my 4 grandparents, my maternal grandmother would die first, even though my fathers parents are older and more sickly, and my maternal nan was fit as a fiddle til the day she died. I know that my father will die before my mother. I dont know how i know, i just do. Sometimes, lying awake at night, i can almost feel the real dreams. But whenever i concentrate on them, i feel them slip away, like sand through my fingers. Sometimes i momentarily see things that arent there, like a single frame with an extra object spliced onto a roll of a movie.

When i get Deja-Vu (this happens occasionally, about once a month), it kills me. I often have to sit down and close my eyes i get the feeling that strongly.

But what really fucks with my mind is my memory. You know how sometimes when you are trying to think of someones name, or a word, and you get it "right on the tip of your tounge", but you just cant remember it? Whenever i think about these dreams, i get that feeling. Like theres something about all this that i have almost forgotten. But i know that its important somehow. But remembering it is like trying to grasp smoke.

I have tried hypnosis to remember more, but i am one of the one in ten people that cant be hypnotised, it just doesnt work on me.

UNKNOWN POSTER – CHILDLIKE FIGURE AND FRIENDS

It started when I was three years old. One night I awoke to find a small child-like figure in my bed with me. He was about 2 feet tall and had the features of a small child, but its head was swollen well beyond a normal size. It was wearing a blue gown with the hands not visible at the end of the sleeves. It was moving its mouth and talking in gibberish. The figure was as real as I was, and it was surrounded by a kind of glowing haze. I ran to my parents' bedroom and woke up my dad, but, of course, he told me to go back to sleep. So I returned to my room and now the figure was standing on my bed. I grabbed a pillow and covered my face and jumped on the bed. It was gone. That started something that would last the next 26 years.

I'll condense the years up until 1990. Those appearances, while still frightening, never really made me feel threatened. During this period, which included teenage years, I saw the figure with the same frequency. My bedroom is located at the end of a hallway with 2 other bedrooms before mine. At the other end of the hallway is a landing that blocks the view to the steps. From my bed I could look out my door and down the hall to the landing and the top of the steps. I always knew right before the figure would appear, because the hair on the back of my neck would stand up and I would get uncontrollable chills. The figure would then appear either on top of the landing or come around the base of the landing and start down the hall toward my room. It never seemed to pay any attention to the other rooms at all. I would normally panic and either shut my door or run into my parents' room and sleep on the floor. Imagine finding your 18 year old son curled up on your bedroom floor when you wake up in the morning. My parents and sister didn't really fully believe that I was seeing this apparition. I also would stay up late, being the night person that I am, and watch TV. In my living room, we have the stairs that lead up to the 2nd floor. It has a wooden railing on it that goes the length of the last 4 steps. I would often see the figure on the steps watching me from the 3rd or 4th step and then disappear. The only real changes during this time period were that the figure was losing its color and becoming more transparent.

Now things will change drastically. A neighbor, with some knowledge of this sort of activity, told me to confront the figure and tell it to leave and never come back. I was to tell it that I was its power source and I was shutting off the power. I did this and enjoyed about a year of no sightings. Around this time, I told the story to my girlfriend of the time. She thought that its description sounded like a baby with water on the brain and still wearing its gown from the hospital. She thought that it was a lost soul trying to contact me to help it with some task, so that it could finally rest in peace. I started to look into the house's history and my family's. The house sits on land that was farmland and a dirt road only 150 years ago. The land was owned by one man and he had his farm and homestead around the area of my house (the main house of his estate is one block from my house and is still standing) My house is 40 years old and we are the 2nd family to live in it. The couple before us had no children that we know about. I have a sister 3 years younger than me and no other siblings. I have asked my parents if they had a child that died that I was unaware of, but they didn't. So after all my checking, I found nothing that could explain the apparition.

After a week of thinking about the interpretation my girlfriend had given, guilt of banishing the figure overcame me. I asked it to come back one night and told it I would help it. The very next night the sightings started again, but with much greater intensity. I can say now, NEVER do what I did, once it's gone, let it stay gone. The sightings would happen more frequently and sometimes they would terrify me. The figure looked the same but something was very different. I was sure what it was, but now there was another force in addition to the familiar figure. I began to see small black colored creatures which I can only describe as imps. They were solid black, 1-2 feet tall and ran around on all fours. They appeared mostly in the living room and coming from the hall closet.

Now to explain the rest of the house set up that pertains to the story. The man that lived here before us started to dig out a basement, but he never completed it. All that remains is a 3-4 foot crawl space accessible from outside the house. The hall closet was to be the stairs down to the basement. He had started making the stairs going down but he boarded it all up when he stopped digging the basement. The stairs going up to the 2nd floor are directly over the would-be basement step and the hall closet. So there are 2 ways from inside the house to access the crawl space, if you really wanted to, rip up the 3rd or 4th step of the stairs or knock out the back of the closet. I began to make the connection between where the figures appeared and where the access ways were.

The sightings got more intense and sometimes they even drove me from my house. Normally, my dog would sense the small figure and act funny when it was around, but now when the imps appeared my dog would be in a very deep sleep and I could never wake him up. I would either leave the house and stay over at a friend's. Sometimes I would be knocking on her door at 2 a.m. terrified. Other times, if I was able to get between them and the steps, I would make a run for it to my room or my parents' room, because, even these creatures would not venture in the bedrooms. My mother was noticing my moods and I had told her about the new happenings so she told me to get her the next time I saw the figure or imps. The next time I saw the figure upstairs coming down the hall, I ran into her room and woke her up. I led her out into the hall where the figure still was. I pointed to it and it began to back away and go down the steps. I chased it down to the 3rd step where it vanished. While she could not see it, she could tell by my eye movements that I was watching something moving across the hall and steps. I think that's when my family started to believe a little.

I became used to these new additions because they never did any harm but they did make me feel very uneasy. The figure was becoming even more transparent. Certain lamps in the house would go on and off by themselves often with other witnesses around. I would hear the TV go on in the middle of the night when I knew no one was downstairs. I had theorized that the figure needed help to appear because it was slowly fading away. I assumed the imps were helping him, but the figure was still fading. I was waiting for a new addition to the cast, so the figure could still appear, since I still hadn't figured out what it wanted me to do.

The sightings stopped again for a few months. I spoke with a parapsychologist, but then decided to leave well enough alone. I didn't want things getting worse. I decided to go into the crawl space and check out the area under the stairs. I took my dog down there with me and I crawled to the area. There had not been anyone under there for years before this. I found an Old Maid playing card with not a bit of dust on it right under the 3rd step. We have wall to wall carpeting so this did not fall through the joints. I hadn't seen that deck of cards for over 20 years, but here was one. It had one corner that looked like it had been dipped in acid, but the rest was in good shape. I took it and put in a pocket bible and put it in my car.

The sightings started again, only very small. I would call my girlfriend on the cordless phone

and tell her it's happening again and then walk upstairs while still on the phone with her. The next time was the worst of all. The figure appeared very bright, like it did years ago, but it didn't look very happy. The imps appeared again but they were more bold this time. Then a 7 foot tall man- shaped black figure appeared. It looked like it was either made of smoke or some liquid. It looked semi-solid and you couldn't see through it. At the same time, the room was filled with imps and a bearded old mans face took shape on the wall and started mumbling. The face was about 6 foot high and 4 foot wide. The familiar figure looked like it was sorry for doing this to me. I left the house and sat in my car until dawn.

I knew I had to confront this new entity and try to drive it away. I also figured that if it wanted me, it was going to get me either way, so I had nothing to lose. My sanity, life and maybe my soul were on the line and I honestly believed this was the only way to stop it before it branched out. I was the original power source, so I was going to shut off the power. The next night I prayed for protection and the strength to drive this evil away. I had a bible handy as I sat up as usual listening to my CD's. About 2 a.m., I noticed my dog was in one of those deep, deep sleeps and I began to look around. The figure and the Tall black figure appeared along with the rest of the apparitions. I informed them in the calmest voice I could get at this time, that I was taking away their power and they had no hold on me or power over me. I told them I, my family and house was protected by God and they could not harm us. I walked right past the tall figure and the imps moved out of my way. I walked right up the steps and never looked back.

That was about 2 years ago and I have not seen them since. We placed a bible on the stairs and a cross in the closet to block off their entrances. I still feel there is a presence there that tries to get me to let in it. I still hear bumping and walking around, but the apparitions are gone, banished to the crawl space.

PECKERWOOD – INEXISTANT CLASS TRIP

I had something strange happen to me in college. It was a chilly, wet November afternoon, a Tuesday, and most of the leaves had already turned and fallen from the trees. I had no classes and decided to take a drive up into the mountains and go hiking- I was training to hike the Appalachian Trail at the time and regularly hiked 10 and 20 mile sections of the trail with a 40 pound pack on my back. That day I planned to climb a popular 2 mile trail which led to an overhanging rock with a gorgeous view of the Shenendoah valley. Of course, in the rain there was no view but I needed to get accustomed to being wet and cold. I won't mention the name of the trail for now.

I drove past the old homesite high on the ridge where colonial families lived and pulled into the parking area to begin my climb. I did not see a single other car, bike, hiker, or person the entire drive up and the muddy parking lot showed only one set of tire tracks- mine. The climb up was tedious and I slipped twice, getting completely covered in mud and banging up my knee. When I was about 3/4 of the way to the top I entered a cloud- my entire world was reduced to a foot of visibility in a milky white/grey vapour.

Standing atop the rocks at the top I entered a meditative mindset and sat down on a rock to take in the experience. It was cold, wet, I couldn't see a thing, but somehow it was very tranquil and beautiful- all alone on a rock in a cloud. Then, I got the willies.

A feeling of fear passed over me in a wave and I stood up suddenly, tense and rigid. Silence. The most silent you'll ever be- not a bird or a car, just an occasional puff of wind. And then, I hear a cackling woman's laugh and a chorus of voices, children's voices, giggling in a sing-song carefree way. The voices were coming from below, then from above, (Impossible) and suddenly all around me as if I were in a circle. I was utterly terrified because somehow the voices were coldly indifferent or malicious, like the predatory call of a wild animal, and they definitely shouldn't have been happening there.

I quickly shouldered my pack, nervously fingered my knife to make sure it was within reach, and hauled ass down the mountain, certain that at any moment a little kid would dart out of the mist and scare me or do something worse- I don't know, but I was scared as hell. I reached my car in record time after sliding on my ass down a slick steep slope and hurriedly stashed my gear and started up the engine. As I was pulling out, I noticed that there were no other wheel tracks in the mud of the lot, and I hadn't seen a single other person on the descent. The voices continued to giggle and laugh the whole way down the trail, all 45 minutes of it. There was no one else on the mountain that afternoon and I can still think of no good reason why I would have heard those voices. I know they were there, and I know that I heard them- but it was impossible.

THEQUIETHERO – CLOWN SHOE

Here's a story I promised I'd never tell anyone...cos it's pretty much the reason that I'm so fucked up now adays.

About 3 years ago, my parents left me home for the weekend to take care of the house by myself. My grandparents checked during the day, but for some reason, my parent's logic conceived that a 14 year old boy who grew up on video games, fantasy novels, and a way too wild imagination would be just fine and dandy when night fell...Needless to say they were very very wrong...

So here I was, 14, and on the second night out of three by myself. I can't remember exactly what I was up to, but it probably involved me being in the basement playing UO. My UO nights usually turned out to be uneventful, and tonight was no exception. After growing sick of running from reds and getting my ass kicked (permanent uo newb status), I decided to go upstairs and make some food...Here's where things get weird...

I go upstairs to make some ramen, and I'm hit by the eerie silence that always seems to accompany the nights spent in a house alone by a 14 year old. About 3 minutes into boiling water on the stove I hear this muffled laughing sound from outside. Ok, no big deal...I'll just ignore it and focus on the ramen. "Mmm...delicious ramen, your .35\$ of noodly goodness will ease my mind..." The laughing starts again and is cut abrupt by something crashing against the window... I freak out, and after hiding in the corner for a few minutes straightening my head out I tell myself "It's just a bird, don't freak out." So at this point I decide I just need to look outside the window and make sure nothing is wrong...

I am presented with the view that I am very accustomed to: A grassy hill leading down to the lake I live on, moonlight sprinkling across the water, bliss of my childhood years spent here. I tell myself I'm ok, and that there is nothing wrong here. I am just a stupid 14 year old that has read too much Tolkien. I take one more look across the yard to make sure that I can get back to my ramen, and that's when I see something. Behind one of the largest trees in our yard I see a figure glaring at me. I blink...and the person disappears. Panic hits me like a brick and I freak

out. After hiding behind our kitchen counter, I begin to feel vulnerable and so I grab the closest two weapons that I could find at the moment: a kitchen knife and broom handle [not gay]. In a rush of adrenaline I run outside to the porch in order to straighten things out. I tell myself I am not afraid and that I will be able to take care of this fucking idiot who is playing pranks on me.

A short walk around my house reveals no scary pedophiles or trespassers, and I begin to calm down again. Cursing myself for being so childish, I start to walk back to the porch. I forgot that I'm boiling up ramen, and so I take a quick glance at the kitchen window. My kitchen light flicks off for about 3 seconds and then turns back on. I blink...Did I just see that?

If you have ever had the feeling like someone is in your house and that you now have few options beyond a) facing this shit by yourself or b) calling the cops and feeling like an ass, then you probably know what I was going through. Adrenaline kicks in again, and I know I have to go back inside.

After pacing back and forth for a few more minutes, I decide that now is the time to strike. I rush inside, shout out "I know someone's in here, you better get the fuck out." and actually believe that I have now frightened any person who has the balls to walk into someone else's house unwelcome.

Slowly making my way from room to room, I turn on every light I can. Clearing out my first floor and the upstairs, I feel worse and worse because I know there is only one place left to check, the only place that I have been avoiding...the basement.

My basement really isn't that threatening...except that it only has one exit and about 4 closets. I open the door to downstairs and flick on the light for the stairs. I make a quick look and start praying to whatever god there is out there that I will see no one. Luckily there was nothing to see, and so I build myself up and prepare to make my way downstairs.

What sucks the worst about my basement is that there is a stair light and a downstairs light. The stair light can be turned on from the top of the stairs, but the downstairs light can only be turned on by forcing yourself to go downstairs facing the darkness. And so with broomstick and knife in hand, I slowly make my way down the stairs. A quick look in the darkness yields no intruders, and so I begin to feel a bit safe...

Finally I hit the bottom of the stairs, and force myself to do the one thing I dread the most...to turn on the light. The room lights up and then I see the thing I will never forget as long as I live.

In the middle of the room is an oversized clown shoe left with the laces undone. Once again, I blink and this time I presented with no clarity. The shoe is still there. A clown shoe. In the middle of my fucking basement. At this point I completely lose it. In a rush of tears I sprint upstairs and grab the cordless phone. I run out into the middle of the street and call my grandparents. I tell them that I NEED to be picked up immediatly. I don't know if they made out a word I said, but they agreed to come.

The next ten minutes were the longest ten minutes I have ever spent in my life. All I can remember doing is pacing back and forth, broomstick and knife in hand, sobbing and shaking like a baby. I stared at that house for what seemed to be hours, praying to god

that some psycho would come out to get me...I needed some fucking closure here.

Needless to say, my grandparents showed up and took me to their house. I didn't sleep at all that week, and refused to step foot in that house again. I remember telling my grandparents and later my parents some fabricated story that someone kept knocking on my door and I just freaked out. I don't know if they believed me, as seeing some kid armed to the brim in house-wife gear weeping uncontrollably deserves a better story than the one I gave them...but they never questioned me.

Of course I had to ask my parents if they ever found anything weird in the house, they said "Of course not" and shrugged off the look of bewilderment in my eyes: I was absolutely crushed. I know I didn't imagine that shoe...

My parents divorce never meant more in my life, as I moved into my dad's house without so much as a word to the reason why. It's one thing to know that someone is fucking with you, but when things are left unquestioned your whole world just kinda collapses. I know I didn't imagine that shoe...

GPF – RADIO STATION GHOST

In 1987-88, I worked at a small radio station in Lebanon, TN. WCOR-AM 900, a little 500 watt *powerhouse* on the edge of town, had been on the air since 1947 or so. That was the earliest telegram I had found in the archives. I was, at various times, the morning guy, afternoon, evening drive-time, and late night close-up-the-station guy. I was also the Chief Engineer because I was the only person that knew how to solder. The building was in two sections; a new two story section where the studio, transmitter, offices, and all that stuff lived, and a squat, one story section where the old studios were. It was essentially abandoned. No lights, no furniture...

Anyways, one evening I was alone at the station, playing full albums to piss off the GM (General Manager) and generally being lazy. I heard someone walking up the stairs. This was odd, since it was about 10:30 at night, and the only person supposed to be there was me. I went to the front and checked for a car, but mine was the only one there. I called up the stairs, but no one answered. I went up the stairs, but just as I got almost to the top, I caught a severe case of the (willies, heebie-jeebies, severe pussying out syndrome), and ran back to the DJ booth.

The record was almost over, so I went through the motions, changed the song, and sat back again. Then I heard the tromp-tromp-tromp of someone coming back down the stairs. Then I heard tromp-tromp-tromp that person coming up the hall towards the booth. I reached around and grabbed a mop handle. As I sat there, the tromp-tromping came through the door, up beside me, around behind me, and out through the door to the transmitter room. I followed this with my head and eyes, and no one was attached to the tromp-tromp-tromp.

Well, as you can imagine, I squealed like a little girl. After this, the spook would come tromping around the radio station at night, but only when I was alone. He'd sometimes stand right in front of the mixing board and watch me do my show. Finally, I looked up one time and said, "Ok, if you're going to hang around, at least let me see you." Well, that was a mistake. The room became unbearably cold, and the air in front of me began

to warp like a heat mirage. I squealed again and hollared, "Nevermind! No NO no no! Just go away!!!" The spook tromped off back to the old part of the building.

Later that week, I almost jumped over the GM's desk telling him to move me to an earlier timeslot. Everything worked out well, and I moved to the shift before the one late at night. I trained the new guy and let him run the shift by himself for a couple or three weeks. Of course, I never told him about the spook.

After letting him alone, I stayed after my shift to chitty-chat with him about his shift. As we talked, I asked him if anything strange happened during his shift and he replied, "Oh yeah, there's a spirit that comes around at night". I almost shit my pants right there. This kid was a bit insanelly religious, and kept calling this spook a demon. While we were talking, the spook tromp-tromp-tromped up the hall into the production room and was looking over my shoulder through the glass. The room got chilly, and I was not happy about it. The kid said, "Just rebuke him in Jesus' name." Well, I'd never thought to do that, so I turned around, looked at the window and said, "Jesus says to get the fuck outta here." The spook tromped back to the old section and left us alone for the night.

I quit working there not too long after that.

INCARNA –TALES OF A GHOST HUNTER

First Trip to Woody's House - The Night of the Blue-Palmed Pervert

I am an amateur ghost hunter, and have been since early 2000. In the last five years myself and three friends have investigated numerous haunted places, from homes to bridges to graveyards to battlefields, with varying results and experiences. I'm going to share with you part of what I consider to be one of our best investigations, and the only time we have encountered what I can seriously call a "dangerous" ghost.

First I need to tell you in advance, despite some talk of photography in this post, there are no pictures. There's several reasons for this. First I can't post images, second I'm not the one that keeps the photograph archives, and most important, I offer my word in writing to every "client" we investigate for that I will not release any information or pictures that could in any way pinpoint the location of the investigation to their home. Believe me, most of these people have a hard enough time living normal lives without intrusions from the media, thrill-seekers, crackpots or scam psychics (in case you're wondering, I'm half thrill-seeker half crackpot). To further protect privacy, I've changed all names involved in this except for those of the four ghost hunters.

Let me introduce you to them. I'm Josh, currently 25 years old, earning a degree in criminal justice with agonizing slowness while I ghost hunt on weekends. For the first three of my ghost hunting years I did computer work for the Department of Defense, now I work for a document imaging and archiving company. The degree and the jobs are both just to get me by until I can make my living as a full-time writer, which has always been my dream.

Next we have Sara, 26 years old and a business major. I met her online in 1997 and we started hanging out. She was a so-called "friend with benefits" for awhile but that just sort of stopped happening, and we managed to get out of it while remaining friends (with very little effort or heartache really; I don't think we were very compatible that way). She has brown hair and eyes and is fairly attractive. She was also the first to take

me up on my ghost hunting offer back in 2000.

Then there's Kevin and Jenna, fraternal twins who are both 24 now. They share features such as hair and eye color (black and hazel respectively), and had similar noses as well (rather large, but I can't say that in front of Jenna); you could easily guess they're brother and sister, but you might not realize they're twins. They've been very close to each other their whole lives. Kevin is a business major as well, Jenna does history and she's sort of out there, but not in an irritating way. She's just very new-agey, spiritual and open-minded. Both were eager to join me in my new hobby, and signed on about a month after Sara.

We had several investigations before the one I'm about to relate to you. During these early ones we learned to work as a team, perfected our methods for getting things done (photography, note-taking, etc.), and learned to budget the costs involved (gas, food, and batteries are all expensive, and you end up spending way more on batteries than you might think -- more on that later). We also had plenty of time to get used to being tense-but-bored (most sessions we don't see, hear, or feel anything out of the ordinary) and a little time to get used to being FUCKING SCARED (no matter how well prepared you think you are, you're not ready when something happens). Basically we were a fairly well-oiled machine, all things considered, by the time we took on this mother-bitch of a ghost.

A word about my stance on ghosts: I am interested in them as a PHENOMENA. There are thousands upon thousands of reports of ghostly phenomena, going back hundreds of years and even further. The fact that ghostly phenomena occurs is, in my opinion, impossible (and silly) to dispute. Weird things happen in certain places, as evidenced by thousands of eye-witness accounts (from all types of humanity), photographs, video, and careful scientific observation and investigation.

What IS open to questioning is whether or not "ghosts" are the spirits of the deceased or if they're something else entirely. I personally believe there are multiple causes, because I've encountered multiple "types" of ghosts. I do believe SOME phenomena are caused by the spirits or souls of the dead. I believe others are caused by a massive buildup of emotional energy that lingers after the source has gone. Still others I think are caused by (laymans terms, I dont know how else to put this) a "wrinkle" in time. These are the ghosts that do the same thing over and over again, perhaps only at certain times of the day or month or year, and completely ignore everything around them. Other phenomena I believe are caused by intelligent aware entities that are NOT deceased because they've never lived on this earth as a human (elemental spirits, demons). Then we have things like Poltergeists, which are not usually spirits, but rather are reputed to be psycho-kinetic energy from a living human, usually a young male or female with some repressed emotions.

Basically, there's a whole lot of shit about ghosts that humanity doesn't understand yet, and my team of hunters is not specifically trying to answer any of these questions. Our mission is to observe and record, nothing more, and we do it out of a fascination and a love of being creeped out. We don't charge for our work; it costs the people we visit nothing more than the occasional raided fridge, and we don't even do that often since our investigations usually occur long after dinner time and we're usually too nervous to snack much. Anyway, enough philosophy. On to the investigation.

My family moved up here to Northern Virginia in 1993. My parents came up for a week

to go house-hunting, and dragged me along against my will because I was still a kid. House-hunting bored me so I didn't go with them most days, choosing to stay in the hotel where we had cable TV and there was a pool and small arcade. One day they came back and my mom told me about a house they'd visited out in the boonies that she had refused to even consider living in because she felt that there was something wrong with the house, particularly the basement. She wouldn't even go down there to look around, though my dad did and he says he felt nothing out of the ordinary. I was intrigued, but eventually forgot about it, and we ended up taking a house in the country not far from the one they'd looked at.

In 2001, with my ghost hunting hobby firmly established, I remembered the house and asked my mom if she could remember exactly where it was. We lived pretty close to it and she occasionally drove past it on her way to the town of Culpeper (which we visited rarely, preferring Warrenton as it was closer and MUCH less country-fried), so she had no trouble giving me directions and a description. I figured I'd drive up there and see if anybody lived in it, and if they did, see if I could talk to them about the place. I was afraid it would be empty because if it was I wouldn't be able to investigate it -- I was dead set against doing anything illegal that might endanger my hobby, so breaking and entering a house that was still up for sale was out of the question.

I was lucky though, the place was inhabited. After a year of ghost hunting I had gotten pretty good at speaking with strangers and making them feel like they could talk to me. Small talk inevitably turned to my job and my schooling, and hearing that I worked for the Department of Defense and that I was studying Criminal Justice probably played to my advantage with some people. Surely if the government would let me into high-security places they could trust me with a ghost story.

To keep this from getting too long (and it's already going to be), here's the skinny: the house was owned by a 63 year old man who I'll call Woody here. He was an ex-marine and teacher, had recently retired and his wife had recently passed away. He looked a lot like Sarge from Survivor, only less hair and heftier. He knew something was not quite right in his house. More importantly, he seemed to have a genuine interest in ghosts, and he seemed lonely -- it didn't take much more than a promise to cause no damage to the property and to keep the investigation on the down low to get him to agree to let us sit up with him one night to see what happened.

The four of us set out for Woody's house with the usual gear and plan of action. We had planned to start the ghosthunt after dark but Woody insisted we show up around 4 PM, several hours prior to sunset. Between us we had four cameras, two film and two digital, and two taperecorders for interviewing witnesses and general recording during the actual hunt. We each had a notebook with which to record thoughts, feelings, observations, and take notes. We had plenty of water, a first aid kit, two cell phones, and we all had pepper spray (a lot of the sites we visited were fairly isolated, and you can never be sure who you'll run into). We didn't usually bother with more scientific instruments -- we didn't even have anything to gauge temperature with, mostly because our experiences had showed us that if the temperature was going to drop due to the presence of a ghost, we wouldn't need any fucking instruments to tell, we'd be shivering.

One sidenote about the tape recorders -- we've tried EVP before, which is where you leave a tape recorder running in some quiet part of the house hoping a spirit will talk and you'll capture it's voice. EVP is bullshit guys. I know there've been some threads

about it here ... it's crap. We rarely try it anymore. I am convinced that most ghosts don't talk. The ones that can will do so quite loudly (although it's usually shrieking or screaming and not words), and have no need to whisper into tape recorders.

The house stood alone and angry-looking in the middle of a treeless field. The next nearest home was about a hundred yards away, over a slope and on the other side of a grove of trees in the distance. The feeling we got was one of intense isolation. We were a bit keyed up, as we always were on the way to a hunt. Anticipation is part of the fun. To be fair, the house didn't look all that bad. It was a pretty good sized one-story home, and Woody kept some flowers growing here and there. It really could have used some trees though. Anyway, we pulled into the driveway, leaving our equipment in the car for the time being, and before we got to the door we were greeted by Woody.

He introduced himself to my friends after shaking hands with me. He then invited us inside and showed us to the den in the back, which I hadn't seen before, having only sat with him in the front family room the day I met him. The den made one thing perfectly clear to us -- Woody took his retirement seriously. He had a TV the size of a Hummer and a pool table that wasn't too shabby either. A sliding glass door led to a large back deck, and the grill was hot. Woody had decided to cook out for us since it was early May and wasn't raining or thunderstorming for a change. Like I said, I think the guy was lonely.

Oh man, he made these pepper-jack cheeseburgers that would have made him a fortune if he'd gone into the food service business. He also had endless stories about his time in the marines, most of them about drunken nights or FNG pranks. He told us a bit about having worked as a mink farmer for awhile too (protip: minks are fantastic escape artists and they're mean), but the girls got fidgety when they realized that part of the job included slaughtering the mink, so we didn't stick to that subject too long. We ate, chatted, shot some pool, and waited for dark so the vigil could begin. We didn't talk much about the house or the alleged haunting; since Woody was the only witness, we figured half of the team could interview him while the other half was sitting in the basement. That way any experiences the basement team had couldn't easily be put off as power of suggestion.

Inevitably the sun decided to abandon us to our fate. It was time to go to work. Rule number one for my team was that we broke up into teams of two and never left each other's sight when we were on site. The only exception was when one of us had to pee; his or her partner waited just outside the bathroom door in those situations. We swapped partners frequently to keep us all feeling like we were on the same level with each other, but for this investigation it would be myself and Sara as team 1, and Kevin and Jenna as team 2.

We walked out to the car to bring in our equipment. First thing you do before going on a ghost hunt is put brand new batteries in all of your gear. First thing you do before BEGINNING the ghost hunt is check them again. We were not surprised to find that all of our brand new batteries were dead. This is a common phenomenon in ghost hunting. I don't know how or why it happens, but I do know this -- every single time we've found our batteries dead, we've had something happen to us that same night. So while it's fucking expensive, and it's also pretty unnerving, we consider it a good omen to find dead batteries. We swapped them for fresh ones, and this time everything worked.

We split up into teams at this point with the intention of searching the outside of the

house and the first floor. Woody led myself and Sara through the house while Kevin and Jenna checked outside. This search is standard for every hunt and has a number of purposes. First, we want to make sure nobody is hiding on the premises with tricks up their sleeve. Second, we learn the layout of the place. Third, we get a feel of the place. None of us make any claims to being psychic, but even us mundane people can pick up impressions, and we can certainly notice areas of low temperature, which often indicate supernatural presence. The search revealed nothing; even standing at the top of the steps to the basement, neither Sara or I felt a thing. We brought Kevin and Jenna there and they also felt nothing. Search concluded, we all made a quick trip to the bathroom and gathering our gear, Sara and I descended alone into the basement while Kevin and Jenna went to interview Woody.

We left the basement lights off. We each had a flashlight/lantern combo, the kind you can pick up for about 20 bucks at Wal-Mart. I love these little things. We both had ours turned on, cameras in the other hand (we didn't use straps, and we also made the girls tie their hair back tightly, because stray camera straps and stray hairs can both result in false-positive phenomena if caught on film). I had a small satchel with the tape recorder and a few other things. And down we went.

It's difficult to describe in words the awful feeling you get heading deliberately into what you believe is a haunted area. Your body kind of tingles, the hairs on the back of your neck stand straight up, and you start to breathe a little heavily. It's entirely involuntary, and it happens every time. No amount of experience ghost hunting can eliminate fear. Even worse, once we made it to the bottom of the steps we became acutely aware of... something. I don't want to mislead you here, it wasn't like in the ghost stories where we felt we weren't alone any longer, or felt something watching us, or anything corny like that. Picture the word **WRONG** by itself, in big bold black letters on a white sheet of paper. That's the feeling this basement gave me. There was just something about it that wasn't quite right. It felt unclean. Anyway, we searched the area, snapping pictures of everything.

The basement was plain; Woody had described what was down there for us, and we found it just as he said it was...basically two open rooms spanning the entire length of the house, doorless openings at each end forming a circle. In the room in which the steps ended there were some boxes, neatly stacked, an old table, and a cheap but heavy metal and wooden rack at the far end filled from top to bottom with paint cans and brushes and such. The second room was liberally covered with newspaper and there were several sawhorses and a workbench with no tools. Woody had told us he did woodworking as a hobby (he was especially fond of making birdhouses, which a friend of his sold at the local farmers markets for a few bucks each), but that because of the haunting he didn't use the basement anymore except to store paints. He'd put some on his rack that very day (and noticed no phenomena when he was down there). We searched the basement quickly and efficiently and settled down to our vigil, planning to wait long into the night if need be. Somewhere up above us Woody was being carefully interviewed, one of our tape recorders capturing every word while Kevin and Jenna asked questions and scribbled notes about what he'd experienced.

I stood in the opening closest to the paint rack, at the far end from the stairs upward. The satchel was on the floor next to me, the camera and lantern in my hands. Sara leaned against a sawhorse. From where I stood I could see almost the entire basement; from where she stood, she could see the far end better than me. We turned out the lights and waited...and waited...and waited. We didn't check the time, and we didn't

chat much at all, just a few whispers here and there. It was the same boring-yet-horribly-intense routine we'd done many times over the last year. After awhile we managed to put the dread mostly aside and ignore it.

We only had a vague sense of time passing down there; as I said we weren't checking watches or anything. But we had sat for what turned out to be about four hours when we noticed a faint tapping sound, like two fork prongs clicking together, coming from the base of the center wall in about the exact center of the basement. Immediately our lanterns blazed to life and illuminated the area. Tap-tap-tap. It continued, despite the challenging glare of our lights. It seemed to be mocking us. We were thoroughly creeped by this point, but also very excited. We snapped a lot of pictures, both at the tapping origin and all around us. The sound was coming from bare wall; there were no objects, no pipes, no nothing that we saw that could be making that noise. We whispered briefly, discussing what we wanted to do. I tried to start our tape recorder and fuck me if the batteries hadn't died again. I told Sara, and asked her if she wanted to leave. She hesitated, but said she'd stay. So I decided to stay too. Really, there wasn't much question we were going to stay. This is what we wanted after all. But damned if I was just going to sit there and listen to the tapping.

It took a lot of fucking nerve to turn my back on that sound, (tap-tap-tap) but I wanted to keep busy, so with the light on, I took to reading the labels of the paint cans on the rack. There must have been 40 of them, every color of the rainbow, some cans with words like Additives and Textures and a few very subtly different shades of (tap-tap-tap) what looked to me like the same color and...anyway, I was pretty swept up in the thrill of educating myself about what kind of paint Woody liked. That was when I heard Sara give a little gasp and curse.

I whirled around, expecting to see a smoking, smirking red devil with a pitchfork impaling my girly girl; instead I saw that she had been pacing the floor around the sawhorses and the workbench and had torn her pants badly across the side of her thigh on a poorly hammered nail (tap-tap-tap). I asked if she was alright and she nodded, told me she thought so. Then she shocked the hell out of me by undoing her pants and letting them drop to her knees, I guess to check and make sure she wasn't bleeding.

Now I have a confession to make. I like seeing girls in their panties. In fact, I'd rather see a girl in panties than see her naked. To be more precise, I'd like to see ALL of you in your panties. All the time. I am shameless. So when Sara decided to drop her pants with her back to me to see if she was bleeding, I held up my light to get a good look. She knew about my little fetish, and I guess by this point was feeling a little pissy (more on this later). She told me if I didn't get my light off her ass, I would likely find it shoved up mine. I wasn't about to argue -- she could do it, and blame it on the ghost (tap-tap-tap), and nobody would ever be the wiser. So as she bent to pull her pants back up, I reluctantly turned back to my paint rack.

Just in time to watch the motherfucker finish TIPPING OVER TOWARD ME. I am convinced to this day that it was tipped onto one corner while I was gawking at Sara, and waited until I turned around to come down on me. Anyway, I yelled, scrambled back, then tripped, my camera and (oh thank god) my lantern still in my hands. Alas tape recorder, I knew ye well. Landed right on the satchel, and the recorder wasn't meant to bear 180 pounds. The rack crashed down within inches of crushing me, and a lot of the paint cans spilled. One landed right beside me and began to spill out, but that wasn't all...the fucking handle on the paint can was FURIOUSLY slamming up and down

by itself, right against my leg. I screamed like a scared little sissy girl and flung it away with my hand, then pushed myself up onto my feet, getting blue paint all over my hands for my trouble. As the noisy can spun into the corner, all the others off the wrack began clacking and clanging as well. It was about this time that I noticed the temperature had dropped drastically -- like I said, I don't need any damned expensive gizmos to tell me if there's a ghost in my face.

All of this happened in the span of a about ten seconds. Sara had whirled around at my first cry of alarm, when the rack fell over. She plainly saw the handle of the blue can clacking by itself, and she panicked just as I panicked. She bolted for the stairs, pants falling back around her knees and me right behind her. I still had my lantern in my left hand but left my camera in the rush. She hit the steps and stumbled, and I blindly reached out with my right hand and shoved her along, too scared to realize I was getting paint everywhere.

Kevin, Jenna and Woody had heard the commotion and were waiting when we burst out at the top of the steps (I could still hear the clanging of the paint can as I reached the top) and kept running to the front lawn, where we finally stopped, both of us gibbering incoherently. Kevin and Jenna, no stranger to panic (previous experiences...) rushed out and immediately tried to calm us down (and Jenna talked Sara into pulling her damn pants up), while Woody stood on the front porch, apparently torn between helping us and gawking at the mess we'd made coming up.

After a few minutes of soothing we were both resting on the grass and trying to relate what had happened. What a fucking mess. All three of them confirmed after things had settled down that they heard the noises as we were coming up the steps. Unfortunately nobody knew precisely when they stopped, because we were all outside. I apologized to Woody for getting paint all over his basement and stairs and dripping on his floor. He took it all in stride -- he actually had a bit of a grin on his face once he realized we were all ok, and told me not to worry about the mess. It was probably the most excitement the old guy had had in quite awhile. Kevin and Jenna went down (reluctantly!) to retrieve my camera and the satchel -- the paint cans had stopped clanging, and the place was a godawful mess, but there was nothing supernatural going on when they went down, and they made the usual jokes about us losing our nerve and not being cut out for the game, trying to lighten the mood.

Sara and I didn't find ANY humor in any of this. I was badly shaken by the rack tipping over -- this was a big rack, with a lot of heavy paint cans, and I probably barely escaped serious injury. Sara was even worse; we couldn't coax her back inside the house, and so we gathered our cameras, our lanterns, notebooks, and one remaining tape recorder, and said goodnight to Woody after promising to get in touch and see about doing another vigil.

The next morning we went out to breakfast and a debriefing. It's always easier to analyze what happened in daylight after some (usually restless) sleep. The pictures would be developed shortly and there was always the hope we might have caught something. The tape recorder I had was destroyed, and we'd have to replace it, but at least with the batteries having been drained, we know we didn't lose any important recordings. Sara and I both were in agreement that the tapping was very real, seemed to be coming from the same place to both of our ears, and that that place contained no easily identifiable explanation for the sound. There was of course the possibility that something inside the wall was making the noise, piping or what not.

Sara maintained that she would have not dropped her pants in some dingy ass basement in the house of a man she barely knew, and that she felt she was coerced by whatever was in the basement. She also mentioned that, in hindsight, she felt herself growing increasingly angry without explanation as the hours in the basement passed, which is something that had not happened to me. Knowing Sara like I do, I have to agree that she's not the type to just drop her pants in front of other people. She's not the showoff type -- doesn't even expose her navel in her daily dress. We could argue that she was concerned she might be bleeding, and that given her intimate history with me she felt no embarrassment about uncovering herself for a minute. Because of that argument, we don't really draw any solid conclusions about whether or not she was influenced in our report -- but given her statements of growing anger during the night, I'm inclined to believe she was. Later trips to this house further solidified our opinion on this.

In the end, Sara and I did find some humor in this whole incident, when we got our pictures developed. When the commotion in the basement started, Kevin, Jenna, and Woody ran to the top of the steps. It seems Woody grabbed one of the cameras on the table, which Kevin and Jenna forgot to take with them in the heat of the moment. While myself and Sara were panicking on the front lawn, and Kevin and Jenna were frantically trying to calm us down, Woody snapped a couple of pictures and nobody noticed. We got our photos back, and they contained nothing the least bit ghostly. What they did have was a great picture of Sara from the rear, pants around her knees -- and an almost perfectly formed blue hand print on her ass where I pushed her going up the steps. Thus was this investigation unofficially christened the Night of the Blue Palmed Pervert.

So that's the story of our first trip to Woody's house. I'm writing it now because I got word from his family the other day that he's in the hospital, heart is failing, and they're not sure he's going to make it. He's remained something of an e-friend since our investigation at his house, and I guess this is my way of dealing with the news that he's dying. The four of us are going to visit him this weekend.

Second Trip to Woody's House

The following Saturday we returned to Woody's house, armed with pizza for dinner and the revelations of Kevin and Jenna's interview with Woody, which we had listened to, discussed, transcribed, and practically memorized during idle moments of the week. All four of us were eager to get back there, and I'd been on the phone with Woody several times during the week. He'd cleaned up the basement, but at my request had left the rack lying flat on the floor, pushed into a corner with the paint cans stacked in the gaps between the shelves. I didn't want to risk injury or another mess from that stupid rack.

Woody's interview gave us good details of the phenomena. Firstly, it was confined entirely to the basement and the stairs leading down to it. Footsteps were common on the stairs. They occurred seemingly at random, always descending. Woody had counted them before, and by his reckoning there were always 22 steps taken -- down a flight that had only 12 actual steps. Queue cheesy horror music.

On three separate occasions that he could recall, he told us, he heard the footsteps coming down the stairs while he was in the basement. He saw nothing, and unsurprisingly after experiencing this he usually made a hasty exit.

He was aware of the tapping sound. It was high pitched and had a ringing aftertone, as I described it previously, much like fork prongs tapping together. He also heard what he thought was the sound of someone heavily dragging their feet on the basement floor -- this always occurred while he was in the basement, on the far side where he kept the sawhorses and the

abandoned workbench. He got up his nerve enough to take a look a few times, and never saw anything.

He told us that he and his wife had discussed the basement many times. She had it worse than he did. She experienced all of the phenomena he did, as well as very sudden, noticeable drops in temperature in the basement. The feeling of anger Sara experienced was also something she had reported, along with a strong sense of resentment, though about what exactly she could never figure out. On three separate occasions she felt touches on her back, near the shoulder blades. She had told Woody they were light, persistent, and while not obviously hostile, they felt threatening.

I should note at this point that he made it very clear most of the time the basement was just a basement. To have anything out of the ordinary occur was unusual, and his abandoning the area except for use as a paint storage area was more out of the general creepiness of the place than out of too many phenomena. He had lived in the house for four years, plenty of time to get used to it (mostly...) and come to terms with it. And to track it. Heaviest manifestations were always in late winter and early spring. Things were usually very peaceful in early fall -- occasional footsteps was about all.

Anyway, that's the gist of the interview. Dinner concluded, we chatted about the house, the interview, the week before, and our expectations for this visit. Frankly, I thought it was slim odds that we'd have two encounters in two visits. But it was early spring, and once again when we went to the car for our gear, we found our batteries drained.

Kevin and Jenna wanted to go down into the basement on this trip. Sara wasn't eager to go down there again, and I didn't want to leave her alone with Woody, so I decided I'd stay up top with her. We searched the house just before nightfall, taking pictures and making sure we were alone and that nothing was out of the ordinary. When it was good and dark, and after a quick trip to the restroom, they went down. What follows is all based on their stories and writings, I didn't see any of this myself.

Upon their descent Jenna was immediately aware of the negative vibes. I've said before that she was very open-minded and had a spiritualist bent; I think she was much more perceptive and aware of this sort of thing than the rest of us. She began to feel irritated almost immediately. Kevin felt nothing beside the usual tension one feels on a ghost hunt.

They quickly searched the basement. I had asked them to take a good look at the sawhorses to try and find the nail that Sara tore her pants on, and to take pictures from all angles. I'd love to be able to say they didn't find any badly hammered nails that SOMETHING ELSE must have caused it, but this is reality (if a bit surreal), and there was a nail on one of the horses that could have easily resulted in a tear at about mid-thigh.

That taken care of, they examined in detail the spot where the tapping sound had come from on the previous visit. They knocked on the wall; it seemed quite solid. They felt the ground and the ceiling, both normal temperatures, no vibrations. It was just a wall.

Kevin decided to stand near the bottom of the stairs. After interviewing Woody he thought they might be a focal point of the haunting; he also wanted to stay far away from the rack, even with it lying on the floor. Jenna took up position on a sawhorse much as Sara had done, but only after pushing the one with the bad nail into an angle where she wouldn't possibly bump into it. And so their lights went out, and they waited.

Sara and I passed our time with Woody. We didn't watch TV or shoot pool, because we didn't want to make any noises that the other team might mis-interpret. He mostly spun yarns from his marine days. He had a million of them and was just the coolest old guy ever. Anyway, the hours passed for us, probably much quicker than for poor Kevin and Jenna.

About two hours into the vigil they heard the tapping sound begin. It was very faint, from the same spot as the last time. Once again, lighting the room showed nothing (nor did the pictures they took), and as it was faint and intermittent, after a little while they found the courage to turn off the lights and sit in the dark again. Kevin had begun to become aware of the sense of "wrong", and Jenna continued to be aware of a mounting sense of anger within her and in the room.

After about half an hour of random taps, the room fell silent again. They sat for approximately another hour, when Jenna stood up to stretch and shift position. When she dropped her hands after stretching, she banged her left hand on the sawhorse, and Kevin heard her give the sawhorse a shove and say "fucking CUNT". He was very surprised by this. Jenna wasn't a choirgirl by any stretch of the imagination, but none of us had ever heard her utter the word cunt before, and she said it with vigor...almost SPAT the word, was how he described it. He talked to her for a few minutes, making sure she wasn't hurt and trying to get a sense of her emotional state. She told him she felt angry but that she was in control, and that she wanted to stay down. He decided everything was fine, and he also wanted to stay, so again they fell silent and waited.

Another two hours passed with nothing. It was now very late at night, Sara and I were getting restless, though Woody was an inexhaustible fountain of energy. We were playing cards. I'm not a big fan of Texas Hold'em, but I loves me some 5 card draw and some Tonk.

Kevin began to hear a thumping sound at this point. It wasn't loud, and it was coming from over near Jenna. He held his ground, listening to it for a few moments to make sure it wasn't a trick of the imagination. Then he flicked on his lantern -- to find Jenna absentmindedly pounding her right fist against the sawhorse. He called her a jerk, told her to knock it off, and switched out the light.

A few minutes passed and the pounding began again. He was about to ask Jenna what the fuck her problem was when he heard a sound directly in front of him -- he said it sounded much like someone dragging their feet heavily, just as Woody had described. By this point he was ready to lose it, but he whispered and asked Jenna if she heard the noise, and she confirmed that she did.

"Well then quit fucking drumming on the sawhorse so we can hear it better!"

"Sorry," she said. The drumming stopped, but the dragging continued. It seemed to move away from Kevin, towards the paint rack and the far opening to the back half of the basement where Jenna sat. He saw nothing, but the temperature was beginning to drop dramatically. And then again, he hears the pounding coming from Jenna's sawhorse. This time it's louder. The room is fucking freezing, he still hears something dragging it's damn feet, and he's so focused on hearing it (and trying to ignore the pounding) that it takes him a moment to consider that perhaps he should check on Jenna.

"Jenna?" he says. Her lantern comes on and she immediately bursts into tears. The dragging sound stops immediately, but it's still ice cold in the room. He switches on his lantern, books over to Jenna and grabs her arm. It's bleeding from where she's been pounding it against the

sawhorse, and she's practically hysterical, sobbing loudly. He pulls her over to the stairs and they book it out of the basement; Sara, Woody and I are waiting just near the top, having heard Jenna crying, and as soon as I saw her I ran for the first aid kit, the one time I can remember breaking the rule of never going solo for even a moment (and fuck me, running out alone into the dark on a lonely country road to retrieve a first aid kit from a car was no walk in the park itself -- ghosts, UFO's, sasquatches, you just never know...) Kevin was still pretty coherent, much more than I was when I came up the previous week, and noted in his observations later that the cold air stopped immediately at the lip of the top step. It was like passing out of a block of ice, he said.

Woody at this point was deeply concerned -- one of us had been hurt, though after calming her down enough to clean the wound, we saw it really wasn't that bad. She'd just rubbed off the first layer or two of skin and caused some capillaries to bleed.

We questioned her at length; she wasn't really aware that she was pounding her fist against the sawhorse. That's why she started crying when she turned on the light and looked at her arm; the sudden realization she was hurt scared the hell out of her. She clearly remembered the temperature drop, and the foot-dragging sound, which had come from around the opposite side of the wall she sat facing and stopped right next to her. Throughout the night she said she felt increasingly irritated and angry, up until the foot-dragging sound started, at which point she said she felt much closer to just plain blind rage, and felt a VERY deep resentment at whatever was making the sound.

Woody was reluctant to let us continue after the injury. I told him I'd call him after we'd debriefed ourselves and we'd talk. And thus, part 2 is finished. I've already told you guys we went back one more time. Hopefully I can get that written up tomorrow sometime.

Third and Last Trip to Woody's House

Here's part three. This was much harder to write than I thought it would be. I'll post my conclusions in the morning, I'm exhausted now. Hope you enjoy.

Despite Woody's concerns for our safety he agreed to let us try again, and our third and what would be final probe into the mystery of Woody's haunting began with dinner at a restaurant in Warrenton by the name of Tippy's Taco House. Woody drove up and joined us. The place has really good food.

We had discussed the events of the previous two weeks in great depth. It was plain to all of us that whatever we were dealing with had a particular affinity for females, and we were willing to take Woody at his word when he said the phenomena was heaviest in the early spring. Certainly we hadn't been dissatisfied thus far.

Attempts had been made to research the property prior to Woody's ownership. It was indicated that the house that currently stood was at least the second time the site had been built on, probably more than that. We had no evidence of a death or anything heinous having occurred there however. Basically a dead end, so we just sat down and put logic to work.

What had happened in this area over the past few hundred years? Our first thought of course was the Civil War. We weren't far from Manassas, where two battles had been fought. A little further in the other direction was Fredericksburg, another major battle site. There are numerous markers along the major roads in our area with little historical

tidbits about armies that passed through on their way to this battle or that. Undoubtedly there was plenty of conflict and plenty of death in the history of our region. We'd had experiences with civil war ghosts before, so it wasn't a stretch to consider that we had another. We thought about the underground railroad as well. Perhaps the ground the house was built on once held a waystop, and something bad had happened. There was probably a Native American presence in the area in the earliest days. And then there was always the possibility it was an elemental or worse, a demon.

In other words we didn't really know. To this day we still don't, though the events of this third and final night helped us narrow it down considerably.

Kevin and I tried to convince the girls that they weren't going down this time. We argued about the apparent danger, reminded them of the effects the previous two weeks had had on them. But they invoked the power of the vagina and won the day; it was decided that all four of us, along with Woody himself, would descend that night. We geared up, four lanterns, four cameras, our one surviving recorder, and Woody had a few flashlights on hand should we need them.

We waited till dusk and searched the premises. All was well except for our batteries, which were once again dead. I came pretty close to calling the whole thing off when we discovered that. I've had a very active ghost hunting career, but I've never experienced three encounters in three weeks. Not once before this incident and not once since. For at least a few minutes on this final night, I really did not want to go through it all again. But my ambition and love of my hobby kept my mouth shut -- it was too good an opportunity to let it pass by.

We descended the steps single file, and halfway down all four lanterns sputtered and died. Momentary panic set in until Woody, who was bringing up the rear, turned back and flicked the switch for the lights over the steps. We retreated to the top floor, where no amount of shaking or fiddling could get the lanterns lit again. These types of lanterns aren't battery powered -- they have a bulb that lasts so long, and then you toss the thing and buy a new one. They're cheap. Unfortunately all four of ours had just died (to the tune of about 80 bucks, they're not cheap in bulk DAMMIT), and we were reduced to Woody's flashlight collection.

Once we sorted that mess out, we again descended the steps, acutely aware that we were not welcome. We all had a very uneasy feeling that night -- it felt like all bets were off, and the dead lanterns seemed to be a challenge, or a warning.

Woody stood near the rack with the biggest flashlight. Sara and I sat on the sawhorses, while Kevin and Jenna waited near the steps. Each of us pairs had a flashlight between us. We had decided that we wouldn't allow the girls to get more than a step away from the guys and that we would frequently speak to them to make sure they weren't being fucked with.

They related their feelings immediately -- dread, anger, resentment. Jenna told us the basement felt different to her this time though, very melancholy. She was convinced something tragic had happened here, but couldn't tell if it was a malicious tragedy, an accident, or what. As I've mentioned, she makes no claim to being psychic, and says she was just interpreting what she felt.

We waited in the dark. We made some small talk now and again, mostly checking up on the girls and asking for their feelings. Nothing happened for about the first two hours -- at that point we heard the first faint tappings. It came from the same place as the previous times, and again, we lit the area, saw nothing, and took a bunch of pictures (that would show us nothing when developed).

The tappings faded away after about 20 minutes, and the minutes dragged by. Jenna and Sara maintained that they were in control of themselves, though they felt the emotional disturbance very intensely. As for us guys, we felt nothing but creeping dread on the back of our necks.

I'd say another hour passed, putting us past midnight and into Sunday morning, May 19th. Two quick tappings preceded a sudden, and I mean fucking SUDDEN, drop in temperature. That was immediately followed by a loud THUMP, right next to where Kevin and Jenna stood. It sounded like something heavy jumping off the steps onto the basement floor. Kevin and Jenna, thoroughly freaked, backpedaled to the sawhorses where Sara and I stood. All three flashlight beams immediately blazed out at the bottom of the steps -- and just as quickly dimmed to the point of barely providing any illumination at all.

This was probably the most "oh FUCK" moment I'd ever had in my life up until that point. Something else would top it a few seconds later, though. We all began babbling at once; we were in the dark, it was freezing cold, and there was some THING fucking around with our flashlights. I raised my voice, telling everyone to shut up and hold still, lets carry this through to the end and blah blah blah. What I wanted to do was fucking BOLT. I held my ground; so did the rest of them.

We heard the sound of dragging feet. I hadn't heard it prior to this, and it gave me the impression of someone in a great deal of pain slowly slogging his or her way across the basement. It moved with agonizing slowness. A three-legged turtle could have moved faster. Of course time always slows down during an "oh FUCK" moment, so maybe my perception was just screwed up. Kevin jerked Jenna back over near the stairs to watch and listen. I could hear them and the others breathing very heavily beneath the sound. It followed the same path Kevin had described it taking, from the steps across the first half of the basement to the rack (Woody still had some of the badass marine in him. He held his ground as it went right past him), through the opening to the second half where the sawhorses were.

Sara and I were pretty much rooted to the spot, even with this thing bearing down on us. We stared in the direction it was coming, the pitiful remnant of our flashlight barely illuminating the space a foot in front of us. It shuffled up next to us and -- I don't want to say it materialized, because it didn't. It was just there.

It had clear, distinct legs; colorless, as ghosts tend to be I guess, but not transparent like some supposedly are. It wore what I can only call old-timey looking shoes, with socks or stockings that ended just below the knee. Above that was just whiteness; I got the impression that it was covered in a sheet, or perhaps wrapped in a cloak or cape. One things for sure, it had a hugely swollen belly -- I think it was very, very pregnant. At chest level it began to become very indistinct, and it had no shoulders, neck or head -- I'm not saying it had been decapitated, just that for whatever reason, it didn't manifest itself above the chest. It's hard to describe how the thing looked up top. You know how artists rough out a basic sketch of something they're drawing, and then add detail and polish

until it looks like it should? That's the best way to describe this thing above the chest. It was like an artist roughed it out and didn't finish it. There was no tapering to where the neck should be, just white streaks that continued up, well above where the head would be.

It was only there for about five seconds, but it really felt like an eternity. I know that's cliché to say, but it's true. I just stared at it; I was aware of how god awful cold it was in the room, and vaguely aware of the other four people there with me gawking at this thing. I remember being thankful that it had no eyes. And I felt a profound sense of achievement. I'd waited my whole life to see a ghost. I'd heard plenty of them prior to this; I'd felt their presence. But I'd never seen one. It wasn't as thrilling as I thought it would be, though; more than anything I felt a deep, unrelenting sorrow for whoever or whatever this was. But behind those feelings were words of warning: unfriendly, unclean. Wrong.

It faded away. Only took a couple of seconds, but it did so much slower than it appeared. Sara and I felt something disturb the air, running past us toward the steps -- but Kevin and Jenna, who were standing at the bottom of said steps, felt nothing. When it was gone, our lights blazed back to full brightness -- and we fucking panicked like we've never panicked before. It played out much like the first night, except this time nobody had their heads together enough to calm the rest of us down. We ended up on the front lawn, panting and trembling, and slowly we regained control of ourselves.

I think we all wanted to talk it over, but we kept it short, preferring to stick to our rule of waiting until the next morning after some sleep and breakfast to debrief ourselves and start work on our "official" report. It was about 1:30 on the morning of the 19th when we left Woody's house. He told us he'd be okay alone. He's a tough old bastard, and knew that there was nothing wrong with the house besides the basement. So we all went home and fell asleep.

There's some suggestions most ghost hunters make to people who are interested in trying it out for the first time -- talk to the ghosts. It sounds silly, but what you're supposed to do when you arrive on site is explain to the ghosts who you are, what you're doing there, and politely ask them to allow their pictures to be taken. You're also supposed to make it very clear to them when you leave that they are NOT permitted to follow you home, that they must remain where they are in the name of Jesus or whoever you wish to invoke. Despite the cheesiness of it our team does that before and after every hunt.

I'm not convinced it works though. I woke up at about 4 AM that same night; my TV had switched on by itself. A few minutes later my phone rang -- Sarah in a panic, her TV had done likewise. The next morning we confirmed the same thing had happened to Kevin and Jenna. But not to Woody.

And every fucking May 19th since, my TV has turned itself on at some point during the night while I sleep. Same thing happens to the rest of my team. I switch it off and go back to bed; nothing else the least bit paranormal has ever happened to me outside of my ghost hunts. But, I think you can understand that given the (apparently) hostile nature of the ghost we were dealing with, I don't like it. Such are the risks of ghost hunting, I guess.



Conclusion and Interpretations

That next morning we gathered at a little country restaurant accurately named Town and Country, complete with a sign boldly proclaiming "Best in Food". They had the best blueberry muffins in the world, were one of the few places I knew of that always served grits, and there was a picture at the register of the owner standing outside the restaurant next to Michael Jordan, who stopped in sometimes on his way through the area. Woody joined us; we wanted his input too. We were all pretty tired, but elated. We had seen the holy grail of ghost hunting, a fucking scary apparition.

But what was it? We don't really know. One of the let-downs of ghost hunting is that there are no convenient wrap-ups at the end that explain everything. Ghost hunting is a mind fuck. Still, we looked at everything we had and tried to make sense of it.

In addition to our other attempts at researching the history of the place, Woody had the contact information of the man who'd sold him the house. He still had it mainly because he was somewhat anal about filing everything, and he continued to get mail addressed to this guy for some time after he moved. He got in touch with him and asked about any weird experiences. The guy claims he never saw or heard anything out of the ordinary, but admitted that he didn't use the basement for much besides storage and rarely went down there. His wife on the other hand disliked the basement immensely, and flat out refused to allow her daughter to go down there at any time. We tried to press for an interview, but the man declined for his wife. So we had confirmation that we weren't the first to experience something down there, but we were going to miss out on the details. Pretty frustrating, but you get used to being cockblocked in this hobby. Bottom line is our research really didn't get us very far, and we were forced to come up with an explanation based almost entirely on our experiences.

Anyway, on to the team's conclusions. Here's our thoughts on all of the phenomena.

The tapping sound: seemed to come from nowhere, was high pitched and metallic, and was always the first thing heard each night. It almost seemed to be an indication that the ghost was gearing up for the nights activities, or testing us to see how easily we'd freak. I've mentioned the fork-prongs thing a couple of times now; Jenna suggested not forks, but a scalpel on a surgical tray. FUCK you Jenna, fuck you very much. Not knowing what was inside the wall of the house at the point the tapping sound came from, we had to accept the fact that it wasn't necessarily supernatural, but we all suspected that it was.

The footsteps on the stairs: The team never actually heard anything on the stairs. But footsteps are probably the most common haunting phenomena, so we had no reason to doubt Woody's report here. The fact that he counted 22 steps on a 12 step staircase indicates to me that the ghost was descending stairs that USED to be on the property, and therefore haunted whatever home or building existed here before Woody's place was built. Woody's place was about 60 years old, so the ghost was at least that old, and I suspect it was much older.

The dragging sound: we all heard it. Jenna and Kevin heard it on two seperate nights. It started at the bottom of the steps, continued to the far end of the basement, and looped around in the second half-room, stopping at the middle where the sawhorses were. No doubt in any of our minds that it was a supernatural manifestation. We really didn't pay the sawhorses as much attention as we should have. We thought the staircase was a natural focal point, but in hindsight the haunting seemed to be HEAVILY focused on the spot in the room where the sawhorses rested.

The touching experienced by Woody's wife: I think it's perfectly clear that this thing focused it's energy on females. The fact that the apparition appeared pregnant makes me think it was itself female. Whether it loved them or hated them is debatable -- though it's easy to say hate, because of the negative emotions it impressed upon the girls, do keep in mind that the only one the ghost appeared to try to specifically harm was me, by tipping that fucking rack over on me. Anyway, I left the touching out of my overall conclusions, because we heard it from Woody who heard it from his wife who could have just been imagining it. Too far removed from direct experience to really be something we can count.

The emotional impact on our girls: Again, this thing was attracted to women. It's easy to say it disliked them, and that's why they felt such anger, and resentment towards the actual entity. (fuck Lowtax's avatar just got me again and it's 11:15 AM :mad:). However, consider the possibility that since it appeared to be a woman itself it empathized with our girls, and sort of -- I guess this is the best way to say it -- projected it's own feelings onto them. At this point we have to question Jenna's harming herself on the sawhorse -- did the ghost coerce her into doing that, or was it simply an unconcious effort on her part to use up the energy the negative emotions were giving her? I don't know. But I don't think the ghost did it on purpose.

So what have we got thus far? A pregnant female that feels a deep sense of anger and resentment, apparently at herself, who tries to express her despair to other women. At this point I'd like to remind you just how completely subjective all of this is.

Some poltergeist phenomena: the rack didn't tip over by accident. This means we have a ghost that's capable of manipulating the physical environment (which, by the way, in my opinion pretty much rules out the "wrinkle in time" ghosts I mentioned in my original post, they tend not to do such things). It's natural to assume that ghosts can do this at will, and that they do it on purpose. I think it's equally likely that they do it entirely by accident, and that it's simply undirected psychokinetic energy given off by their presence. Thus it's impossible to determine if it was a malicious ghost, though it was clearly a dangerous one.

Possible awareness: again, I believe it projected it's emotions onto our girls -- and thus, we assume, knew that they were there. It also seemed to openly challenge us on the third night by taking our lanterns out of play before we even got down the damn steps. If you accept the fact that it tipped the rack over, and that it did it on purpose, then it's natural to assume it knew I was standing there and was trying to harm me. Taking all of that into consideration, plus the fact that it's (possibly, see below) visited us all once a year ever since and probably will again here in about two months, I believe it was aware of us.

The apparition: The fact that it didn't manifest all of itself isn't necessarily telling us anything, though a famous ghost hunter by the name of Elliot O'Donnell (passed away in the 1950's, I think) once theorized in one his stories that elemental spirits, having never been human, have a hard time manifesting a complete human form, and either leave parts out, or substitute them for something else (in his story, the ghost was an elemental that took the form of a woman but with a pig's face). Anyway, that's an interesting side note, but I don't think this was an elemental (or demon), and so I don't think it applies here. It's rare to see a completely-formed apparition anyway.

Pregnancy: The fact that it appeared PREGNANT I believe is extremely significant. Was it pregnant when it died? Maybe. Perhaps the child it carried was very important to it. Maybe it was stillborn, or she miscarried. For whatever reason, pregnancy (and if you want to do a bit of interpretation, fertility and maybe female strength) were important to the ghost, and I believe strongly that something unresolved having to do with the child is the cause for the haunting in the first place. Which really makes it quite sad, when you think about it.

The seasonal manifestation: if indeed the ghost in question was pregnant at or near the time of her death, it's not too big a stretch to assume that her baby was born or was at least due in the early spring, when manifestations are most common.

That "wrong" feeling: I've stated that I felt unclean in the basement, that something was just not right, and that the spirit itself was unfriendly and dirty. All four of the others felt likewise.

I think the wrongness was just our human instincts warning us that something funny was going on with this basement -- I believe we all still possess our animal instincts, we just don't have much need to tap into them living in a fairly safe and civilized society.

The feeling of uncleanness could have been another projection of the ghosts own feelings about itself. Perhaps this woman got pregnant out of wedlock, or was raped and subsequently became pregnant, during a time when such a thing was considered a very grave sin and would have led to her being outcast. She likely would have felt a deep sense of shame and self loathing, further leading to the feelings of anger and resentment that she tried to share with the girls. For some reason, thinking about this, I don't think she was civil-war era. I'm thinking even earlier.

The yearly visit: Fucked if I know what to think about this one. Since we didn't do jack shit for the ghost beside intrude on it's place of sorrow, I doubt it's dropping by to say "hay how's it going". We have theorized that it's not actually the ghost at all, but that we were simply so deeply moved by our experience that our subconscious fires off a burst of psychokinetic energy on the anniversary and ends up activating something in the house to wake us up.

And having said that, now's a good time to mention just how much this experience DID affect all of us. If it's any indication, I'm typing this line with tears in my eyes -- even four years after the fact I can get extremely worked up about it. It was without a doubt one of the most

intense experiences of my life and my view of the world changed afterward. It has convinced me that emotions and instincts have power, have energy, and that even though science can't explain how, we are more than capable of picking up on these things from each other. It has heavily influenced my desire to continue ghost hunting.

Woody has remained in the house in the years since, rarely using the basement. He maintains that it's still haunted, hearing footsteps about twice monthly, except in the early spring when it's far more common. We've never been back. We haven't even really been tempted to go back; I feel we overstayed our welcome, and I'm smart enough to bow out gracefully.

So there you go.

The Screamer

You want screamers? Ok! I think this is going to be my last tale -- my pool of creativity has been about drained by all the writing this weekend, and frankly nothing will come close to the intensity of my first one. Hope you enjoy this.

I was staring out at the field I was about to cross when Jenna came skipping over to me from the car, parked in a driveway about 20 feet behind me. She looked at me with a huge grin and those big pretty eyes of hers -- she has lovely eyes. "Guess what?", she says. She had just gone to check our gear, so using my unique powers of reasoning I guessed that the batteries were dead. She literally bounced up and down with glee.

Normally I'd be very appreciative of such a bouncy display, but I was feeling pretty gleeful myself. This would be our fifth time visiting this site and we were way past ready for something to happen. Unfortunately Sara and Kevin would be missing out this time. Sara was ill and Kevin was swamped with schoolwork -- it was close to finals. I knew they were going to be pissed at missing the trip if anything happened; and with a pile of dead batteries in our back seat, it seemed highly likely something was going to happen.

It was November 2004, and by this time my team had developed a pretty good reputation (if I do say so myself) among our friends and family, enough that we occasionally got approached with requests to visit this or that site, usually passed down through a friend of a friend of a friend until it reached us. Most of the time, we accepted the offers. Most of the time nothing happened. But some sites intrigued us enough that we were persistent. Occasionally it paid off, as it did this time.

We were on a privately owned and abandoned farm, having been invited to visit the site by the owner, who was a friend of one of Sara's uncles and had heard of our exploits through him. The owner had plans to demolish the farm and develop the property, as there's been quite a population explosion in this area in the last few years, and what was once desolate country is now becoming suburbs. But his project was still a ways in the future, and he saw no harm in letting us visit the place, at least not after securing the usual promises about photography, media contact, and property damage. I didn't quite see the reasoning behind not wanting to damage a building that was in poor shape and soon to be torn down, but we don't aspire to be vandals, so hey.

We had some history on this place. It had been around for a little over a hundred and fifty years and housed several generations of the same family, up until about 1962 when a murder-suicide occurred. The story goes that the lady of the house frequently engaged

in sexual activity with the low-wage hired help while the husband was off at market. She had one lover in particular she was hot for; he was an Italian immigrant, supposedly not well educated, and was easily talked into attempting to murder the man of the house so that he and the lady might carry on in the open.

Various attempts to poison the guy were made, and failed. An attempt to arrange for a tractor accident was also thwarted, though they did manage to get the guys hand in that one. Ick. Frustrated with his lack of success, and as I said not particularly intelligent, the Italian Stallion decided to just shoot the husband and get it over with. In the aftermath of the murder he realized he'd fucked up and that he'd never be able to get away with it. So he fled to parts unknown and the lady of the house, distraught at the loss of both husband and lover, combined drink with medication and died. They ruled it a suicide.

Now a lot of that stinks of myth, but our research most definitely confirmed a shooting death in the home and the suicide of the wife. There was also on record the death of two elderly people in the house (natural causes) and one dead infant in what appeared to be a case of SIDS.

There was some reported phenomena, from passers-by who'd seen something strange and informed the police, and even more from various crews the property owner hired to do work on the house and the grounds in preparation for the project that was in the works. I knew a couple of local cops. I went to high school with them. My criminal justice studies gave me an opportunity to meet cops. It was also a police officer who gave me my first lead that launched my ghost hunting career. So I had a chance to get some information about the disturbances from both the police and the owner of the property.

Strange lights were frequently seen in the front, upper story of the house -- unfortunately, an area that had fallen into great disrepair and wasn't the safest place to hang around. Gunshots, or something like them, were occasionally heard from the nearby roads. Work crews had heard what sounded like a crying child, and reported feelings of discomfort around the family graveyard, located a bit behind the house near a patch of woods with a creek running through it. They also reported FREQUENTLY (like several times daily) hearing what sounded like the snorting and stamping of horses near the barn.

So we had an old house and a small family graveyard nearby, along with lots of documented tragedy, some possibly-embellished but certainly encouraging backstory, and reports of phenomena. Imagine then our frustration when our first four visits turned up nothing. Granted, we had a good time -- we're always creeped out on hunts, and we enjoy walking, talking and picture taking. We enjoy the note taking, searching the premises, and just taking in the often creepy ambience of whatever place we happen to be in. But we like it even more when we get the shit scared out of us.

We had spent three of our first visits on the actual house and the fourth around the barn. This time, after about an hour and a half of milling about the house and barn, Jenna and I decided to try the graveyard.

The air was frosty, the moon was about half full, and the feeling that stole over us as we made our way across the field was somber. Behind us lay the decaying house, the inside empty of furniture and the paint on the walls peeling. I didn't care much for the house.

I'm sure it was nice enough in it's heyday but some roach carcasses convinced me that the inside of the walls were crawling with insects, and I have a rule -- if you have more than four legs or less than two, stay the FUCK away from me.

The field was pretty big, a few hundred yards across I'd guess, coming to an end at the edge of a patch of trees. A small creek ran through them; we had been told it tended to go dry at times, but we could hear it softly babbling as we approached. The trees stood in a narrow but long patch along the north end of the field, and we had to follow them east until we found the graveyard at the end. We peeked into the trees with flashlights along the way, to ease our tension and to make sure nobody was hiding there.

We stopped at the edge of the graveyard and began taking pictures. There were 10 graves in the graveyard and we shot them all, zooming in on headstones (some so weathered you couldn't read anything anymore), zooming out to capture as much of the area as we could. The graveyard was surrounded by a tiny and very weathered picket fence, barely a foot high. We took shots of the woods, the house, and the sky (never know, might catch a UFO. Or a sasquatch). We breathed in the country air, a heady scent with just a hint of cow pie, and stretched our arms and legs, preparing for another long vigil.

I took Jenna's arm and led her to the fence, holding her hand in a gentlemanly fashion while she stepped over. I followed suit, and all hell broke loose.

I don't think most people have ever heard a TRUE scream. We hear 'em on TV, movies, we hear shrieking babies, and people having fun on thrill rides and rollercoasters. But a genuine scream is a rare thing in this day and age. I've only heard a couple.

From the center of the graveyard, not more than fifteen feet away from us, came THE most appalling screams either of us had ever heard in our lives. If you've ever heard a mountain lion, it was similar, but much deeper (clearly masculine) and the pitch of it didn't change at all. I was immediately just paralyzed with fright, and Jenna froze up right next to me. Our lights were still on, and we could clearly see between them and the moonlight that there was nothing in the graveyard with us. Yet the screaming continued without a break, probably for close to a minute. It didn't pause even once until it stopped entirely -- whatever was responsible clearly didn't need to take a breath. It sounded fucking pissed off. The whole time it continued, I couldn't move. Jenna couldn't either. We were just rooted to the spot by the shock, I guess.

After about sixty seconds it faded, the scream becoming something of a wail at the very end. Our reaction was immediate -- we hauled. Actually I hauled. Jenna tripped over the fence. Just like in the fucking horror movies, the girl falls down when she really needs to stay on her damn feet. I jerked her up and we ran, dogpiled into the car, and peeled out. I nearly wrecked getting us out of there. Once I was on the road I got myself under control, Jenna pulled herself together as well, and we headed for a 24 hour diner in Warrenton, the closest town.

We had coffee and doughnuts; we didn't speak much. I took her home and promised to take her out to breakfast the next morning for the usual debrief. I went home and slept, waking up three times during the night from nightmares about the screaming. I think this is the only trip I've gone on that I've dreamt about; I still dream about it once in awhile. I don't attribute that to supernatural causes. I was just really fucking scared by the scream, and my subconscious likes to conjure it up when I sleep for some damn

reason.

The next morning Jenna and I met and we talked it over. We think there's actually a fairly simple explanation for this one; we entered the graveyard, there was something already there, we were not welcome, and it voiced it's displeasure. But fuck me, it could have just asked us to leave.

We developed the pictures, and as I said there were 10 headstones. We could only account for 9 in the pictures, despite being certain we had photographed all 10. We examined the negatives and could only account for 9 as well. We went back to the site one more time, with all four of us -- nothing happened, but we checked out the graveyard, made damn sure to photograph all 10 headstones, and again found we couldn't account for one when we developed the pictures. The one we couldn't seem to get a picture of was so weathered we didn't know who was buried there -- but we now suspect he was the screamer, and that he resented our invasion of his resting place.

Which is perfectly understandable to me. We'll never go back, and we tread much more carefully in graveyards now.

Time-Wrinkle

By a combination of some good fortune and some social engineering my team gained weekend access to a tourist trap tobacco plantation with a few ghosts of it's own. The plantation is in southern Virginia, very close to the North Carolina border, and we wanted to give it a full three night stay so we decided to make a road trip of it and got ourselves a hotel nearby. Half-serious thoughts of sharing a room with Sara were soon bashed by reality; I'd be sharing a room with Kevin. Fine :pwn:. In addition to the usual promises in writing we made to people we investigated for, it was understood that we wouldn't show up with our gear until after the place had closed to tourists and that we'd clear out well before opening the next day. No food, no drink (we never drank anything but water on hunts anyway), no littering, and don't touch anything in the house besides the stuff that had obviously been put it in more recent times -- there was a bathroom and gift shop in the front of the house, though they were making plans to construct an add-on building and move that stuff there, while restoring the downstairs to it's former glory.

The first day we took a tour just like anybody else would and it was a hell of a house (as most approximately 250 year old houses are). The rooms were large, high ceilinged, with wonderful detail. The corridors on the other hand felt kind of cramped. They kept the place neat of course, but it had kind of a musty feel all the same, and Jenna felt discomfort in the master bedroom. Nothing serious, no hairs-standing-up or anything that severe; she just got the feeling that it was a hot spot. The grounds were well landscaped and maintained, and there was a massive garden in back, complete with tall hedges and a central square with benches and statues and the like. I've always wanted a huge garden like that.

The place as I mentioned was a tobacco plantation; it actually had very little tragedy in it's history besides the natural deaths of some ailing family members. There was one unnatural death known to have occurred -- a servant woman was crushed to death in a moving accident. Her spectre was said to haunt the area where she was killed. The original lord of the manor was seen in various places as well, and it was he who I think we eventually saw. Nothing tragic ever happened to him, so speculation on why he

haunted the place ran from the friendly "he loved his plantation so much he likes to return and visit" to "he was a devil worshipping baby killer and it's just nobody has found the secret room where he ate their hearts yet". Whatever the reason, he was supposedly there with the ghost of the dead lady, along with some of the usual noises associated with ghosts (including piano music -- and there was no piano in the house anymore).

One thing of note about this trip; not once did we find our batteries drained. I've said that drained batteries invariably lead to phenomena for my team, but there have been times when we've experienced things without the drain. Don't ask me why, I haven't a clue. Regardless, our first two nights were enjoyable and not entirely uneventful -- we mostly camped out in the master bedroom both times, being mindful to stay the hell off the furniture (I think some of the items in this house could have easily funded a new car). We heard some knockings in the hallway and once, footsteps on a staircase. They were minor, and the knockings especially really could have been explained as natural, particularly in an old house. But the footsteps gave us a good creep and were loud enough that I'm willing to believe they were supernatural. I really wanted to hear the piano but sadly we never did.

The third night was warm and cloudless, and it was a harvest moon so we decided to stake out the garden. As I mentioned I love big gardens so I was really digging the place. We all took turns alternating between walking around the garden paths and camping out in the center square.

It had been a quiet night; we hadn't heard or seen a thing besides some perfectly mundane wildlife (and no sasquatches; perhaps they don't go as far south as we were this time). Kevin and I sat in the main square, which aside from a pathway leading out at each end of the square was entirely encased in hedges about 6 feet tall. Jenna and Sara were currently walking the garden. They were both shorter than the hedges (Sara's 5'7 and Jenna's an itty bitty 5'2 -- I've had backpacks that could comfortably hold Jenna) so we couldn't see them. But it was late, about 4:30 in the morning, and we were all tired and fairly certain we weren't going to witness anything, so they were a bit lax in our usual discipline. We could hear them talking and giggling about whatever the hell it is girls talk about when guys aren't around. Kittens and chocolate, I bet.

I was about to suggest to Kevin that we grab them and pack it in for the night when I caught a sharp odor of smoke and tobacco. Thus far I haven't had cause to mention smells much in my posts, but they're also common in hauntings -- perfumes and favorite scents often linger, and supposedly bad smells (like shit) are supposed to be signs of demonic infestation. Anyway I bolted upright, and as I mentioned before Kevin was blessed with quite a nose, so he picked up the scent quickly as well. We looked around wildly and spotted a male figure standing in the middle of one of the pathways, just outside the square. This guy had his back to us, but appeared to wear a black longcoat that was very much like what you see in pictures of the Washington era. Unlike our other apparition he was transparent and had a distinct head of grey hair. He gave absolutely no sign that he was aware of us.

Now let me be clear, there weren't any bad feelings with this ghost. I was very frightened of course, as was Kevin. But there was no feeling of wrongness or menace or anything like that -- it was just peculiar and a little surreal. Actually a lot surreal. We knew who this guy was supposed to be, and we doubted that he was hanging around because of some mis-deeds in life that some people claimed were the cause, so we

were just...enthralled. Kevin snapped about six pictures, two of which didn't turn out at all when we developed them, three showed nothing, and the last had a peculiarity but we decided it wasn't supernatural. Bad exposure or a fuckup in development, I don't know, but it was a hell of a dissapointment.

I began whispering Jenna's name sharply, trying to get her attention without making enough noise to chase away the ghost, when he turned and started walking away -- following the same path that they were now heading down, except in the opposite direction. They were going to run right into him and I wanted them to be ready. I decided to take a risk and raised my voice..."Jenna!"

"What?"

"We saw him, he's coming your way down the path!" At this point I heard them both babbling, and Kevin and I slowly crept up hoping to get another peek at him. We peered around the hedge -- and saw nothing but our two huntresses, looking frantically this way and that hoping to spot him. He had dissappeared. It's entirely possible that my raising my voice made him poof. Maybe Jenna and Sara talking did it. It's equally possible he just decided he didn't want to show himself anymore. More on that in a moment. They were really dissappointed at missing him, but hopeful that the pictures held something. As I said, that too would turn out to be a dissapointment. But they needn't have worried.

Dawn was drawing near and we were exhausted, so Kevin and I packed up our gear while the girls ducked into the house to use the bathroom. Just as we finished stowing the last of our equipment we heard them both give a shriek of excitement, and Kevin and I both hit the ground running. We burst through the doors of the house, to find both of them freaked out and excited; they'd caught a glimpse of the same exact figure going up the staircase. Interestingly, he made no sound doing so, and they hadn't smelled anything like we had. They described him in detail, and it matched what Kevin and I had seen. They also mentioned not being particularly afraid as much as they were fascinated. We waited around another 20 minutes or so in hopes he'd come back, but no such luck. So we thanked him for letting us see him, said the usual "don't follow us please" prayers, locked up and left.

Now in hindsight I really think he was a time wrinkle and not an actual spirit, which eliminates the theory that he purposely chose not to show himself to Jenna and Sara. He gave no indication at any time that he was aware of us, either in his looks or actions. All previous sightings of him also confirmed a complete lack of interaction with the environment. This however, does not explain the smells.

The female ghost (who I wish we had seen) is more likely to be a traditional "ghost". She died a tragic death before her time, and I suspect she's responsible for the noises associated with the house, including the footsteps we heard. As I said I'm on the fence about whether the knockings were ghostly or just the house settling or something like that -- they were very light. Regardless, we didn't get a chance to experience this lady like we wanted to.

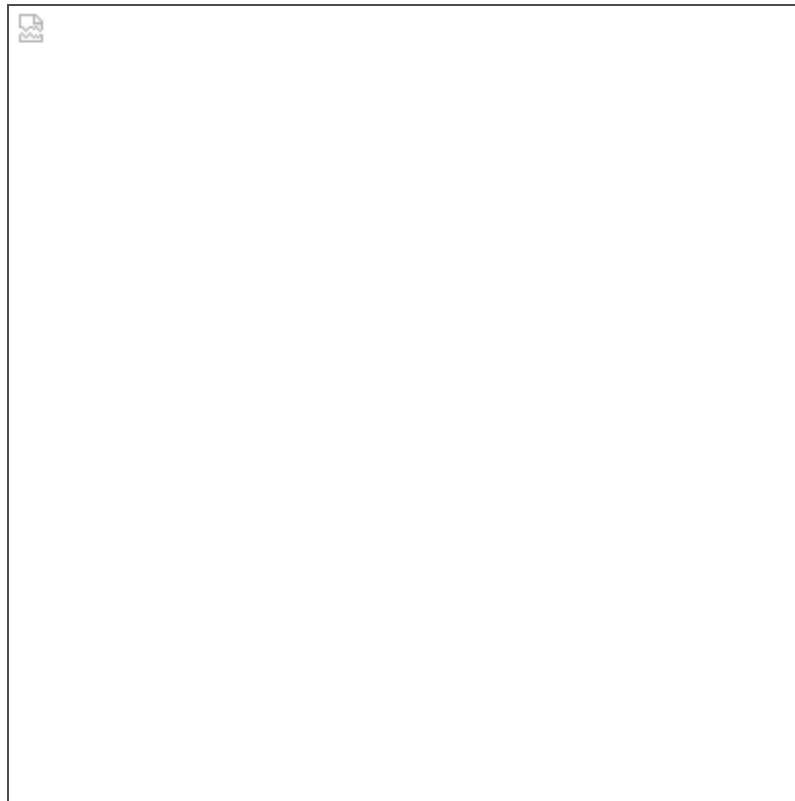
Despite that, this was a hell of a trip, and it's the first and only time we've gone on an extended road trip. I am very thankful to have gotten the opportunity to visit the plantation in this manner. That we saw our second apparition was just icing on an already sweet cake.

JOHNNY CANUCK – RED EYES

When I was a teen, I lived out in the country on a 100-acre hobby farm. Most of those 100 acres were forest and swamp. Our main focus was raising exotic birds/fowl. Fancy geese and peacocks and such, but also regular chickens, ducks, and turkeys.

One late afternoon, a friend and I were exploring a trail we'd found a few days earlier. It's a barely visible trail cut at the end of the dead-end road where my "driveway" was (the driveway was a little more than a mile long).

Here's kinda how it looked:



My buddy and I are wandering down this trail, having nothing better to do, when we spot across an even smaller and more overgrown trail branching off from this one. We've already had supper, so we think "what the hell, let's go see what we can find". Sometimes, you'd find the coolest stuff somebody'd dumped years and years ago, like the old rusting van we'd turned into a fort. Anyway, we wander down this barely visible trail, and we stumble upon a clearing. By the edge of this clearing is an old one-room shack, most likely put up by a squatter. It's in a pretty bad state; planks are falling off the sides revealing old, rotting tarpaper, there's a hole in the roof, and the one window has been broken and re-broken. We start to get nervous, as whoever built the place might have a gun. You don't want to be trespassing on a squatter's land, as they're usually pretty crazy.

As this fact is registering on us, I look over and notice that there's some kind of an animal pen made out of chicken wire built onto the back and side of the shack. I move a bit to look at the pen, and I see about 15-20 dead and mostly decomposed chickens lying there. They're mostly bone and feather, and what little flesh is left doesn't stink all that much anymore. The remains

haven't been scattered, which means no animals have been chewing on them. Some of the chickens from our farm had gone missing a year or so before this, and some of the bundles of feathers had the same coloration as ours.

Suddenly, my buddy grabs me by the arm and screams "Let's get out of here!" He'd been staring intently at the shack when he'd freaked out. I looked back to see what had scared him, and I didn't think I saw anything... unless...

We run back to the mouth of the trail at breakneck speeds, jump on our bikes, and tear off down my driveway. When we arrive safely at the house, I ask him what he thought he saw. I'm terrified that he'll confirm what I thought I'd glimpsed.

He did.

"I just felt like something was really wrong there. Then I saw those eyes, those creepy red eyes staring out at me from that shack..."

We eventually tell his dad - who's lived in the area since he was a kid - what we thought we saw. He gets very quiet, and makes us promise we'll never go down that way without an adult present ever again. He refuses to answer any more questions about it.

My friend and I have never talked about it since, and we certainly never repeated our trip down the trail.

THE BIG LEBOWSKI – DEAD CAT

Well, Incarna, if you don't mind I'd like your opinion on my house.

I've lived in the same house since I was five years old. I'm 25 now and have purchased it from my father. The only places of interest are the front door, the smaller bedroom's closet, the upstairs hallway's closet, and the basement. The house itself is probably nearly 110 years old.

The smaller bedroom's closet runs the length of the bedroom and has a very small door leading to the attic with two latches and two padlocks on it. The attic itself runs the length of the upstairs (smaller bedroom excluded) and has a secret passage. The passage contains a small room with a bench and a ladder. The ladder's rungs were far too far apart for me to climb as a child and the passage up top is too small for me to squeeze into now. I've used flashlights to see what I can up there and it looks like an empty landing, there's also what I think to be another empty landing five feet further up and behind you (if you're climbing the ladder) with no way to reach, unless you can jump five feet vertically and 7 feet across.



The first odd thing my family (older and younger brother) and I noticed was the front door's lock. The door itself is probably as old as the house and extremely sturdy. The dead bolt is newer than the door but at least 50 years old. Almost on a nightly basis, you could hear the door lock and unlock itself non-stop. The timing was erratic and never seemed to follow a pattern. I set up a tape recorder years ago and confirmed that it is definitely the lock making the noise and not some old piping. The locking and unlocking always stops as soon as anyone comes downstairs. I still try to catch it every now and then but it never fails to cease if I come running or sneaking towards it. It also never starts if someone is downstairs throughout the night. The closest I've ever come to observing it was five years ago while I sat on my porch's swing. I heard it pop and click three times within six seconds. I stood up and faced the door but it stopped as soon as I turned. I sat back down and heard one last *click* as the door unlocked itself again.

The basement always gives off a strange vibe, but it's not very threatening. I remember going down there once shortly after we moved in to catch a quick glance of my recently deceased great grandmother smiling at me from between the washer and dryer. I was six years old then, so I wouldn't be surprised if that was just a childhood delusion or something else easily explainable.

The upstairs hallway's closet only had one strange incident, but it scared the crap out of me. I was twelve at the time and was woken up to a strange sound. It sounded exactly like two marbles clicking together. The sound came from the hallway itself just outside of my bedroom. I turned on the light and the noise stopped immediately. I looked around found nothing and turned the light back off. The clicking started back up again almost instantly but was much louder and faster. This time it managed to wake my older brother up as well. I turned the light on and decided to check out the hallway again. My brother must've assumed I was making the noise because he turned the bedroom light off before I could reach the light switch in the hallway. As soon as the light went out I heard three clicks and a crash. I lunged at the switch and turned the lights on and was amazed at what I saw. The hallway's closet door was opened and all the clothes that were hanging in it were on the floor. The 12' wooden pole that the clothes hung from was still intact but all the clothes were completely blocking the door. I went downstairs and slept it off. The next morning I checked it out and discovered all the hangers were piled up in a neat stack against the back wall of the closet. Of course, I got in trouble for the whole thing.

The closet that was in our bedroom (the one with the attic) was and still is the most messed up place in the house though. I hate to break off on a tangent but this is important. We had five cats when I was a kid. The oldest one, smokey, was more dog than cat. He followed me everywhere. I had a paper route and the cat would follow me through the whole route even during the coldest of Wisconsin winters. He used to climb up the ladder of my bunk bed (in a very loud and clumsy fashion) nightly to sleep by me. This cat would not leave my side, ever. When I was 15 he stopped coming upstairs. He'd still go into the basement so I know he didn't

have a problem with stairs. I tried several times to carry him upstairs and he'd get so scared that he'd attack me. This cat never even scratched me before this. This cat also hated other animals. It would attack dogs triple his size on sight as well as other cats.

November of 1996. Both my brothers and my father went up north for deer hunting. My mother was out of town visiting her sister. I was 16 and home alone because I was fairly well behaved. The second day of having the house to myself is when the weirdest thing I'd ever seen started. My big fatass all white long haired cat, Boris, went missing. I thought he had possibly snuck outside even though he never even attempted to before. I figured he'd turn up in the next couple of days. I was right.

The fourth day of having the house to myself was a normal school day at first. I decided to steal my brother's car for the day and drove home for lunch. I finished eating with half an hour to spare, and so I decided to play with my cats. I found three of them but couldn't find Smokey anywhere downstairs. I decided to check upstairs for the off chance that maybe after a year and a half he had enough courage to sleep in his old spot, my bed. When I got to the hallway I saw Smokey's tail in my bedroom facing the door. I entered the bedroom and he immediately began to shriek as loud as a cat can. He was facing the closet door which was open (I always kept it closed). The damn cat didn't even acknowledge my presence in the room. I started to panic a bit. I forced the cat downstairs and found my father's extra large maglight and headed back up to my room. Smokey was right on my tail. I knew something was wrong at this point and the hair on the back of my neck stood up. The closet was dark and cold, it's always ice cold so I didn't think this was abnormal. The stench was overwhelming. We had a freezer in our basement that a cat unplugged while we were on vacation and roughly 200lbs of meat had spoiled within it. The closet smelled worse. Much worse. I turned on my flashlight and pulled the light fixture's cord. Of course the damn bulb was burned out and my scared ass wasn't going in without more light. I got another bulb and replaced it. Then I found Boris.

He was lying down against the back wall of the closet exactly where I found the coat hangers in the other closet. He wasn't white anymore. Now I'm no expert, but I never would have guessed a cat's body had that much blood in it. All of his fur except a couple of patches on his head was stained maroon. The blood wasn't even all the way dried which still makes me wonder why it smelled so rotten in there. His face was contorted in a very fucked up expression, a cross between panic and sleepy. Smokey started screaming from the bedroom again, which didn't help the atmosphere. I grabbed a garbage bag and gloves from the kitchen and decided to take a closer look at Boris. I'm sorry if any of you are squeemish but this is how he felt, his back half was very rigid but it looked like his back left paw was broken badly. His front half felt spongy and boneless. Both of his front paws were severely broken and his neck was stretched at a very extreme angle. I poked his at his ribs a bit and they felt shattered. I had trouble locating them at all on his left side but the right side had a couple of intact ribs. His skull felt fine though. I'm a very very curious person and I didn't feel any panic for the first few minutes that I was looking him over. I felt extremely sad and wanted to see what caused his death. It's like the fear left me completely when I saw him and didn't return until I was almost done. Suddenly I felt a very urgent desire to get the fuck out of the house. I stuffed the cat into the garbage bag, surveyed the closet for something that may have fallen on him, and found something interesting under the cat. A bloody playing card. It probably came out of the toy box in the closet and when I washed it off I discovered it was a seven of clubs. I doubt that's important but it's stuck with me.

To be honest, the cat looked like it had been beaten to death by a psychopath. I don't even know how you could damage a cat that much. My family being out of town assured me that it wasn't one of them who did it. I love cats, so I know I didn't do it. Nothing was stolen and I doubt someone would break into my house with the sole purpose of beating one of my cats to death in a closet.

DAVEY LOCKWOOD – MY AUNT'S POT

Lets get one thing out - this story has nothing to do with drugs. It has to do with my Aunt's Pot. Like...cooking pot.

So the set up:

My Aunt was going out of town, and needed someone to watch her house. They had to stay there EVERY NIGHT because there were THIEVES AND CRIMINALS in her neighborhood. The lady is like 90 so I take up the bid and oblige. Gotta earn my place in the will right?

I show up at her house as she is leaving and she shows me around. A large kitchen, living room, and bathroom downstairs, with two bedrooms upstairs. Small house. We say our goodbyes, she leaves, and I get to work watching television. I'm not there maybe 30 minutes when there is this outrageously loud CLANGGGGGGggggggg from the kitchen. I run in, and am med with a stainless steal metal cooking pan, 12 inch size, rocking back and forth on the hardwood floor like it just fell off of the counter.

I didn't think twice about it, opened up cubbards until I found the pan area and tossed it in, then went back to watching TV. After about an hour of that, I started to get uncomfortable on the couch, so I went up to the guest bedroom and started to go to sleep. I remember thinking, how long has it been since someone has actually used this room. She has lived here like 50 years...has anyone really come over?

CLANG-PANG-TING-CLANG-TINGTINGtingtingting. The noise of metal on wood reverberated throughout the house. My heart was hammering in my neck as I peered out of the doorway down the stairs.

At the bottom sat that same pan, horror-movie style in a single patch of light cast by the street lamps outside. The stainless steal bounced the yellow light all over the room, making it look like everything was moving.

Was something moving?

I went down to check it out, keeping my eyes on a dark spot against the wall. I really was not thinking ghost at all at this point. I don't know what I was thinking really. I knew what I needed to do though - hit the light and jump on that shadow. I crouched down and tightened up my legs, then hit the light switch and leaped onto...

A fucking coat rack. A shooting pain burnt through my face as my nose collided with one of the stupid ass coat rack arms. Fuck that. I'm going to get that pan and go the hell back to sleep. I turned around and stared at the now empty floor.

No pan.

I decided to continue with my previous plan and head upstairs to go back to sleep, cursing the coat wrack as I nursed my nose and watering eyes. Stupid pan. I got back into the dark room, laid down in bed, and started to go to sleep, pulling covers around me, and touched something cold. Not quite ice cold, but still surprising.

The pan was in the fucking bed with me. This was the first time I got an OK look at it, in the faint light that was coming in from the window. First, it was cold (I mentioned that). Second, it smelled awful. Like 7 day old hamburger awful. Third, it was whispering to me.

You know that sound when you hold a seashell up to your ear? That was sort of the sound coming out of the sound. Like a bunch of people whispering, then listened to through a metal funnel. I thought I caught my name once or twice while I carried the pan down the stairs.

Sleepyness numbed any fear or confusion. I just accepted things as they were happening. Moving talking pan. Sure. Why not. I put the pan the cupboard again and jammed it closed with a wooden spoon. Satisfied, I went back upstairs to sleep.

I woke up vaguely dreaming of pans. I decided it was all a dream and walked to the downstairs bathroom to do my morning business. This wasn't that hard, I thought. Sleep in a house for three nights and get payed for it. Good deal. Now, put your brain on pause for a second and I'm going to go through what happened next in slow motion.

First I opened the door to the bathroom and faced a mirror. In the mirror was a furious looking old man holding the pan over his head.

Second, I turned around and saw the pan flying at my face. I ducked instinctively, listening to the pan woosh over my head.

Third, the mirror behind me exploded in a mirror-induced death, sending its silvery carnage all over the bathroom and ricocheting the pot off the sink and into the bath tub, making a horrible, horrible amount of noise.

Back up to normal speed. I stood there a moment, dumbfounded, then picked up a piece of the mirror, touching it to try and figure out if that just happened. At the angle I was holding it, it reflected the faded dragon on my shirt (I know, I'm a goon). I turned it up to look at myself in the face. It was a reflex. Try picking up something reflective and not looking at yourself in the face.

I caught the reflection of something moving behind me...there it was again. I was fighting with myself at this point. Either put down the shard and act like it isn't there, or keep looking and see the old man trying to kill you. I stepped aside and moved the shard over, using it as a rear view mirror. Nothing still.

That was the moment I decided I had it with the house. I threw down the shard and walked outside, walking past the mess in the living room (I apparently had also knocked over a lamp in the coat rack indecent). I got in my car and started it, and started to back up when I saw the guest bedroom window was open. I just started to think, 'Did I leave that...'

The pot flew out of the window and broke through my front window, landing in the passenger seat. I picked it up and threw it out in one swift motion, all while reversing and getting the fuck out of dodge. Thus ended the pan incident.

UNTIL

My aunt called me at the end of the three days and thanked me for keeping the house so clean.

IT GETS EVEN WEIRDER

Three years later, when she died, she left *me specifically*, as in "And to Dave I leave...", that pan. In the note she said "It felt like the right thing to do." I buried it in a park.

So, to all you ghost hunters and believers who think that ghosts have some motive, or some purpose, no. You are wrong. Ghosts make no fucking sense and I am pretty sure have no idea what they are doing. I'm not saying they don't exist, I firmly believe after that incident, what I am saying is that they have no idea what they are up to.