



the
Enigmatic
Monster

About The Enigmatic Monster Project

The Enigmatic Monster is a compendium of short stories written by first time authors of varying ages about the enigma we know as the 'monster'.

This project is presented digitally, free of charge and was made for the public to enjoy.

For more information and updates please go to theenigmaticmonsterproject.wordpress.com/

This project was founded by Penny Cobb.

The stories included were edited by both R.J. Mornix and Dave Mornix. This book was put together by Jacob Zaccaria, Penny Cobb and Jonathan Kruschack. Special thanks to Chelsea Schell, Brad Jones and Denziel Mornix for their respective contributions.

Thank you for reading and please, keep it monstrous.



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The Meeting
Jonathan Kruschack



The Meeting

Jonathan Kruschack

On an autumn night, when the wind was erratic and cold, in a place that was far from prying eyes there took place a meeting. Just as it did every year on the same night, as far back as anyone could remember, or even attempt to.

It was illuminated by only the moon, full and large in the clear, dark sky. It lit up the entirety of the meeting place, a clearing next to a mountain which height was nigh-unimaginable.

The meeting took a while to get underway.

Some arrived early, some late. They came from all over the Earth, from back alleys, sewers and swamps to castles, great forests and deep sea chasms. Some flew with wings, some through sheer will. Some walked on their own two feet, some on countless feet. And some just appeared, bending space and time with a thought. But all had a connection to this place, this clearing next to a mountain wall. They grouped together at first, by respective homelands, with only the few most bold who dared to mingle. Soon enough, as they always did, the crowd became thoroughly mixed as the ice was broken.

Time seemed to slow to a near halt entirely as they chatted with each other. Eventually things quieted down and at the stroke of midnight, as if on some unspoken cue, all those gathered ceased making any noise at all.

Those who could see looked at each other, those who couldn't or wouldn't, simply waited.

The full moon hung still in the air. It seemed like an eternity until the silence was broken. A large lupine figure scratched at the fur on between its shoulder blades. Standing seven feet tall and naked from the waist up, pants ripped and torn by its bulk, with yellow eyes surrounded by pure blackness, "So, shall we start then?" Its accent was clearly British, though its pronunciation was poor due to its lycanthropy.

The crowd murmured heads were nodded in agreement, signifying a resounding yes.

Something with scales and bulbous, orbicular eyes asked "Who's first?" with its large lips trembling as they moved.

A pale, strong hand with neat, talon-like nails placed itself on the scaly shoulder as a thick, Romanian accent said "I would like the honour this year, aquatic one."

The thing with scales turned and saw a middle-aged man with a long, thin black moustache and fine clothing, wearing a long crimson coat on his shoulders like a cloak. It shrugged off

the hand with an uneasy look at the utterly pale gentleman, who gave a hardy laugh at the action.

He strode towards the center of the meeting place, the only things that betrayed his poise and calm were his four pronounced canine teeth and his eyes, which were completely bloodshot behind his black, circular shades. The one in red spoke once he reached his destination, “Good evening, my compatriots of the shadows. We are here to once more hold our contest, to determine who amongst us is most terrifying. Whose kind can strike fear in the inner most parts of humanity? And, since I have the floor, I nominate my own kind. I claim supremacy in the realm of fear for all my people. For the Vrykolakas, Strigoï and Sasabonsam. None cause strife and woe like those who drain the blood from the living, like we proud Nosferatu. All cower at our thirst.”

A smattering of murmurs from the crowd, the lycanthrope who spoke first bared his teeth and emitted a low growl as he barked out “You cannot claim supremacy that way, leech! My people are feared in the same fashion!” The crimson-clad Sanguisuge’s brow furrowed as he scoffed at the rebuke. “Compared to mine, your people” he spat out the word, “are nothing but mongrels. Bastard offspring, who mimic their betters quite poorly.”

It was not unheard of for such problems to occur at the meeting. The original nearly all but started with a bloody fight and only ended when all gathered lost interest in trying to kill each other, because where’s the fun in trying to murder something that cannot die? With a snarl and his lupine ears raised upwards, the wolf-man sprung forward at his red target, knocking away those ahead of him. The oh-so proud bloodsucker charged forward as well, red coat billowing behind him, eager to rend his challenger to pieces. They were both knocked back, suddenly. An unseen force separated the two before revealing itself. Those gathered heard a voice which sounded neither male nor female, more of a collection of many echoes.

“We...incorporeal and intangible...are the...true victors...” stated the near-transparent, twisting shape of light. It shifted and twitched, making the faint noise of static.

Jittering, it continued as its form flickered in and out of sight.

“Our kind...is a most...universal fear...spirits...doomed to...linger...on this mortal....plane...” Only a few moments in and no clear winner was in sight. Those who could speak spoke their peace. Some screamed and shrieked. A few clicked and chattered as their segmented eyes saw all. Those who could not speak communicated through proxy or telepathy.

The Elder Ones dreamed their words to the minds of all in attendance. All points from all beings were understood in one way or another, such was the way of the meeting.

There was more conflict as the night wore on, of course.

Conflicts occurred both verbal and physical. Shape-shifters were strangled, spirits were admonished and giant, irradiated lizards bled. The Meetings were becoming more and more like this with each passing moment.

Posturing, insults and violence...It amounted to nothing, like the year before it and the year before that and so on and so forth. Through all the madness, noise and viscera, only two had yet to do anything. Seated, ironically, in the only spot with any shadow, under a slight overhang of the great mountain next to the clearing, the lone figures were nearly impossible to notice.

They barely moved, only watching. Never looking at each other. Their breathing was quite rhythmic, nearly in perfect sync with the other.

Their kind had been to every meeting, of that all can be sure. As the meeting went back and forth time and time again, as creatures of darkness quarreled the two did seem to slowly grow restless. Their body language switched. The one who leaned on the large stone wall behind them removed himself, dusted off his shoulders and back very quietly.

The one who sat on a small stool stood up, lightly scratching the side of her neck. Their faces were stoic.

The man finally looked away from the meeting towards the moon, it almost directly above the clearing ground.

Looking to his cohort and she looking down to him; they said nothing but both knew it was finally time to act.

The meeting was finally calming down, at least in the physical sense. This is how each and every meeting went, after the gruesome violence and bickering than it came, a relaxed state. Followed by every being that had gathered, simultaneously giving up and leaving ... another meeting with no winner. Another pointless pissing match!

Then, from that solitary shadowy corner came a twin clearing of throats, causing heads, tendrils and things without names to turn and become silent. "I'd forgotten they were even here," said the pale gentleman in red, his accent quivering for what may be the first time in his un-life to a near-by wendigo.

It concurred, while hungrily and fearfully gnawing on its own gangly, clawed hands which smelled of decade-old rust. The hunger-spirit looked somehow even paler though it was difficult to tell with its already dead, white flesh.

The two emerged from the shadows into the bright glow of the moon, finally their appearances were revealed. The man was short, wearing a dark, grey suit with fine, black

pin-stripes. It matched his hat, which covered his cleanly bald head.

Dark circles under his eyes, creases on his face showed his age to be in the late 40s or early 50s. A thick, neatly trimmed beard with a triangular look adorned his jaw line. The woman wore a suit of similar pattern, though black with grey pin-stripes. She was much taller, nearly seven feet to his five foot nine. Her complexion was like that of an olive, her curly hair was tied into a loose pony-tail.

The two kicked up dust as they walked. Their expressions shifted, they now sported smirks as if they remembered an amusing anecdote. The air hung thick with their pure confidence. In the center of the meeting place, they casually turned and scanned those surrounding them.

The muttering died down, whispers ceased.

Taking a cigarillo package from inside his jacket and a lighter from his pants pocket, the man began to smoke.

Inhaling deeply, he slowly cracked his neck to the side, removed his hat and exhaled. Breathing out a cloud of opaque smoke, the man began to speak "Greetings, on behalf of my partner and I, to all those gathered. Our utmost respect to every being here," he looked around at his audience.

He met their eyes, if they had them. "And with that said," he continued. "I must say that each and every one of you, as well as those you represent by proxy, are wrong."

That got their attention. A scaled woman hissed in unison with her hair, which coiled aground her. The sheer audacity of that statement, causing even the Great Old Ones to stir in their slumber as if angered by a dream.

The woman interjected, "Perhaps my partner was too...blunt in his statements. Perhaps what he should have said was that we disagree and would like the opportunity to make our case in hopes of swaying you all with our reasoning."

She chooses her words carefully, though not out of fear.

More so out of respect like one shows to an elderly relative. "May we go on?" The crowd of creatures became utterly quiet. Their silence was a signal to continue. She thanked them, undoing her ponytail, quickly shaking free her hair and relaxing more. "We claim victory in this contest for all humanity. Simply put, none instill more fear than us."

As she spoke the old vampire seethed with blinding rage.

To him, she was at best a food source and at worst another bride. How dare, his meals speak that way, he thought.

His anger was not well hidden. His bloodshot eyes now were pure crimson, lacking pupils.

Deep lines appeared on his formerly handsome face.

With a mighty roar he shouted “Enough!” with his mouth was now full of sharp teeth like that of a great shark and his tongue was now long and pointed. “You are but cattle to our kind!” he said with a voice that could shatter the ranks of an army. “How could you possibly win this contest of terror?”

He lunged forward but a creature with the face of a Greek woman and the body of an emaciated cow held him back with the help of a constantly weeping Scottish ghost.

Shrugging them off, the vampire seemed to calm down as he returned to his former appearance, though every few moments he’d twitch with pure, white-hot rage.

A cloven hoof stomped down with a resounding crack.

A tall, naked figure strode out of the crowd with head of a horse and limbs too scrawny to support such weight.

It spoke, “The old bloodsucker has a point.” Two man-shaped creatures moved forward, both wrapped in cloth and wearing long coats. One, to give himself an appearance, for without it; he would be transparent. The other wore such wrappings to keep his dusty remains together. The first one spoke his peace, his West Sussex accent affecting near every word, “The King, he and I agree with the nude equine fellow. How can you, the very entity we all seek to frighten, win this contest?”

Dust left the ancient bandages as the old pharaoh nodded his agreement.

The vampire shoved away the two who held him, “Speak when your betters ask you something, morsels!”

The woman readied herself to continue, but the short man held up a hand to stop her. “Oh no,” she thought, “This might not end well.”

With a trademarked clink the man opened his lighter again and lit another cigarillo, he did this devoid of any emotion, ignoring the eyes and ears upon him. After a quick drag he exhaled in the vampire’s direction and looked him square in the eyes, never flinching or blinking for an instant. No mortal had done this since the incident of his second death. “Damn Bowie knives,” he thinks, recalling the attack. Scratching at his beard nonchalantly, the short man spoke again, “Our kind wins this ‘contest’ by default, to say the least.” Something with too many mouths parroted the man, “By default?!” It echoed the words multiple times.

Lowering the cigarillo the man continued, “Yes, you heard me right. Should I elaborate or are you all smart enough to figure it out on your own?” There was no sarcasm in that statement.

This man really wondered if they could even fathom to figure out his meaning. The crowd uttered amongst themselves.

Two floating heads whispered to each other then, one whose dangling organs smelled of vinegar told the man to watch his tone. His eyes narrowed, "Fine." Continuing, "Humanity can claim victory through default due to a complete lack of competition on the part of the other contestants."

Soon the man's vision and hearing were called into question by creatures with no eyes or ears. The irony was not lost on any of them. In a perfect, refined Japanese dialect, a second floating head asked if the man was unaware of how frightening their collected visages were. Her mouth was full of fangs just like the vampire's had been. In a similar dialect, a beautiful woman who had the legs and abdomen of a giant *Nephila Clavata* spider concurred, "I must agree with my compatriot, the little Nukekubi must be right. Neither you nor your partner show any fear towards us, therefore you must not know who we are or you must be ignorant of all fear. We may need to educate you." Despite the language barrier, all understood what they said. Again, such is the nature of the meeting.

The man smirked slightly. His partner noticed his tell, the small idiosyncrasy that gave away his true emotion: anger.

He had clenched his fist tightly then, released it just as quick.

"They have no idea," thought the woman, "no idea at all of what is to come." A final smoke and he tossed the cigarillo with reckless abandon, it bounced off the ground and onto the feet of the old mummified king, who looked down in disgust and stomped it out as he thought, "I used to have slaves for things such as this."

With smoke discharging from his nostrils, much like one of the dragons seated in the back of the crowd he began to move.

His smirk became what a person who enjoyed using thesauruses would call a 'coprophagous grin', so full of self-satisfaction at his own decision to give in to his anger.

"Oh, I disagree. I feel I should give you all a lesson or two, mainly in reality!" The short man gestured widely as he raged around the clearing. The crowd gave him as wide of a berth as possible.

"We win," the man said loudly, enunciating every syllable like an irate comedian, "because none of you are here!" he stopped suddenly, jerking his head to the right so his eyes met those of a cockatrice in the crowd. His whole body turned towards it, his right hand shooting out to grasp its wattle atop its avian head to force the creature's gaze to meet his. He dared

it to turn him to stone and it tried with all its might, failing miserably to the surprise of all around it.

“I think you’re all catching on.” said the man as he released his hold. Turning again he once more began to move.

“It’s not that we don’t know, because we do.” pointing the tips of all his fingers inward at his chest, “And it’s not that we don’t know fear because we are the epitome of it.” The old vampire audibly balked at the notion, the most amused he’d been in hours. Turning towards his heckler, “Do I detect a non-believer in our midst? Let me ask you something: does the great and fearsome walking parasite fear his brothers and sisters of the shadows? No? I thought so. And I know why.”

The bearded man stopped right in front of the vampire, who puffed out his chest and chin. “He doesn’t fear any of you because he thinks that you are just trumped up myths, pretending to be real so you may traipse upon the world of the living like his kind does. So arrogant, he won’t even consider that he may be one and the same!” And with that, the man cuffed the vampire with the back of his hand, knocking him off-balance for the first time in centuries.

“News-flash: you are a story. A long drawn out story.”

The man’s words were razors, driving deep into beings with impenetrable flesh. “Why should I fear a story any story! When my fellow man is just as likely to torture me to death as he is to greet me each morning?” His attention turned to the others, continuing his rant. “You are all nothing but stories! Stories, art pieces, misconceptions, lies and faded half-remembered memories! Most of which were dreamed up when my people still feared the sun!”

The woman watched, hating herself for her inaction.

But she stood still, remained silent. This needs to happen. It’s the only way this will end. Just please, don’t push too far, she thought.

“If it weren’t for our fears, none of you would exist!” he shouted, nearly frothing at the mouth like a rabid dog.

Gone was his grin, his face now full of pent-up malice and truth. “Your existence is continued because you make humanity feel better about itself! Some of you are even an entertaining read!” he looked straight at the tall figure in black, with the prominent stitches and bolts on his neck and black shades that hid reanimated eyes. After that, barely any of the creatures met his gaze. Even those without eyes shirked at the mere idea of it. The man came upon the slumbering old one, so big it looked as if it was another mountain made of rubbery, discoloured scales and tentacles, “Oh, don’t even get me started on you!”

The man ran up and kicked at it with the sole of his fine shoe twice, then stomped off. The force must have been like that of a gnat kissing a whale for all the good it did but the immense, cosmic entity shuddered and clenched its eyes very tight, as if it were a child startled by nightmares.

The woman sighed as this continued, seeing how the crowd reacted. They seemed to grow weaker with every word, sadder. “They are no longer terrifying. They’re just...terrible.” she mouthed the words but made no sound, her manners not letting her. She looked at all those gathered, turning around to do so. The wolf-man now sported a mangy fur coat, with grey flecks. The creature from the blackest of all lagoons looked very parched, lips chapped and shaking. The jorogumo’s eight legs now had arthritis and her silken webs were frayed and weak.

It all happened so quickly. The truth always hurts. It has to. “We humans fear all that is different, all that is unknown! And we hate what we fear,” the man kept going, his voice never once giving out. He moved back towards the center, near his partner.

“So we created you, all of you, from nothing. To explain what we didn’t know. To pretend that we never knew, to imitate the act of creation that we still aren’t able to reach concession on! But that didn’t do anything! We still fear everything and everyone! And with that hate...” he trailed off, his brow no longer creased. Anger left his mind very slowly.

He turned inward with his tone. “...And with that hate, we destroy. We cripple and maim. All out of fear, all out of not knowing or understanding,” the bearded man now looked as if he were at a funeral. Gone was his swagger, his ineffable raving. But his words were still tinged with venom, only now he felt it to. “So why should we fear any of you, your ideas and lies?” he spat the words out, not caring for their taste.

“That’s what you all are. Just ideas and I tell you this: Ideas. Are not. Invincible. They fade, they are forgotten as surely as every man and woman will one day die. Such is the fate of all things.”

He stops talking, just looked at those who are gathered.

His look was one of disgust. At them, at himself.

Then he felt a hand on his shoulder.

“My partner is right.” It was the woman with curly, dark hair. Looking to his side; looking at her strong features and determined eyes. Her grip tightens then relaxes in an instant as it moves back down to her side as she begins to move. Now it is he who watches her. “It is true. You all pale in comparison to us mere humans in the realm of fear.”

She moves her fingers quickly through her hair, keeping it out of her eyes. Those gathered cringe as she walks near them, expecting her words to be a finishing blow hidden in a kind tone that will obliterate them and scatter their remains to the winds. “We fear ourselves more than we ever could you,” she said, with eyes full of sympathy. Then a smile crept on to her face, like the dawn of a new day on the horizon.

It was time to turn it all around, thought the woman, her movement was now so fluid it was like a dance. Turning on a heel near 360 degrees; the sound of gravel scraping under it drawing everyone’s attention.

“But that doesn’t mean we don’t need you. That you aren’t important.” Heads perked up, those with ears listened, others read lips and some read minds. “We need you, much like my partner said. But not solely to make ourselves feel better, though that is true. You are a part of our collected histories and cultures. You are the night to our day. What would any of our heroes be without you most vile to fight against? How could we warn our headstrong children not to stray or avoid rapid water, without such cruel beings to try and devour them?” her arms outstretched as she said that, her feet planted firmly.

The bearded man’s mood lifted, he put his hat back on and grabbed his last smoke, though he did not light it.

The woman’s words were rejuvenating and pure.

Dull fangs and broken claws grew long and sharp once more. Fur grew shiny, muscles flexed and black, dead hearts began to beat harder.

Their confidence returned and so did their horrific beauty.

Roars of revitalization broke out. Bloodlust returned.

“So please, I employ you, continue! Go out and haunt the shadows, lurk in castles and caves! Stalk streets and roads drive us to madness with dreams!” Turning towards the vampire, who had regained the black in his long moustache and put back his circular shades. The vampire gave her the smallest, most noble of nods as she spun around and continued. “Spread pure, unadulterated terror and lavish in our screams! For we need to be frightened as much as you need to be frightening. To the abyss with this contest! There is no need for betters, for supremacy. You are all equals. We are all equals. Long live the creatures of darkness and woe!”

With that final statement, she exhaled, lowering her arms.

The woman looked around to see that she was now alone, save for her partner who finally lit the harsh cigarillo.

She looked up at the sky, judging there to be about an hour before the dawn broke.

Putting her hair back into a ponytail, she wiped the sweat from her brow. The man produced a flask from his coat which she took. Swigging down its contents, a smooth cognac, she soothed her parched throat.

Wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, she looked at her partner and he looked back at her. They both smiled and turned to leave. With a final drag of the cigarillo, the man left the unfinished thing on a rock in the center of the meeting place to slowly go out.

A smoldering tribute to the night for safe passage.



Jumbees
Dave A. Mornix



Jumbees

Dave A. Mornix

His grandmother told him to tie another knot in the rope.

He was the strongest knot tier in their village. He complied with what his grandmother said as he didn't want to get her mad at him again. She poured some salt out in front of the doorway a long narrow strip of it then back up again making the strip thicker.

He had wanted to ask her so many questions but knew the answers to most of them already. It was another moonless night or so the elders predicted. He looked across the way and saw his neighbor his aunt doing the same thing on her stoop.

Empty shoes were left outside by the doors. Everyone had long bits of rope knotted repeatedly leaving them outside the doors, along with mountains of salt or in some cases lines of salt blocking the doorway protecting them from the evil spirits. When there was no moon in the skies it meant all beings of evil could run amok and play. Children weren't safe.

Oh, the children were never safe on moonless nights.

Piles of sands or salt lay outside front doors, empty shoes and long knotted ropes. Normally he would sleep alone but tonight his grandmother would have him in her room with his sister and brother. There would be a lamp burning all night and his grandmother would keep a watch over them.

They weren't real he kept repeating in his head it was just superstitions that the old people told them to keep them in line. They weren't real. He had a habit of sleep walking once they were inside his grandmother shut the door and barricaded it.

The Jumbees were evil spirits that would come in the night on a moonless evening when it was dark with only the stars to keep you company. They were fierce creatures that would steal souls or worse steal the children. Once a young girl wandered off into the night and the elders blame the Jumbees for it.

Ever since the villagers keep a keen eye for moonless nights they burned a candle in hopes she would return and to also see the Jumbees when they came.

His grandmother made them all get into bed and wasn't satisfied until they were all sleeping. He couldn't sleep but she thought he was. It was such foolishness part of him wanted to go outside and prove to the old woman she was crazy for believing in such things and another part of him wanted to hide under the covers until morning. They weren't real, he repeated in

his mind over and over again. They just weren't real.

Drifting off to sleep he dreamt about playing cricket out in the field with his friends. It was a warm afternoon and the bright hot sun shone down on them. Cassie the girl that disappeared two years ago was in the field with them. She waved at him. He waved back.

She was a nice girl. He liked her. Everyone liked her. She was one of the nicest people he knew. She was up to bat. He was bowling for her.

Smiling at her he winked. She blushed and smiled back.

Stepping back he wanted to hit a six just for her. Part of him wanted to bowl her out and part of him wanted her to hit the ball for a six or a four. Her hair was braided and tied back.

Her face shiny and friendly her kindness shone through her eyes. A few of his friends were chanting to strike her out. There weren't many girls like her around.

Running toward the pitch he wound up the ball it bounced once and she missed. It was right there for her to hit too.

He couldn't have been nicer, he thought. Someone tossed him another ball. He walked back to where he started shaking his head. Turning he smiled at her. Then winked, she blushed again. He felt his heart fluttered. Yes he liked her a little more than he should, he thought. Winding up the ball he ran and bowled the ball again. It bounced once and she hit it.

"Four runs," someone shouted. Another person concurred.

Yes, he let her have it. Trying to look disappointed he turned and pointed at her. She smiled. He winked. She blushed.

Her eyes glowed red. He choked and swallowed hard.

Rubbing his eyes he looked again. He was outside in the dark a few feet from his doorstep. There was a pair of red eyes watching him.

Stepping backwards quietly, he heard his grandmother screaming his name. His sister began to cry.

The night air clung to his sweaty body. He was sleep walking again. How could he do this? His heart was pounding so hard he felt like it was going to jump out of his chest. If it did would the thing with the red eyes eat it? Something told him YES!

Stepping back he kept moving slowly trying to get to his front door which felt like a million miles away. In truth it was just eight more steps backwards and he could get back in.

Back inside the safety of his home and hide under the covers.

The problem though was every one step he took he saw another pair of red eyes pop up to see what the commotion was.

There were more of them. There was too many to take on. Jumbees? Were they really Jumbees? Oh god how could his grandmother and the elders be right about this? He tried the call out to his grandmother who was crying and calling his name out in the night. His voice could not escape his lips.

His chest was pounding so hard it made it hard for him to fill his lungs with air. He had trouble breathing.

His shallow breathing grew raspier by the second.

Taking another step backwards he saw another pair of red eyes pop up out of his peripheral vision.

Stories of the Jumbees tearing a human being apart while he was still breathing as it stood over him and ate his liver. Images leapt in his mind. God he was too young to die. He didn't want to die. He should have stayed awake and not fallen asleep.

Swallowing hard he tried to take another step backwards.

He was safe though, since he was a child they didn't do that to children, at least not that he heard about. Only adults that got in the way suffered such an atrocious fate.

His grandmother was at the door way. "They are all around you. Come to granny baby boy come to granny," she sobbed.

Biting back the fear that shook his body he turned and ran towards her. Granny! His mind called out, got to get to granny!

Something grabbed at his heels. His legs were stinging and he felt something biting him. She grabbed him and kicked his leg then slammed the door. His sister stood there shaking holding the lamp.

His brother stared wide eyed at them. "Did any get into the house?" his grandmother snapped at his brother.

The boy stared wide eyed at her shaking his head no.

She checked him over and hugged him tightly.

Something kept pounding against the door. She barricaded the door again and they all huddled together by the lamp.

There was a commotion outside that he had never heard before.

It sounded like the Jumbees were chasing the chickens around. They didn't eat chickens but

they were mad that they were denied a human child. They banged against the door.

Trying to knock it open, they went around their home and banged on the windows that were boarded up.

Smashing glass and trying to get in.

“They will go away soon,” their grandmother hugged them and rocked them.

How could they be real? All he saw was the red glowing eyes. Rubbing his leg it felt sticky and wet. Looking down he saw that he was bleeding. His grandmother quickly tore a piece of her nightgown off and tied it around his leg. He didn't want to let his grandmother go. He didn't realize until he began to stop shaking that he was shaking really badly. His lungs felt like they were fillet over some hot coals. If he hadn't seen it he would never have believed them to be real. Their red eyes burned into mind and into his soul he would never forget those red glowing eyes.

“We need to be very careful boy, they marked you. That means they will come back for you. We can't let them get you.”

He shuddered at the thought but his legs were aching there were scratches and a bite mark to remind him that what he saw tonight he would be reliving again if he wasn't careful.

Now being marked he would have to be extra careful.

The Jumbees were coming on moonless nights...on those nights he wouldn't sleep ever again.



Axendough
Penny Cobb



Axendough

Penny Cobb

Prologue: The End Begins

...Rotting.

The dreams.

The hopes.

Everything which had been held onto with a feverish zeal was

rotting away. They were turning to dust! One mistake had ended it all, taken everything away: his life, and then finally

his love. How cruel. Curses. He had dealt in them before,

but never in such a magnitude as this one, and never upon

himself. Most had directions. This one was blind.

It neither thought nor felt concerning the intended target.

The thing, if a thing it could be called, plowed on, aimless.

The irony of it was not lost on him. Silver fluid traced down his hands, falling to the earth.

Her blood. How cruel. She had left him. No one had ever dared leave him. They feared him. She had not, but how?

Who knew?

There had been nothing he could do to change that.

Now she was gone, rotting, turning to dust.

It was a mistake...

Forgive me, was his last thought before he was flung into the void.

A Poem found in one of the journals of Harris A. Clergue,

youngest son of the late Harriet and Patrick Clergue:

Axendough, a legend of old

A monster unspeakable from a realm untold
(Listen to my warning, and let the story unfold!)
As the legend shall go: His heart was black,
Cold, cruel, and callous.
He wore tattered robes which hung slack From his frame,
a body deserving the gallows. As tall as a tower,
Endowed with hideous strengths,
In short: a monster.
To what lengths
Would he go to avenge himself?
I pray that we never know,
Nay, not even myself!
With claws like knives,
The shadow in the dark
Preys upon children, men, and wives Without leaving trace nor mark.
The spell caster casts out his curses With neither thought nor impunity.
He has been relegated to the tales told To children by their nurses
But fear him still, yes, for he is here For eternity.
Who may stop him?
All is futility.

1: House of Bones

“I don’t even know why they want to renovate this place;
it’s a waste of time and money!” muttered Len.

“Just tear down the whole damn place and build a new house!” The other man nodded absently. It was no secret that the house frightened Len; it was a joke amongst the other men working for the contractors.

“How old did they say this house was?” he asked.

“From what I hear it’s pretty old,” Len replied.

“Too bad the original owners didn’t keep it. This house could’ve classified as a heritage site; and then the family would be rich if they ever sold it. It’d make a nice tourist spot too!”

Len rolled his eyes. “The original owners are dead, Gary!”

Was he rolling his eyes in fear? Gary wondered.

He’d been working for the same contracting company as Len for four years now; Len had never acted this strange on

a project before. Gary examined the walls.

They were on the second floor, in one of the three bedrooms;

the current owners wanted to make the second and third rooms into one large studio area. It would have been much cheaper to tear the place down and start from scratch. Gary wondered if the current owners were going to sell the house once it was finished. They could charge quite a bit.

In order to make the studio, they’d need to knock down

a wall or two. Normally he didn’t care, but this house was too old; it made him uneasy. What if the floor caved in?

There were more men working below them.

Listening to Len go on about tearing down the house also

made him feeling apprehensive. The man’s fear was starting to eat at him. “So what happened after the owners died?”

At the time the original owners, the Clergues, had been quite affluent up until their mysterious death. It was all Gary knew.

“After their death, their children left town. No one returned.

So basically the house was left to rot.” He plugged the shop

vac into the extension cord. “Nobody knew why they didn’t come back to the house. A few years back there was a case of three children who were reported missing in this area though.”

“Okay,” Gary said slowly. Was that what Len was bothered about? From what he knew the nearest house was a kilometer down the road. They were also in bear country.

“Get a grip on yourself, Len!” He hefted the sledgehammer.

“It stinks in here,” Len muttered.

Gary rolled his eyes. The room hardly smelled at all. It was one of the better rooms, there had been no furniture or books for the mice to chew on and there was little water damage, if any. At the most, it was dusty.

“There’s something dead in the walls!” Len groaned.

“It’s probably a rat. Shut up.” Gary made the first swing, knocking a hole the size of a fist.

“Wait!”

“What the hell’s wrong with you? Can I do my damn job, please?” Gary didn’t even bother looking at the other man.

“I see it!” It was more of a whisper than a shout; the urgency in his voice was what struck Gary. “It’s looking straight at me, Gary!” Len stared out of the window facing the backyard.

All Gary could see was where the forest began.

Out of curiosity Gary went to where the Len was standing, just to see if there was something there. Len pointed at a spot. “It’s right where my finger is; I thought it was just another tree. Until it moved...”

Gary couldn’t see anything he asked, “What are you on?”

“Life,” Len replied sourly. “I’m not seeing things.

Its right in front of that birch tree. How can you miss it?

It is right there damn it! Now it’s looking at you, Gary...Shit!”

“Move out of the way. Okay, which birch tree are you looking at? There are at least twenty of them.” Gary stood where Len had been. He followed the man’s finger to the exact spot.

For a minute he stared hard. All he could see was the birch tree; the bottom half was black, and the rest was normal.

Teenagers came out to this place on dares, so it would seem natural for a few to strip the bark off of a tree. He’d never seen someone strip off that much before.

It seemed a bit senseless.

“Len, it’s a birch tree. Someone stripped off A LOT of bark.

That is not a monster. It isn’t anything.”

Len opened his mouth to protest, he shrugged his shoulders. "You're probably right. I don't know what's happening to me."

"Maybe you should take a few weeks," Gary suggested.

From what he knew Len was due for a holiday anyways.

There were enough men, so he wouldn't be missed.

"Let's finish this first," Len said. He turned his back on the window. Gary returned to the wall. An odd smell wafted from the hole. "I think a rat died in here."

A shout rang out, shrill and hoarse, loud enough to be heard from the main floor. One of the workers looked up to the ceiling.

"What--?"

Even before they had thought of posing the question there was a clamor coming from down the stairs, a clatter of frantic footsteps. "OH SHIT! SHIT! OH SHIT!" was what the two workers were saying, over and over again. Their voices held a hint of terror, even a touch of delirium. Len and Gary burst into the living room area with wild eyes. Len sunk to the floor while Gary leaned against one of the walls.

"You okay?" someone asked.

"What's going on?"

Slowly, Len lifted his eyes.

"Well?"

Gary began to sob. He started to thump his head against the wall, muttering, "No! No! No!"

Len cast his eyes to the floor. Funny that he should be so calm now. From the corner of his eye he saw the thing again.

It stood outside one of the windows. He tried not to scream. His words came out in a choked whisper.

"There are bones in the walls."

Once the proper authorities were called in the house was scoured from top to bottom. Inside the walls numerous skeletons were found; most were estimated to be the remains of children

aged three to ten.

The house was confiscated, and then left abandoned . . . again.

2: Always a Sad Shadow

Three years passed by since the grisly discovery at the old Clergue estate. The house had been forsaken this time, left to rot by itself...rotting.

The garden out in the front yard had soon grown into a tangled jungle that blocked the wretched place from view.

The people who drove by down the road were relieved at the prospect of NOT having to look at the place.

By now everyone knew the story.

He, it, sidled along down the dark corridors. They were truly empty now. What a blessed relief! Oh to be rid of those horrid reminders. But now that the ghosts of the past had vanished, he was all alone.

Atonement. Once seeming ridiculous, it was now an unattainable dream. He would always be a sad shadow. He would creep along in the dark, afraid to show himself to the light of day. Then he would rot.

Alone...

A soft rumbling caught his attention. Looking in the direction of the noise, Axendough let out a soft hiss.

Not alone anymore...

3: The Root Cellar

Let's go for a ride, they had said. Let's do something different, something cool!

So that's what they were doing. When asked to be the driver.

Susan had said sure with a smile, all the while thinking fuck you. What was she, their chauffer?

She drove down the quiet road hitting ninety kilometers.

All the windows were down, and the radio was blaring.

It wasn't that she was bitter...just a tad disgruntled.

They always asked, because she was the only one with a license to drive. At least they asked.

The sound of the rushing wind competed with the sounds of Fleetwood Mac.

Their older songs, though. They were the best.

“Can you switch the song?” Mark whined.

“No,” said the others, two girls and a guy. Mark didn’t like

most of Susan’s music, which was fine because she didn’t like most of his. They were evenly matched in that regard.

Susan caught Mark’s eyes roll into the back of his head.

Drama queen! She thought. “Hey, I know what we can do tonight!” she said. “Let’s go to the old Clergue estate! Apparently they found the bones of children in the walls!”

“Oh gross!” Hanna wrinkled her nose. She was a bit squeamish, that one. “Sweet!” That was Jake. “Its five minutes away, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, it’s pretty close by,” replied Susan. She scanned the fields. The house was hard to miss unless someone knew what to look for. She spotted it on the left. Susan carefully pulled into the unkempt driveway; partway through they had to get out and walk for the remainder of the trek.

Unkempt was an understatement.

The decrepit building loomed up like a giant, bathed in a warm orange light. The sun had already begun its descent. Twilight was fast approaching.

“I really don’t like this,” Hanna whispered.

“Why are you whispering?” Mark asked.

“I don’t know. You know how some people get a very bad feeling about a place?”

“Yeah?”

“I’m feeling it.”

“Sure.” Mark rolled his eyes.

“We’ve only been here for five minutes, Hanna,” Susan broke in. If they got into another fight she’d make them walk home...alone...in the dark.

“You’re serious about this, aren’t you?”

“Yes, Hanna. You don’t have to go inside, you know.”

They came to the old porch. Mosses and lichens covered it like a floral blight and where it

had caved in tall thistles sprouted. Stepping around the weeds Susan went up the steps to the front door. The door handle had long since gone missing; she nudged the old wood. It fell right off the hinges with a dull thud. "Geez!" she jumped back a step.

"Maybe we shouldn't go inside," Jake began.

"Yeah, you're right," Susan agreed. "This place looks like it'll fall. Where's Mark?"

"I'm over here!" They all turned their heads in the direction

of Mark's voice. While Susan had gone onto the porch he had explored around the house. "I think I found the door to a cellar or something!"

"I'll just stay here, thanks." Hanna hugged herself for warmth.

It was beginning to get cooler now that the sun was going down. Susan went around the house. Jake remained with Hanna. "We'll wait for you," he said softly. Why was everyone whispering again? Mark was crouching over something in the ground. When he looked up at her he said, "It's hard to see at first, but this is definitely a door." His voice was a whisper too as he traced the faint outline of the said door.

Someone had taken the time to hide the entrance.

Now the question remained: what was it an entrance too?

"See if you can open it." She was very curious.

In the news articles Susan had read nothing about a secret cellar. Perhaps there were more bones waiting to be uncovered.

Mark had to dig in the sod, but he found the latch after five minutes. "Maybe the grass just grew over it?" he suggested.

"People forget about these things all the time." Mark sounded unsure of that explanation.

"I remember they used to teach us about the local history in grade school; no one ever thought that one of the city's most influential families could do any wrong!"

"Yeah," Mark nodded his head in agreement.

"They won't be teaching kids about this stuff anymore. At least, not the bad stuff."

"I wonder who did it," Susan asked. "Was it the parents, or one of their kids? Apparently their youngest son had committed himself in his forties..."

"Wait, what?"

"He checked himself into an insanity ward. There's got to be some trauma associated with

this place.”

“What if it was somebody else stuffing the walls?”

Here was a thought. “Maybe somebody was sneaking into the house through this secret cellar at night. They could’ve murdered the Clergues and tortured their kids!”

Susan grimaced. “That would be horrible.” Mark’s idea seemed far-fetched, but it didn’t mean it wasn’t possible. No one had been able to determine who or what had been the cause of death to those poor children.

Finally, Mark lifted the door.

A black, gaping hole stared at them from the ground.

Some strange, faint smell wafted up to greet their noses. It wasn’t a bad smell...just an odd one. It was unrecognizable.

“Who’s first?” Mark hesitated.

“I’ll go. You found the door, so I’ll find the way.”

Susan descended down into the dark cellar.

The air steadily became damp and cool. It looked as if no one had been down here for ages. It seemed as if no one had ever been down here at all. Layers of dust caked and clung to every surface. Thick layers of dust gripped every surface.

Susan wrinkled her nose in disgust.

When she came upon a hallway Susan stopped.

At the end of the corridor was a strange orange glow.

“What the hell?” she murmured. Looking up she saw Mark coming down the stairs. He was surrounded by a square halo.

She motioned for him to be quiet, and then indicated the light; his reaction was like her own. Could someone actually be down here? They crept down the hallway. Once they reached the end they came to a room.

At its center was an antique table. It was in mint condition.

It was also very old. There was dust everywhere else except on that table. A candle had been placed at the center of the table. The candle was the source of the orange glow a small flame consumed the wick, dancing strangely in the dark.

It held an unnatural quality.

Susan put her hand on the table. It was a fine piece of work.

Had someone put it there to be admired? It was a small room.

So who else was here?

Just beyond the candles glow she noticed it...a wingback chair.

“Huh.” Something drew her one step closer. Bending forward to investigate--Mark poked her arm. “Hey! Are you all right?”

No. She was not all right.

Sitting in the chair was it! He...the dark shadow! It was not human. It was too big, too skinny; too long...Everything about it was wrong. Leaning forward, as if to observe the observers... the thing cocked its head to one side. It turned to Susan.

With a monstrously large hand it put something into its face.

It, he, the dark shadow, had put on his eyes.

They shone white, colourless in the darkness, soulless.

Mark dragged the transfixed Susan past the table.

In his frantic scabble he bumped into the table, knocking the candle to the ground. Before Susan could blink everyone was thumping to the car like a herd of mad elephants, half carrying her in their arms. As the old house burst into a crackling blaze Jake was speeding away. “Susan!” Hanna’s voice was muffled.

All she could see were those two white eyes.

What was happening to her?

She blinked.

4: The Beginning of the End

Susan blinked again.

She felt something swerve violently, followed by a sickening impact. A loud whine filled her ears. Someone screamed.

Then, all for the whining, it became silent.

“I can’t feel my legs,” She muttered.

No one answered. “Mark?” her voice was hoarse.

Her eyelids fluttered but she could not open them; she whined in frustration. Through her eyelids she saw a dark shadow loom up before her. “Jake?”

No one answered. A sob nearly choked her.

Someone touched her waist. “Mark?” The sensation left her...What was wrong with her legs? Then the realization hit her.

“Holy shit, what the hell is that on the road!” that had been Jake. He screamed that before swerving to avoid the thing. Hanna let out a quick sob, right before the glass shattered her face. “No!”

Yes, there had been the distinct sound of shattering glass.

Susan’s body had tensed at that.

The air bags had burst out from the dashboard with a whoosh and a thud. The two at the front would have been dead a few seconds before that.

It was a few seconds too late to save them... Mark... He was okay, but unconscious. It was him who had fallen across her legs, cutting off the circulation.

So who was touching her? A pointy object or so it seemed, was placed on her forehead. Was it a pencil?

No. It was the thing; it was resting one of its long claws on her head. Susan forced her eyes open to stare straight into the hidden face. Those two white orbs stared at her, or at least she thought they did. It could be looking at a daisy and she wouldn’t know the difference.

“Damn you!” she spat.

The creature, if it could be called such, drew back as if whipped. What kind of monster cringed after it had done something this horrible?

If only Susan knew.

She’d never know that she reminded the thing of someone else, someone he had lost a long time ago. Susan would also never know that that someone had given him the exact same reaction.

Now was a different time though. The long years of abject suffering had bludgeoned a once proud and arrogant heart...

With something resembling a sigh, the creature turned away.

“Forgive me,” it murmured.

“No!” she told it coldly.

The thing let out a piteous howl.

“No!” was its last word before violently dashing itself onto the ground.



Bedeviled
Dave A. Mornix



Bedeviled

Dave Mornix

Too many restless nights his back was sore and he was tired of being tired. His wife kept nagging him to buy a new bed. RIP's had a deal this week. He knew Rip back from the old days and he was always a nice guy. It was sad that he had a heart attack last month and died. The family took it hard most of them moved away except for his son Mike.

It was time to pay Mike a visit and get a new bed, so it would be one less thing Kevin's wife would nag him about.

God that woman would probably nag him to death.

She even blamed him for the weather like he had control over that. Underneath it all she was a wonderful woman just not lately. If he could stuff her in the trunk just for an hour to have some peace and quiet he would. The only thing stopping him was he would have to let her out and he'd be a dead man.

No, he couldn't do anything to his wife that was mean.

Ignoring her was the best medicine for his soul and it would wind up her up so much, so sometimes he thought she would explode. Smirking at the thought he shook it from his head.

No, he reminded himself he loved his wife. It was for better and for worse. What happen to the better part?

Dang, he got ripped off. He wondered if there was a department to report that to? Chuckling to himself he knew better. Driving up to the lot, he parked and went inside.

Mike was helping another customer. Wandering around it was a nice furniture store it had everything. Plus if you were looking for something special they would order it online for you if they didn't have it stock. It was the only place he would shop for anything.

A young woman came over to him.

"Welcome to Sweet Dreams; may I help you with something?"

"I need a new bed."

"What do you have in mind?"

"Well I want something like my old one, but new."

"How big is your bed?"

“Its bed size, what do you think?” he didn’t like her she was asking too many questions, she reminded him of his wife. If he wanted to be asked so many questions it would have been better coming from her.

“Its okay Arlene I’ve got this customer,” Mike patted him on the back. “How are you doing Kevin?”

“I’m good.” He nodded. Mike reminded him of Rip.

“How’s your beautiful wife?”

“She’s been nagging me, Mike. If I don’t get a new bed today, I might be sleeping on the sofa for the rest of my life.”

“I hear you,” Mike laughed patting him on the shoulder, again, with understanding.

“Your dad was a great guy.”

“I know, Kevin, and he spoke so highly of you too. How about this beauty, Kevin? This is from a new line called Sweet Dreams.”

Kevin looked at it. It was a bed. What the hell did he know about picking one of these things out? It looked as big as the one he had at home but he didn’t know if this would make his wife happy.

God he was thinking maybe he should have brought her along.

“Listen Mike I might be wasting your time here. I have no idea what I’m supposed to be buying I just need a bed, so my wife won’t be angry anymore.”

“Is that all it takes then I need five of them,” Mike chuckled.

Kevin grinned and was grateful that Mike understood.

“Here this is very similar to the one that you have now with a small upgrade since we’re getting older it will just provide that extra support. Lay down try it out.” Mike nodded to the bed.

Hesitatingly Kevin put a hand on it and pressed down. “Feels good.”

“You have to lay down on it Kevin.”

“Alright Mike, alright,” he sat down trying to get the feel of the bed. It did feel like their bed, when they first bought it, but better. Kicking his feet up he laid back. The pillow soft fabric felt like clouds. He closed his eyes and caught himself. He almost fell asleep instantly. Caressing the fabric he grinned. “I’ll take it!”

“Great let’s get you ring through.”

“Thank you...you just saved me some trouble.” Getting up, reluctantly, he followed Mike over to the counter.

“When can I have it delivered?”

“Next week? How does that sound?”

“Too far away,” he frowned, staring back at the floor model.

“Can’t I have the floor model?”

“People have been laying on that one, are you sure Kevin?”

“You don’t understand my wife has been at my throat lately. I think if we could get a good night’s sleep it will be better for the both of us. She was threatening to walk out on me this morning.”

“Alright, I’ll knock off 15% since it’s the floor model. Do you have your truck here?”

“Yeah outside,” he pulled out his debit card and paid for it.

“I’ll get the boys to take it out for you.”

“Thanks.”

“You did good baby,” his wife leaned over and kissed him. It was the first time in months that she had done that.

He waited to see if he was going to get anything else.

When she rolled over and pulled the covers up he was just grateful to get a kiss. Grinning he was proud of himself for making his wife happy tonight. He really loved her.

She was trying his patienscs for the longest time but there was no one else he wanted to spend his life with.

Rolling over he drifted off.

Coming downstairs he couldn’t believe what a brand new bed did for the soul. He hadn’t had a sleep like that in years.

He felt younger, more alive and there was a spring to his step. Coming into the kitchen his wife had made him breakfast! This was a surprise.

“You old dog, you,” she giggled and playfully slapped him on the butt.

He looked at her and smiled. Feeling very pleased with himself he was grateful for stopping by Rip’s shop yesterday.

Sitting down he began eating. He couldn’t help but looking over at his wife she was in a very good mood this morning.

She was humming to herself and the kitchen looked so bright and clean.

“I’ll see you tonight lover,” she came over and kissed him hard on the lips. “Maybe tonight we can have a replay of last night. I didn’t know you had it still in you.”

She turned and sauntered off there was a swing in her hips he hadn’t seen in a while. What did she think happen last night? Whatever it was he didn’t care. As long as she was happy and holy smokes she made him breakfast.

Grinning he took his time and enjoyed it. Didn’t know when the next meal like this would find him. His day went by fast.

It was amazing what a good night’s sleep would do for you. That bed was amazing. Kevin couldn’t remember the last time he felt so refresh and alive. It had been awhile. Coming home it was late, but when he got inside he saw his wife had her book club over in the living room. Not wanting to disrupt them he tiptoed to the kitchen and was amazed to see dinner waiting for him. He almost went to ask his wife whose food it was. Twice in one day! Wow he was a lucky man.

He took his time and ate enjoying every bite then washed his dishes and headed upstairs. On the way up he heard his wife speaking to the ladies and paused. He was going to go and thank her, but her words caught his attention.

“...and last night was the best sex we have ever had.”

“Way to go Kevin.” One of the ladies giggled.

“Well someone is really lucky,” another one said.

“I’m telling no one was more surprised than I was,” his wife went on. Kevin thought well I am more surprised than you are, but said nothing and went upstairs. After a long, hot shower he headed to his bed. It was a weird nagging thought that caught him as he started to drift off. If he didn’t have sex with his wife, then who did? Could she have just had the most amazing vivid dream ever? That was it! She had to have been dreaming because he didn’t have sex with her.

He would have remembered that. Sleep won over.

He felt his wife joining him. She woke him up and they made love. He took his time and tried to make it memorable.

Afterwards he hugged her and they fell asleep. It was the closest they have been in years. It felt good and he couldn't imagine having anyone else in his arms. Sleep was a dream.

Morning came too fast for his liking. He yawned and stretched. He glanced at the clock and saw it was after seven.

His wife was nowhere to be seen. Getting up he had a quick shower then went downstairs for breakfast. She must have made him breakfast this morning he thought.

When he entered the kitchen he noticed it was the same as last night. Nothing had been touched. The only difference was the cups and saucers from the book club were in the drain board.

"Honey?" he called for his wife. She didn't reply.

Maybe she had an early meeting. Grabbing a quick bite he went outside to see his wife's car still parked in the garage. Crap, he thought. It must have given her trouble this morning. He'd have to take a look at it when he got back.

Climbing into his truck he looked at his house.

Something didn't seem right. It was like he was forgetting something. A small part of him wanted to go back in and give his own house a once over.

Shoving the crazy thought aside he headed off to work.

Since this morning his whole day was off. It was one crisis after another at work. Nothing seemed to work. Getting back home he was just grateful to walk through the door. Expecting to see his wife in the kitchen the house felt too quiet. He checked the living room. No one was there. He went to the kitchen no one was there. Walking through the whole house he found that it was empty it was just him there. Checking the phone there was one new message. Maybe his wife was running late, he thought.

The message was from his wife's office wondering where she was. The second one was to remind them that they both had dentist appointments tomorrow. And a third one was from his wife's office, they were looking for a file that she only knew where it was. Hanging up he tried calling his wife's cell phone. He heard it ringing inside the house.

He followed the noise until he found her purse in the living room. Picking it up he couldn't understand what that meant.

Sitting down he began frantically calling her friends and family.

No one had seen her since last night at the book club.

He called the police and told them there was a break-in, he knew if he had just said his wife was missing they wouldn't do anything.

Half hour later a police officer was at his door.

"Good evening Mr. Miller you reported that someone broke into your house?"

"Yes I did. Please come in."

"Were any windows broken? Where was the point of entry?"

"I'm not sure."

"Do you have a list of what was taken?"

"Only one thing missing."

"Is it very valuable?"

"Priceless."

"Do you have a picture of the item?"

He handed the officer a picture of his wife. The police officer looked down at the picture than up at him looking a little perplexed. "Is it the earrings?"

"No, it's my wife."

"Alright sir, when did she go missing?"

"Last night sometime."

"I see."

"You don't understand, she was here last night with her book club. Then she came to bed and woke me up. We had sex. I woke up and she was gone. I've called family and friends no one has seen her since last night. I went to work this morning.

I saw her car in the garage, and that it isn't unusual because it had been acting up lately and she would get a friend to pick her up. So, I went to work and didn't think anything of it. When I got home I checked the messages and there were two from her office looking for her. So she didn't go to work and I don't know where she is."

"I understand."

“No you don’t I know you have some crazy rule about missing people having to be gone for 24 hours, but come on lady, she’s my wife I don’t know where she is. She’s a pain in the ass, but I love her. You have to help me find her please.”

“I will take this information with me and check back with you.” The woman nodded and left.

He didn’t trust her. She didn’t look around the house for any clues and she didn’t look interested in finding anyone.

He had no idea where she was. His stomach felt sick and he couldn’t think right. Sitting on the sofa waiting for her to come home or waiting for someone to call about her the hours dragged by. It was four in the morning and he had heard nothing. He called the police again. They said they would send someone over in the morning and he should get some sleep.

It sounded like the same lady that had come by his house earlier. Dragging himself upstairs he crawled into bed and turned off the lights. At least this was the last place he saw her and he could be close to her in that way. Grabbing up her pillow he could smell her scent on it. It was a mixture of shampoo, bath soap and perfume that she used.

Closing his eyes he could almost feel her wrapping her arms around him. Pulling him against her warm firm body.

Then he realized something *was* pulling him!

Something was wrapped around his waist, and it wasn’t just the blanket he covered up with. He opened his mouth to scream, but something covered his mouth and pulled him down.

As it was pulling him down he could swear he heard his wife’s screaming for help. He had to help her, but first he had to get out of this Sweet Dream...



The Intruders
R. J. Davies Mornix



The Intruders

R. J. Davies Mornix

Wendy froze when she heard a noise coming from the bedroom just beyond the bathroom door. Was it just her imagination?

It was an old building after all. No, no it was just her imagination she chided herself. She had been feeling jumpy all day long and wasn't sure why.

"It's an old building," she reminded herself under her breath.

If you jump every time you think you hear something you are going to be a nervous wreck. Don't do it, she warned herself.

Nodding slightly she agreed.

Slowly she continued to lather her hair. Rubbing her fingers into her scalp it felt good but she didn't notice because she was still listening for noises outside her bathroom door.

She paused and strained her ears. There was a crash that sounded like one of her vases falling. That wasn't her imagination! Was there someone in her apartment?

Quickly she rinsed the soap from her hair and poked her head out the shower curtain again. Listening hard she held her breath...there were footsteps in the outer room!

She wasn't crazy...well maybe a little bit but not regarding this issue! Grabbing a towel off the rack on the wall she wrapped it around her and tucked it in. Looking around she grabbed the first thing that she could find...unfortunately for her it was the bathroom plunger. Creeping over to the door she pressed her ear against the door to listen. Her heart was pounding hard in her chest. There was a faint rasping sound...was that her? Holding her breath she listened hard and there was no sound at all except for the water running in the shower.

The intruder on the other side was doing the same thing.

Biting her bottom lip hard she said a quick silent prayer that she wouldn't die tonight.

Any other night she begged, but not tonight she had plans that she didn't want interrupted.

Still listening hard that's when she heard him on the other side of the door, whispering to someone else. Her heart hammered inside her chest it felt like it was going to burst through.

There were intruders in her apartment! How dare they break into her place! They obviously didn't know what kind of trouble they were getting themselves into, she wanted to throw

open the door and knock them out. It didn't matter who they were on the other side she knew she could take them.

Seeing a foggy version of herself in the mirror she realized she was in no position to knock anyone out. Pressing her slim hip against the door she decided that she needed to do something before they tried to barge into her bathroom.

The lock on the door was broken so that wasn't an option.

Looking around the room there was nothing to barricade the door with. Her options were next to nothing in this department.

Just then the door knob began to turn slowly...

She jumped back and pressed against the wall a head popped in looking at the shower. A large figure dressed in black entered the room his eyes were on the shower. A burglar...no way...this was unbelievable! What were the odds someone would break into her place? Not taking her eyes off him she brought the plunger down hard across the back of his neck.

He turned around and looked at her with his annoyed dark brown beady eyes.

Bumping into the door she swung at him again hitting him in the face. He grabbed her hands and shook her.

Kicking hard she aimed for his family jewels.

With a grumbling moan he fell to his knees grabbing her around the waist. She used her knee and caught him in the stomach.

She wanted to yell for help but thought, what's the point?

This old building...you couldn't hear a thing. The walls were too thick. A person could die in this building and no one would notice until the body started to rot. That innocent thought distracted her momentarily...the image was like watching a traffic accident it was very hard to look away.

A large hand grabbed her around the mouth. She fought wildly and wriggled free. She lost her towel in the battle but she was free from the invader. He grabbed her ankle and she fell into the door as she tried to escape. Spinning around she kicked him in the face. She lost her balance and found herself scrambling to get a hold on something. Fumbling with the doorknob she flung the door open and ran from the bathroom.

Looking over her shoulder to see if she was being followed she ran smack into a brick wall.

It felt like a brick wall but it wasn't there when she went into the bathroom. Stumbling backwards a pair of hands grabbed her shoulders to steady her.

Looking up she found another intruder gapping at her naked body with a perplexing grimace. "Hey I got her." Her capturer called to his partner. "My, my, my, little missy you are a twisted one aren't you?"

She stared up at him and watched how his eyes never left her face. "Allen, get your ass the hell out here fast!" he yelled at his partner in disgust.

Allen came out of the bathroom holding the wall.

"She's something else isn't she?" he chuckled.

"Yeah, well, I get the feeling she's not our type."

"What? They're all my type," he laughed.

"You don't want this one," he nodded towards the hamper.

"Take a look at what I found in the hamper."

She couldn't help but smile as she noticed he shivered.

Allen walked over the hamper and lifted the lid.

His eyes bulged out as a shaking hand flew up and pulled his ski mask off.

Gasping for air he fell back against the wall for support as he coughed. Allen held his stomach with one hand and covered his mouth using his ski mask with the other. Shaking his head he looked up at her and then to his partner, "Oh god Mike, that's a head! I think it's real too! What the hell is this?"

Wendy chuckled as she felt herself become empowered. It was like turning on a light switch...the transformation was instantaneous. Smelling their fear was like waving raw meat in front of starving dogs. She was no longer their victim...they didn't even know it but the roles had suddenly changed.

She was Wendy the mighty, Wendy the strong...Wendy the judge and jury.

Tonight there would be no escape for them.

Her laughter grew momentum it was a deep, evil, throaty and very sinister rumble. "Well gentlemen you really ought to know better than that. Digging through someone's dirty laundry can become very messy...very, very, messy indeed. What do you two intend to do now?"

The blood drained from Allen's face. She watched his throat bobble as he swallowed hard. Shaking his head, he staggered along the wall heading towards the doorway never taking his eyes off her.

Wendy smirked. "You could just walk away and let bygones be bygones? What do you think, Mike?"

He still had a hand on her shoulder holding her in one spot and he look so uncomfortable he wanted out. She could tell he wanted out any way possible. She also could tell he was the smart one out of the two and he had already wagered his chances of getting out of there alive.

"Or you could kill me or I could kill you? Tell me which do you prefer?"

"Allen," Mike shuddered.

"Oh shit, Mike, let's just get the hell out of here!"

Her lips curled into a malicious smile, she lowered her head slightly so she could look up at them through her lashes looking frail and innocent of which both she was not.

She wasn't fooling them either. "Well Mike what do you want to do?" His fingers loosen on her as he licked his hot dry lips.

He glanced over at Allen it was the first time he took his eyes off her and it was only for a moment. "We're going lady. Relax we're going." He started to back away from her and that's when she saw it...her silver solid steel letter opener laying on the dresser next to her phone bill. She had been looking at that just before she decided to take a shower. He was around the bed and heading for the door as she took two steps grabbed the letter opener and bounced across the bed jumping into the air and landing on his back. He stumbled backwards she slammed the letter opener into his neck. His eyes widen in horror she felt him grabbing her for support and she helped him down to the floor, kissing his cheek gently.

Allen was gone. Licking her lips she savored the salty taste of fear from Mike's cheek. Wendy leapt to her feet and was down the hall calling out for him. "Come to Auntie Wendy, Allen. It won't hurt much."

She found him trying to climb out of her fire escape; he was climbing out feet first. His eyes went wide as saucers as he saw her coming towards him. Her dishes were still in the draining board where she left them after dinner.

Grabbing the cast iron pan she heaved it in the air and brought it down hard on his head.

His body crumbled laying half in and half out. She wacked him again for good measure and smiled satisfied that he wasn't breathing. She dragged his body back inside.

Kneeling down over his body, she checked his pulse and smiled. "See unlike a common thief I always...always keep my promises Allen, even to someone like you."

A loud knock at her door interrupted her party.

Frowning she rose to her feet and called “just a minute!”

Stopping off at the kitchen sink she rinsed their blood off her skin. Then stopped in the living room where she pulled another clean towel out of her laundry basket which was sitting next to the sofa she hadn’t put that away since last night.

She was getting sloppy; it was unlike her.

Wrapping it carefully around her, she grabbed the door and opened it with a big smile.

“Mrs. Hilroy what a pleasant surprise, how can I help you?”

“I thought I heard someone screaming,” she tried peeking inside her apartment.

“No it’s just me. I had the television on in the bedroom maybe it was something from that you heard? I don’t like to have a shower in this old building without having the television on. I’m forever hearing noises and thinking that there is someone moving around in here. I was in the middle of having a shower is there something I can do for you?”

“Yes dear I agree. I feel the same way I won’t shower unless Mr. Hilroy is in the bedroom. Oh, Wendy my dear, you’re bleeding!” she pointed to Wendy’s head.

“I slipped in the shower when I heard you knocking. It’s nothing.” She tried to close the door.

“Oh wait, I want to let you know that you should keep your windows shut tonight dear. There is word that there has been another break in here last night just down the hall. If it’s not break-ins it that mad man running around killing people what has this world coming to?”

“Honestly I don’t know?” Wendy shook her head as if agreeing with the old lady. “As if anyone in this building has something worthy of stealing or something to hide,” she chuckled and shook her head.

“I don’t know what they were thinking either but I just wanted to warn you and check to see if you were alright.”

“Well thank you for always looking out for me, I appreciate that. Good night.”

“Good night, dear.”

Stepping out of the shower for the second time that evening she dried off and slipped into her soft cotton nightgown.

The hamper with the decapitated head had to be thrown out. It was for the best: the thing was starting to smell. She didn’t need to attract unwanted attention. As for her two uninvited guests she had disposed of them after her chat with the nosy Mrs. Hilroy. Pushing her basket

of clean laundry aside she sank down into her soft sofa and flicked on the news.

It was going to be sunny tomorrow, which was good she wanted to get out for a drive anyways.

“Live breaking news...two more victims of the Madison’s Serial Killer has just been discovered! Mike and Allen Brown, two brothers who were under suspicion of being the cat burglars were brutally killed tonight...”

“Brutally my ass,” Wendy spat. “You guys are on the ball tonight, it had only happened a few hours ago.”

“The only identification that was left behind was their fingerprints. The serial killer has taken on a different twist here tonight, this is the first time he has killed two victims in one evening. But the police are certain that it’s the same guy, off the record. Why these two men? Who knows? Harold Matthews found their bodies when he was taking out the garbage. Just like the other bodies, Mike and Allen were cut up and their heads are missing!”

“How else would they fit into the bags,” she scoffed.

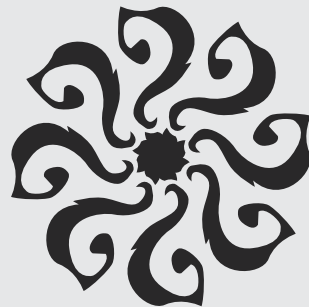
Feeling a little smug she leaned over the side of the sofa.

Beside the sofa the Brown brother’s heads were staring up at her blankly within two green plastic garbage bags.

The bags sat in an old beaten up cardboard box. “Now did you gentlemen even feel a thing did you?” Shaking her head, “No, no I didn’t think so. Maybe you should call up the cops and tell them.”

She laughed at that one as she sipped her hot chocolate.

She began a file in her head for Harold Mathews, she would be seeing him soon. She wondered if he saw anything... she was careful. Wasn’t she? Yes she was always very, very careful. Well she would soon find out. Wendy smiled as she settled in for a cozy evening with the boys.



GU-TUKU-UKKEN (First Meeting)

Jacob Zaccaria



GU-TUKU-UKKEN

(First Meeting)

Jacob Zaccaria

Once a very long time ago in deep ancient woods without name, crowning even older mountains who no longer exist, there lived a gentle soul. He was old and grey, with bright eyes and tall ears, and he was a friend to everyone big and small.

He was called King of the Forest, Gentle Giant and Protector. But his true name was lost to the mists of Time.

He sang oft to the trees and rocks, they danced and moved to his voice. Living sculptures were the result of this dance, and hundreds of them adorned the deepest glades of his realm.

Many sought him out for his wisdom and council on all matters, this day was no exception: a wounded male, Sly Fox, came to him, a fierce looking shaft penetrating his furs below the shoulder. "Who did this to you, my brother?" the Giant asked. Almost a whisper panting in pain, Sly Fox replied, "A monster, m'lord. Monsters! In the south valley...where the river meets the great plain...They wear no furs of their own, and they have stone claws sharper than not, they wear evil grins, and carry grim shafts like this...They throw them without mercy, hooting and gnashing..."

"Rest easy now, young one. You must sleep," the Forest King said solemnly.

"Yes...Thank you, m'lord. Thank you..."

In a moment, he was gone; the gentle soul closed his eyes for the last time and whispered to the Ancient Ones to bring his spirit peace. When this was done, he called for the swiftest hunters in his realm to gather in his presence.

Old Bear, Lone Wolf, She-Lion, Swift Hawk and Wise Owl came to him in the deep glen one after the other, and stood tall under the sacred tree. The King said to them, "A dear friend passed to the Otherworld today. He warned me of monsters in the south. I should wish to speak to them if I could, though they would seem to be below intelligence if what Sly Fox said is true. I need you to route them out and watch them, learn what you can, and then come back to me."

They did what was asked of them. At dawn from the waters' edge watched Old Bear; at dusk from the woods' edge, Lone Wolf kept her eye upon them; She-Lion gazed down from a rocky precipice at midday, while Swift Hawk kept watch from high atop a lofty pine; in the midst of the night, with his keen eyesight, Wise Owl kept sentinel as near to the beasts as he

could.

Together, the hunters watched for three days and three nights before they returned to the King of the Forest.

“What Sly Fox said is true your Grace,” Lone Wolf spoke.

“They threw long shafts from their arms and struck everyone who came near their place, hooting and grunting and snarling with big bright teeth.”

“Yes, and they had sharp stone claws that glistened in the sunlight,” added She-Lion. “They tore the skin off those they killed, and set the rest on fire ‘til it was black as coal before they ate it smiling and hooting. Such monsters!”

“They spoke no words we know,” Old Bear growled.

“And they lack all respect and mannerisms. Brutes!”

“I kept my eyes upon them all through the night,”

Wise Owl cooed. “These beasts sat long by a great fire unafraid, laughing and gnashing their teeth wildly. When they tired, they curled themselves in the skins of those they’ve slain and hushed to sleep.”

The King of the Forest thanked them all for their hard work, and grew quiet. Eons could have passed in that silence; not a single sound was heard anywhere in his realm, as if in anticipation. Finally, he spoke, “These beasts, I will judge them. Their crimes are too grievous and terrible, and they show only ignorance and hunger for death. And yet perhaps there is hope for them yet...We shall see.”

“One of you must bring them to me.”

To Lone Wolf his gaze fell. “My friend, you are the fastest runner and the sharpest of wit. I ask this task of you.”

Proudly, he howled, “it will be done!”

Nightfall came before Lone Wolf reached the Monsters.

Fresh skins hung on sinews to dry by the fire, and the lot of them were dancing and gnashing around the fire when he broke amongst them, brave and proud.

“The King of the Forest calls for you all. Come!”

If they heard him, they surely did not understand him.

They howled and growled, and lifted their deadly shafts and stone claws high and poised to

strike.

He had only one choice.

“Come then! Chase me, beasts!”

He struck fast, lopping through the underbrush, with the whole lot of them close at his heels. He did not need to look back, he could hear their terrible cries behind him, the sound of snapping branches and leaves underfoot careless and loud.

Up and up they went, deeper and deeper, and every one he passed ran ahead before the host of creatures. Lone Wolf led them to the sacred grove where their Protector waited. The Gentle King stood sentinel at the entrance to the hollow, letting all who came with Lone Wolf pass in to safety unmolested. Last of all came Lone Wolf, panting from his flight; he stood beside his King and faced the Monsters as they scrambled into the glen. When they saw the tall King, they stopped abruptly and hushed their raucous voices.

Lone Wolf growled.

The gentle giant, their Protector, raised his hand palm out and spoke in his deep sonorous rumble to them both within and without. He said, “Keeper of the Woods and singer of the Rocks and Trees; it is I who protect the young, the old, the strong, the weak, and give justice and keep peace.”

“You have been brought before me to be judged for your heinous crimes. I pity thee. You know not the words of glen and river, and show only malice towards your brothers and sisters. Monsters!”

“But I give thee one last chance . . . keep your lives, lay down your terrible claws and spears and leave these lands forevermore. There is a green land far beyond the river lands, beyond even the great sands, where you can live and harm my people no more. But if you refuse, then the Earth will be your ultimate Judge. What say you?”

The tallest of the beasts rose and stepped forward, and he knelt before the King, laying his spear upon the soft earth. His monstrous brothers behind him grumbled and hooted amongst themselves as if pondering His Grace’s words. It seemed as if they would comply.

Then with a hoot, the kneeling beast lifted his spear, arm raised, and his brothers followed suit! The first spear struck the gentle King in the heart, and another grazed Lone Wolf; the rest struck the Forest God and the ground before him, leaving him ragged and bloody; he fell without a sound.

A deep silence pervaded the glen, but only for a moment: the monsters howled and laughed, they gnashed their evil teeth and thumped their chests and lifted their stones in triumph. Then it happened.

With a terrible ear-piercing screech, the ancient sentinel trees lifted their roots as the solid stone opened her gaping maw wide, swallowing up the gnashing beasts where they stood.

Their screams were not heard for long though.

As quickly as the earth opened herself she had closed on them. Barely a rock was out of place nothing of the screaming creatures remained.

All of those who took refuge in the hollow witnessed this turned to their Protector, tears beading in their eyes.

Silently they formed a circle around his fallen frame and kneeled and lay down together around him.

A shaft of bright light then pierced the canopy above, falling upon him. He shimmered and seemed to become part of the light and then he was gone.

It is said that their tears flowed so freely that they poured across the earth in that place, and it became a mighty river which overtook the valley below, washing away the monsters' filth from their camp. The rushing waters fell without end, and the sandy deep which lay far to the south was flooded and became salty with their tears.

Now you know why the monstrous Human is most feared and hated among all of the free peoples of the Wild; every people of feather, fur, scale, tooth and claw know their crime. They will never forgive...and they will never forget.



The Picnic
Chelsea Schell



The Picnic

Chelsea Schell

“If you’re going out in the woods today,

You’d better not go alone.

It’s lovely out in the woods today,

But suffer to stay at home.

For every bear that ever there was will gather there for certain, Because today’s the day the teddy bears have their picnic”

Today was the first time little Katie had ever heard the teddy song. All of the other children, her friends, sang it aloud while they played with their stuffed teddies. Oh! Don’t get me wrong, of course Katie has plenty of toys to play with — model trains, colourful balls and pretty dolls — but she has never once owned a teddy of her very own. She has wanted one for ever so long, pleading with her mother and father to buy her one, but they never did, and poor Katie never understood why.

But on this particular day, Katie’s dreams were about to come all too true. Because there, laying in the grassy lawn of her own backyard, was a lonely teddy bear. Katie could barely contain herself, but she was also very confused: whose teddy bear was this? There were no other children around; her friends were off playing with their teddies and toys somewhere else, surely.

She wondered if, maybe, her mother left this here for her to find as a present. Could it really be true?

Smiling, Katie skipped over to where the teddy lay, and before she could say a word, the teddy leapt up and ran off, heading into the woods! “Oh dear,” she exclaimed, “I’ve never seen a Teddy do that before. Come back, Teddy!”

Katie ran headlong after him, not sure if this sort of behaviour was normal for a stuffed Teddy. She was so excited to find her new friend; she didn’t even tell her mother where she was going...It wasn’t long before young Katie found herself very alone, and lost in unfamiliar woods. She slowed down, and walked along, calling out for her friend,

“Teddy! Hello, Teddy?”

The sun was setting, and the woods were growing dark very fast. Poor Katie saw no sign of her Teddy, and she was ready to give up. But where was home?

Panic set in now, Katie frantically tried to retrace her steps. She was running through the underbrush, hoping desperately to see her porch light shining in the dark. Ah! There was a light ahead, dim but peeking up from somewhere just ahead.

It was her house, she was sure of it. So she ran as quickly as her little legs could carry her, tears running down her cheeks.

Oh, her mother would be so cross with her when she got back, but she didn't care. She would be home again, warm and safe.

Not far, now...

The light was brighter now. Suddenly, Katie found herself in a little meadow. There was a small table, and the scene was lit by a tiny lantern filled with bright fireflies.

Standing before her, black button eyes gleaming, was her Teddy. Her eyes went from her Teddy, and back to the little scene behind him. All around the table were more teddies, all different shapes and sizes. She didn't notice them right away, but as her eyes adjusted to the light, she noticed their faces were... deformed. But her Teddy stood there, waiting for her.

"I found you!" she laughed ready to pick up her Teddy in her arms. But out of the corner of her eye, she sees an empty lantern swinging towards her.

After that, she remembers nothing.

When she finally comes around, she finds herself in a strange bed.

She tries to get up, but she cannot move. Just then, she feels something reach around her, and pick her up. It's her friend, Vanessa. Katie tries to scream, but no sounds come out. Vanessa takes her outside and lays her down in a pile of other teddies they look oddly familiar...

Before she could try to call out once more, a voice rings out somewhere unseen, Vanessa's mother calling for her to come in for dinner. As soon as the door shuts tight, the teddies begin to move! They get up and stretch. One offers to help Katie up, and takes her by the hand and leads her in line with the rest as they march towards the woods. Voices now, as some children run through the yard. All of the teddies...Katie included drop limp to the ground instantly.

"What's happening to me," Katie thought. She couldn't make a sound or move at all when there are other kids around, and this scares her. The children play with them until the sun goes down, and they all scurry off to bed, leaving the toys out on the lawn. With the first light of the stars twinkling

high above, the teddies rise up. A supernatural force “pulls” Katie along with them, leading deep into the forest.

She finds herself again in the mysterious clearing, the table set with a raggedy plaid picnic table cloth. Each teddy, with their misshapen forms, finds their seat around the table and Katie gets a good look at them all.

On the little log stools they sit on, under them, there are pictures. There’s a little girl about her age beneath one, and then a boy, and another child’s face beneath the next bear, and the next.

Six children’s faces beam bright smiles from pictures, and slowly Katie sees their resemblance in the faces of the bears. There’s one last, empty stool, with a picture lying neatly beside it. Katie stoops beside it, and takes a good look at the photo at her feet. It’s her, right there, all bright and smiling.

And suddenly she understands.

The bears are staring at her now they look as if they’re... smiling. One of them points to a message carved into the trunk of an old oak tree where the lanterns hang.

It read:

“Salvation is in the bear

And those who own you, stop you.

Forgive them, and send them to Salvation.”

There’s a muffled cry from behind, and Katie turns to see her friend Vanessa struggling, gagged and bound.

One of the teddies holds a sharp knife, and offers it up to Katie, who takes it without a thought. Another bear carries fluff and button eyes, glistening in the lantern light.

An empty teddy skin hangs on a low bough off to the right. The bear who led her here shows Katie where to cut, and guides her as she carves out Vanessa’s nerves and organs with precision and care. Soon she will be one of them...another teddy.

Remember, if you’re going out in the woods today, you’d better not go alone...



The View
Dave A. Mornix



The View

Dave A. Mornix

This day couldn't get any worse he grumbled under his breath. First he locked himself out of his house his wife was home but couldn't hear him since she was down in her studio.

Then his car wouldn't start, when he finally got to work he had to run an errand for his boss in an unfamiliar part of town for which he couldn't find the address at first. When he did, the customer he delivered the package to complained that he was late and everything was ruined.

On the way out another delivery guy came rushing through the doors knocking into him and his glasses fell off. A large man then stepped on them and didn't even apologize, he just kept on ambling away lost in his own little world. He was half blind without his glasses! He should have just called in sick this morning...

Fortunately when he stepped outside he found an optometrist across the street that repair broken glasses. He had to wait for an hour, but was pleased when he finally was able to see clearly again. The quirky looking man behind the counter had one eye larger than the other, his hair was tousled like he just woke up and he wore a lab coat over a bright red t-shirt and yellow shorts with suspenders. He was very peculiar indeed, yet efficient.

Putting on the glasses he paid the man and left. Getting back into his car he headed back to the office. On the freeway he met a traffic jam. It looked like there was a car accident ahead. Traffic had stalled. A man next to him was screaming into his cellphone that he was stuck on the 401. On the other side a woman was putting on her makeup.

There was nothing he could do at this point. Sitting back he tried to relax to the radio. The announcer was complaining that it was another scorcher.

Closing his eyes momentarily he opened them looking around.

His skin prickled uneasily.

It startled him he rubbed his eyes again but as he looked around he no longer saw just the highway flanked with strip malls and the traffic jam. Holding his breath, his eyes drank in the scenery; in its place were miles of red desert filled with death and decay. The highway was still in place as were the cars, looking around him he was still sitting in his car but the people around him in their cars didn't look right.

They were skeletons!

The man that was yelling into his phone turned and looked at him, still screaming to the other person on the other end that he was just going to start driving over bodies if they didn't move it. Seeing he had an audience he flipped Gary the finger and then ignored him continuing on with his conversation.

The woman that was putting on her makeup was pruned herself in the rear view mirror of her car and could care less who was watching her skeleton form. The people in front were the same; craning his neck around he could see there were others behind him going about their business as if nothing was out of the ordinary.

Then in the corner of his rear view mirror he saw them coming! There were four black shadows galloping towards them. Swoosh the four men galloped past his car on horses' dark as night. One turned back and looked at him with red glowing eyes. He shuddered as he watched them with his mouth gaping open. Taking off his glasses he rubbed his eyes.

Everything looked normal again. Checking behind him and all around him, the others all looked normal again. He must have been dreaming he thought. How bizarre.

Putting his glasses back on, he peeked around him with them on. Everyone was still their normal selves. He had been working too hard lately he decided. He really could use a vacation. Maybe when he got back to the office he would put in a request to have some time off?

Driving pass the car crash he could have sworn he saw a black shadow on a horse hovering over the scene out of the corner of his eye. Glancing back he saw nothing more than emergencies workers trying to clean up the accident.

Pulling into his parking spot, he grabbed his briefcase and headed back inside. As he passed the front desk, Mary — who was a sweet young secretary — smiled up at him. He nodded back with a faint smile and was about to flirt with her as he always did when he noticed something odd. His voice caught in his throat as he saw her face: one of her eyes gaped out of the socket. Her left side of her face scratched and bleeding as the skin hung loosely off her cheek bone.

Swallowing hard he hurried down the hall and to his office. Once inside he closed the door behind him and squeezed his eyes shut taking in a few deep breaths.

It was just his imagination. That's all. Mary looked amazing as she always did. It was just his imagination.

He was overworked and really needed a break.

A knock on his door startled him. "Yes!" he called out sharply.

"Hey Gary, got a moment?" It was his best friend, Jeff.

Something normal, finally! Gary went over to his desk and sat down.

Taking his glasses off and rubbing his eyes. "Sure Jeff, come on in."

"You okay? You didn't sound like yourself there a moment ago."

"No, no I am fine." He rested his glasses down on his desk. "I think I need a vacation."

"How does New York sound?"

"New York?" he raised an eyebrow, puzzled.

"Yeah, we need someone out there to meet with Ricky Keller. Potential new client and Jackie just went home with the flu."

Jeff prattled on about the trip. Jackie was their best seller.

He wasn't bad he had been with them since the company started up ten years ago. Gary was their best seller up until Jackie came on board last year and she took the company to greater heights. He was grateful to have her around it took the pressure off him for a while.

"When do I leave?"

"How fast can you pack?"

"I'll get my wife to pack me a bag and pick it up on the way to the airport."

"Great! I'll book you a flight. Oh and stop by Jackie's, she accidently took the file home with her."

"Alright. Well, guess I better get going then." Reluctantly he got up, slipped his glasses on. He said goodbye to his friend. Everything looked normal, as it should.

But he avoided looking at Mary on the way out.

It was a quick drive over to Jackie's house. When he got there she met him at the door.

"Thanks Gary," she wiped her bloody nose.

Cringing he looked at her. "Whoa what happened to you?"

"I caught a bad one." She handed him the file.

He reluctantly snatched it up trying not to touch the blood on it. "You're bleeding," he shuffled his feet not wanting to be there. "Shit! I'm what?" she looked down at her bloody hands. "What? Where?" She asked looking at her hands and arms. It was plain as day all over her hands, how come she didn't see it?

"Right there," he pointed and stepped back.

She paused and looked at him.

“Are you sure you’re feeling well?”

He watched her as bugs started crawling out of her ears.

A shiver went down his spine. She scratched at her ear.

Swallowing hard he tried to look away...away from the bugs but he couldn't they were covering her body.

He opened his mouth to say something but no words could escape. Turning on his heel, he just left as quickly as he could. Once back in his car he drove off as quickly as he could.

Reminding himself to breathe he began to slow down once he got a few blocks in between them. The light turned red ahead of him, he stopped and waited. Looking around everything seemed normal again.

He saw a pretty young lady coming out of a café.

A man came up behind her. She looked at him and smiled.

He pulled out a knife and slit her throat she fell down in the street and another woman walked over to her. A scream caught in his throat at the scene before him. He thought the other woman was coming to help her. Instead the woman bends down and digs out an eye than ate it in front of him.

“It’s not real,” he whispered to himself. Taking off his glasses he rubbed his eyes. Someone beeped their horn behind him.

Looking back he saw the woman walking down the street with the man...the one he just watch have her throat slit and her eye eaten. The horn behind him brought him back to reality.

Slipping his glasses back on, he drove home. The rest of his trip home was uneventful.

When he pulled up in the drive way his wife came out to meet him. She wore a sour face and sweat cloths. He knew from experience what that meant. She was worried about her weight; she worked from home and normally dressed nicely unless she was going through one of her bad days. His wife Tricia was beautiful and very talented but she would go on these emotional roller coaster rides and drag him along with her for kicks.

A small part of him was happy that he was going out of town and he would miss the drama that he would have suffered that evening. Pouting, she approached him.

“Do you really have to go?”

“Sorry honey, Jackie is sick otherwise I’d be here with you tonight.”

“Where are you going?”

“New York.”

“New York! The women there are so beautiful. You’re going to look at them too aren’t you? Why did I ever marry you? You’re so insensitive! I’m warning you, if you bring home some STD that’s it! I’m done with your ass.” She threw the suitcase at him. He knew from experience not to enrage her.

There was nothing he could say that would make her feel okay about it. He had never given her any reason to be suspicious.

Jeff once witnessed an outburst and asked Gary if he had her tested. He smirked at the thought.

“Sure laugh Mr. Funny Man. Enjoy your sordid little trip of hookers!” she turned and stormed back inside.

Taking his bag he put it in the trunk. He was about to drive off and realized he needed his passport because he was going out of the country. Checking his bag he looked for it everywhere. She at least remembered his toothbrush. Closing the trunk he looked back at his house. It was his home.

It was supposed to be his oasis.

The demon from hell was residing in there right now, he frowned and chastised himself for referring to his wife in such a manner. He had to go in.

“It’s just me,” he called to her so she wouldn’t be alarmed.

She didn’t reply. He went upstairs to their bedroom and found her lying on the bed at least most of her was.

Her head rolled over to him and she stared up at him blankly. He screamed and ran into the wall. Stumbling backwards he tried to rein in his terror.

Grabbing the phone he tried to dial 911 but the line was dead.

A dark shadow came out of his closet and stood over her.

“Get away from her!” he shouted. He started moving towards the shadow and noticed his wife’s hand stretching out to him. How? How was that even possible?

The shadow came at him and then darkness.

The shadow swallowed him whole. He was surrounded in darkness, swimming in it... drowning in it.

What was going on with him today? Crazy things were happening. He knew he should have just called in sick this morning and stayed home.

His eyes fluttered open and he saw his wife kneeling down beside him. She was cradling his head in her arms.

“You think those hookers are going to be a concern for you? Good luck mister.” She dropped his head and it thumped against the carpet. Okay, he was just seeing things again.

Getting up he rubbed his head. Took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. Sighing heavily he went over to their dresser and pulled out his passport. He had to hurry and get to Pearson Airport. His wife was cursing him under her breath as she tidied up the already tidied bedroom.

She followed him down the stairs calling him every name she could think of. At the bottom of the steps, he turned around and kissed her firmly on the lips. She looked at him and smiled.

“I love you and I will be back as soon as I can.”

She cocked her head to the side, “Have a safe trip.”

Then her head fell off.

Ignoring it he turned and left. The trip to the airport took forever; it was like travelling through the streets of hell.

Everywhere he looked violence and terrible deeds were occurring before his eyes. Swallowing hard every time he saw something that wasn't normal; he knew his stomach was full of his own saliva by the time he arrived at the airport.

He was just grateful to get through the customs and finally sit in his seat on the plane. Taking his glasses off everything appeared normal again. Looking at his glasses he realized it wasn't until he got them fixed that he was seeing things.

Putting them back on him, he watched as the thin zombie came towards him. Taking them off he saw the blurry flight attendant smiling at him. Putting them back on...she looked like a zombie. Her face was decaying her hair matted with blood. Her skin was falling off its bones. Taking them off he shoved them in his pocket and decided to take them back to the optometrist shop that he had them repaired at earlier that day.

In the meantime he would do without them.

His trip was successful and three days sped by.

Putting his suitcase back into his trunk, he closed the lid and slipped on his glasses. There

was something he wanted to do but couldn't for the life of him remember what it was.

What was it? Getting in, he paid for his car's stay in the overnight lot, slipping the receipt in his glove compartment and then headed for the office.

Stopping at a red light, he saw a woman crossing the street in front of him pushing a baby stroller. The baby peek its head out, but its face looked like a dog!

Not any dog, but something that was unnatural and raw. It was red and he could see the muscle tissue gleaming at him.

It was giggling but the sound didn't match the picture.

Looking up at the woman she smiled at him and heft up her sagging breast. It was drooping to her hip.

It looked like it was melting off her body. She pulled it up to where it should be and gave it a little pat. As she passed by him he noticed a third eye in the back of her head was watching him suspiciously. A large bird flew down and landed on his hood.

It wasn't a bird, but some kind of demon that pulled one of his windshield blades off his car and used it to pick its teeth.

Tossing the blade aside into the street, it winked at him then it flew off. His throat went dry as he remembered he wanted to take his glasses back to the repair shop. Taking them off it things were a bit of a blur but he could still see somewhat.

It was much better than all of the horrible images he's been seeing.

It was a short drive to that end of town where he was a few days ago. Pulling up in front of the store he scratched his head. Their client from across the street was still there.

Looking up and down he searched for the optometrist shop. It wasn't there. A barber shop was where the optometrist was. How could that be? He remembered the optometrist clearly.

He was a quirky guy. He went inside the stores and asked them all about the quirky man. No one knew what he was talking about. He almost threw them away and decided against it. He had to show someone. Jeff would understand.

Turning to go back to his car someone bumped into him.

The glasses he was holding fell and the same person who bumped into him stepped on them.

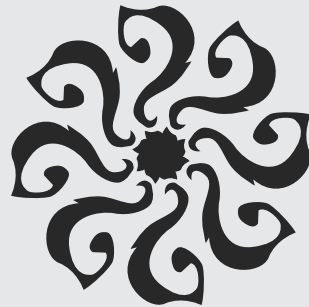
"Oh shi...! I'm sorry," the large man paused and apologized looking down at the glasses then hurried off.

"Hey?!" Gary was going to chase after him to make him pay for them, but had a feeling it

was a blessing in disguise.

Getting into his car he wondered if it was the same man that bumped into him the first time. Looking around at the shops one last time he didn't see the optometrist that he could have sworn was there before.

As he drove away, Gary remembered his second set of glasses were at home. He would have to get his wife to meet him at the office with them.



Closed Doors
R. J. Davies Mornix



Closed Doors

R. J. Davies Mornix

Maybe Ashley was right? Being afraid of the dark, basements, shadows, horror stories and monsters in general was so much work. Hell he was afraid of his own shadow if the truth had to be known. He had just turned eighteen last week and he never grew out of his fears. Dwayne met Ashley at the restaurant for his birthday. She was there with a few of her friends and he was there with a couple of his friends.

Ashley had a sparkle about her. He never met anyone who seemed to be so knowledgeable at such a young age. She was one of those old souls people talked about, people who seemed like they had roamed the earth for centuries. He had moved out on his own a couple weeks before that. It was a bit of a struggle but he was getting used to being independent...it was really great. Staying up late, eating whatever you want.

Okay, it wasn't by choice. His uncle kicked him out. His parents were living who knows where. They were always on the go. But Uncle Rick couldn't take it anymore.

He freaked out and told Dwayne he was too delusional.

Dwayne felt the assessment was inaccurate. Paranoid, yes...delusional? No. So what if he was afraid of a few things? It wasn't his fault. A healthy dose of fear kept people safe and he was one of the safest people he knew.

Double checking his locks on his door he made sure his apartment was nice and secure. Then he went through his apartment making sure the lights were all on and all the doors shut and locked as best as they could be. Heading back to his living room he sat down on his sofa. Pulling out the book, *Needful Souls*, he shuddered as he saw the severed head and blood on the front of the book cover.

Did he really need to do this? Maybe he should try watching another Stephen King movie. No he couldn't get past the first fifteen minutes without hyper-ventilating. Swallowing hard he felt his body start to perspire at just the thought of trying to endure a Stephen King movie. Jumping up he paced around the room and cleared his throat a couple times.

"I'm okay, I'm okay," he kept repeating trying to calm himself down. Inhaling deeply he tried to hold his breath for as long as he could then release it. Swallowing hard he did a couple more deep breathing exercises.

"I can do this," he nodded his head and felt hot tears threatening to come forth.

Shaking his head no, he repeated, "Yes, I can do this."

Walking slowly back to his sofa he sat down. The soft wool fabric of the sofa cover felt comforting. Swallowing hard, a few more times, he managed to calm down by picturing a pretty field of flowers in the hot sun on a clear day.

It was relaxing. He loved going to the park and this field he would image always made him think about the park. With children playing on the swings and sliding down the slides, and hanging upside down giggling on the jungle gyms. People, walking their dogs, holding hands and in general people just being happy. He loved the park. He always felt safe at the park.

Feeling at ease he almost forgot what got him so worked up. Setting the book aside he turned on the TV. Flipping channels he found a comedy movie on.

Watching it, he really wasn't paying any attention to it. It was a distraction while his mind wandered. He had to be the only adult that was such a chicken poop. There were kids out there that lived off scary movies! He was never one of them, though. Dwayne didn't think he could ever be close to one of those people...

There was no reason for it. He had a happy childhood when his parents were around; they always had fun.

There wasn't a traumatic memory he held. Even his uncle was generous with his patience. His mom and dad were adventurers, so they were always on the go: checking this out, exploring that, researching and investigating mysteries. His biggest adventure was going out with his friends for his birthday.

Going out and mixing with people was dangerous as well. So many accidents could happen. He wasn't really paranoid he felt he was more cautious than paranoid.

Glancing over at the book, he felt the hairs on his arm stand on end. "It's okay. It's just a book and it can't hurt you. Just read the first chapter and be done with it. Read it fast and it'll be over with. You can do this Dwayne!"

Beads of sweat pooled on his forehead, back of his neck and palms. Holding his breath he reached out and the tips of his fingers lightly grazed the cover. He felt an electrical charge transfer from the book to his hand. It was just his imagination running wild he reminded himself and tried to swallow some of his fear. His mouth felt so dry all of a sudden.

His breathing turned shallow and quick.

Swallowing hard again he grabbed the book and dropped it in his lap. Rolling his eyes he looked to the ceiling.

Oh how he need strength to get through this.

“Nothing bad is going to happen it’s just a book and probably not even a well written one. Just open it and read fast.”

Swallowing hard again he tried to clear his throat again.

Forcing himself to grab the book he did. He opened it quickly and then started to read the first paragraph. He got through the first paragraph and it was okay. Feeling a little more confident he reminded himself, “If it gets too scary you can put the book down any time you want.”

He continued reading and felt his body starting to relax a little.

By the time he got to page four the book was interesting but not scary. A small part of him that was untapped felt alive and open to possibilities. There was an energy in the room that he wasn’t even aware of that he created himself. It lurked in the dark corners...waiting...preying...its fingers stretching, reaching and clawing to come out and play.

The lights flickers he jumped. They didn’t go off.

Looking around him he surveyed the room. Nothing was out of place, getting up he walked over to the window peering out that’s when he noticed there was a light rain that started.

Surprised he hadn’t noticed it before. Absently he went over to the hall and pulled out his emergency pack.

Closing the door securely behind him he went back into the living room and began preparing in case the lights went out. Pulling out a small generator that was fully charged, he began plugging his lamps into it, and kept the radio close by in case everything went out so he could have updates.

Inhaling deeply and letting out the apprehension he felt, he went back to his sofa. The book lay open where he had left off.

He really loved reading, and read many books, mostly history books. Swallowing hard again, he tried to drown some of his unmistakable fear that was creeping up and threatening to engulf him whole.

It was just a light rain and nothing more. It didn’t hurt to be prepared just in case.

Picking up the book again he continued where he had left off. The story was getting interesting.

He liked the main character already he had reminded him of himself. Flipping the page, he continued.

He could hear Mrs. Trout upstairs walking around.

Her lazy strides sounded like a large animal crossing the room. Dwayne knew the woman didn't like it when it rained either. Sometimes he would go up and sit with her. He wondered if he should go now. "You're an adult it is crazy that you are carrying on so. Just sit down and read your book."

He went back to reading again. Lightning flashed in the sky lighting it up like day light.

He began counting and stopped only when the thunder roared. It felt like it was right above him. It was 15 seconds dividing that by 3 it was approximately 5 kilometers away.

The rain started coming down a little harder. He jumped up and ran through his apartment making sure everything was unplugged and the lights were all on and all the doors closed and locked...everything was secure. Running back to the living room he checked his generator. It was on and the lamp was working. Quickly he ran into his bedroom grabbing his blanket and pillow off the bed. A quick look around the windows and curtains were shut tight. The doors were all closed.

Dropping to the floor he peeked under the bed it was clean. There weren't even dust bunnies living under there.

Getting back up he left his bedroom making sure the door was closed tightly behind him. He hurried over to his sofa and jumped on it wrapping himself under his blanket and holding his pillow close to him. His heart was racing. He could feel it thumping hard against his rib cage. Swallowing hard he kept trying to swallow his own fear but his stomach was beginning to feel sick of it.

He felt like he was going to jump out of his own skin.

It wasn't possible, he had to remind himself.

"It's just a storm, it will pass...it's okay, nothing to worry about." The phone rang all of a sudden. He didn't know who would be calling him in this weather, and at this hour. Everyone who knew him knew he would never chance picking up the phone in a storm. Thunder rumbled and it felt like it was just outside his apartment.

His mind began reeling with thoughts, over 2 million lightning strikes occurred in Canada on average per year. 9 to 10 people were killed and between 100 and 150 people were injured every year. He was grateful he didn't live in the States because they had 60 deaths a year on average and Florida was the lightening capital of the world. That was one place he would never go to even for a quick vacation.

"Think happy thoughts!" he squeaked interrupting his own mind. "Fluffy blankets, bunnies and kittens, yummy cheesecake, donuts and muffins. A field of flowers in the shining sun, children playing in the park...maybe I should read a book it will be distracting."

The suggestion was a great idea. The bookshelf was across the room next to the window. He couldn't bring himself to get up off the sofa to cross the room. He desperately needed a distraction from the storm.

Grabbing up the book that sat beside him he absently went to the next page and began reading half-heartedly. His eyes kept trailing back to the window.

The lights hadn't gone out, so he was doing good. Fighting back the lump forming in his throat, he made an effort to focus on the book in his hands. His mouth went dry again.

Thunder cracked and he could hear the glasses in his cupboard clink together. It rumbled and his apartment building shuddered. Trembling...his whole body was trembling ever so slightly he tried to calm himself down by deep breathing.

He remembered something his mother use to say to him as a child. 'You are very special Dwayne, you come from a long line of special people. Not everyone will understand you or appreciate you. No one must know how special you are. You get this from your daddy's side of the family.' He had just figured at the time she was trying to make him feel better since he was such a scaredy-cat. Sometimes he wondered if his mother meant that he came from a family of cowards. Perhaps she was just trying to calm a scared child; a child that jumped at his own shadow. His mother's voice haunted him.

Turning his eyes back to the book at hand he tried to focus and then felt an episode coming on. The room started to sway, he felt light headed, nauseated and confused. This part felt like an old friend visiting him. Closing his eyes he knew it would soon go away. It always went away after a few minutes.

Resting his head on the sofa he felt the uneasiness of his fear start to subside.

"Every little thing is going to be alright...don't worry...don't worry about a thing," he hummed the rest. Bob Marley made him feel good. Especially that song, it was like magic, it calmed him down when he had his episodes.

Opening his eyes he realized the power went out.

When the nausea hit him, his external senses shut down. Shallow breaths and a racing mind came rushing back.

The storm seemed to be moving away. He wondered how long he was out of it for. Trying to shake off the feeling, he grabbed up the book again and tried to focus his attention on it. Looking down it was like the words were floating off the page. They danced in front of him.

Wide eyed he mouth gapped open. This had to be another episode of some kind but he wasn't sure of what. He had never seen anything like this. The words bend and folded in

front of him and then formulated into a sentence in front of his eyes. Dwayne felt his stomach churning as he whispered the words, "Welcome dark prince we looked for you everywhere."

The words scattered then floated about again swirling in the air in front of his eyes. Blinking hard he thought he had to be imagining it all. "The Key Master is coming."

Key Master, who was that? *What was that?*

Rubbing his eyes he watched as the words floated and swirled around again. Coming back to formulate another sentence, "Open the front door."

Open the front door? What front door...*his* front door?

He looked at his front door to his apartment and then there was a knock. Bam, bam... followed by silence the only noise was the rain from outside.

The words floated around in front of his eyes again and formulated, "Answer the Door!"

Slowing getting up on shaky legs he walked over to the front door. Standing in front of it he looked back at the living room.

Did he just imagine that?

There was a knock on the door again he jumped. His heart was racing, his breathing shallow. Stretching a hand out to the door his fingers wrapped around the door knob, it felt ice cold to the touch. Twisting it ever so slowly...he pulled it open a crack,

the door chain was still latched.

"Hi Dwayne," Ashley smiled at him.

Swallowing hard he didn't know how she found out where he lived. He had never invited her over. He only met with her a couple of times.

"Are you going to invite me in or what?"

"Who are you?" he croaked.

"I'm your friend, Dwayne, it's me! Ashley." She smiled at him but her smile didn't reach her eyes.

"How do you know where I live?"

"A girl can't look you up in the phone book?" she tilted her head a little to the side and smiled at him again.

"Are you going to invite me in?" she asked again.

He didn't want her in his home. There was just a bad feeling about all of this. Yet he didn't want to be rude either.

She was a nice girl and all but he didn't know her well enough to be inviting her in. Stranger a little voice in the back of his head yelled.

Trying to squash that fear down he looked back towards the living room.

"You're being awfully rude Dwayne, is there another girl in there?" she caught his eye and he had trouble looking away.

Shaking his head no, "No, no," he stammered. "No one is here but me. Listen Ashley, I gotta go."

"Dwayne we're friends, invite me in and we can hang out," she persisted. He almost said yes but there was this nagging feeling in his stomach that he couldn't ignore. "I'm really sorry, Ashley," tears started to well up in his eyes. "I can't right now."

He slammed the door in her face and bolted it.

She continued to knock. He stepped back.

What was happening? Swallowing hard he had a bad feeling about everything tonight. The phone rang again. The rain was letting up outside but it still wasn't safe to answer the phone. It stopped for a few minutes then rang again. The knocking on the door and the phone ringing he felt like he was going to lose his mind. Staying away from the living room he didn't want to go back in there and find the words floating again.

He'd rather just chalk it up to a delusional dream.

Backing into the kitchen he turned around and almost peed his pants. All the drawers and cupboards were open!

They were all wide open...gaping at him! He didn't do that!

He knows he didn't do that! He could be a little crazy sometimes but this he didn't do. Did he?

"No I didn't do this," he whispered to himself. Fearful that if he said it out loud someone was going to stop him.

Ashley was still banging on the front door, and the phone was still ringing...Dwayne felt like he had opened a door and stepped into a whole world of crazy.

The phone on the wall in the kitchen kept ringing.

He had to answer it even though it wasn't safe he had to make the ringing stop.

"Hello?" he croaked.

"Dwayne you have to get out of there!" it was his father.

"Dad?"

"Yes there is a lot you don't know about and right now we don't have the time to explain it to you but you need to get out of your apartment and away from anyone you just met since your birthday." His voice sounded strained and scared.

"I can't...Dad I can't it's raining outside."

"Dwayne!" his mother's voice was shrilled.

"Listen to your father! Get out now!"

"I can't," tears ran down his cheeks.

"It's raining outside and there something really bad happening here."

"That's why you have to get out of there son! Climb out the window and go down the fire escape. Do it NOW!"

He looked back down the hall, Ashley was still outside his door calling to him and banging on the door. The fire escape was off to the side of the fridge. The rain was letting up but he knew it was unsafe to go outside when it was raining.

"Dwayne go now, your uncle is outside waiting for you. Run!"

The phone went dead, "Dad? Mom? Dad?" He wiped the tears away and tried hanging up the phone and then dialling their cell phone but there was no use, his phone line was dead.

Ashley was still outside his front door.

Struggling to be brave he stood up and forced himself over to the fire escape. Peeking outside there was no one out there the fire escape was all clear. Mainly because anyone who knew him would know he normally wouldn't even be near this window let alone considering climbing down the metal wet fire escape, his heart was beating a mile a minute he couldn't even think straight.

Looking back at his apartment he knew none of this was right and he wasn't imagining this. He had to get out. Ashley was not the cute girl he thought she was.

Opening the window the light drizzle assaulted him. It felt refreshing against his hot skin and yet he was so scared. Looking back over his shoulder he had to move fast.

He still had his rubber boots on since it was raining out he always wore them just in case lightening came and got him.

Poking his head outside, he felt the cold breeze against his skin.

Oh god, how could I do this? What was I thinking?

Was he really going to climb out on his fire escape?

Dwayne forced himself out onto the fire-escape and then within seconds he made it down to safe ground.

Scanning up and down the street he looked for any signs of Uncle Rick. The rain had let up. Puddles of rain were everywhere. He had to get away from his house. Maybe he could go to his Uncle Rick's house? It wasn't far away. Starting off, he hurried as fast as his legs could carry him he just wanted to get back inside somewhere where it was safe.

He needed to get shelter. The skies were still dark and he needed to get inside before the shadows got him. It took him ten minutes to jog over to his uncle's house. As he approached something caught his attention. There were several people standing around it didn't look normal. Coming to a stop he ducked behind a bush and looked back behind him.

What was going on? None of this made any sense.

Who were they and what were they doing standing around like this? Something told him whatever these people were doing it wasn't safe he had to get away from here. But where was he going to go at this hour in the dark? It was so dark outside.

He felt the tears starting to come again. Backing away from the direction that his uncle's house was in he decided maybe one of his friends might be a better idea.

As he started down the street the apprehension began to ease up. What was going on? None of this made any sense.

Maybe when he got to Jerry's house he could call his parents. He had to find shelter it was so dark out. He didn't like the dark. "Dwayne?" Ashley softly called his name.

He looked behind him but no one was there. Stepping up the pace a little he turned the corner and ran right into her.

"Dwayne I know you probably have a lot of questions, I'm going to help you with them."

"No don't come any closer! Please don't!" he held up his hand. "Please don't I don't know you. Please don't come near me!"

"I'm on your side Dwayne it'll be okay I assure you everything is going to be okay," she stepped closer to him. Reaching out her hand she almost was close enough to touch him.

“Don’t!” he screamed and a ball of fire flew out of his hand.

Ashley stood in front of his eyes being engulfed in flames.

She screamed and kept approaching him. He backed up out of her way. With his mouth gaping open and his eyes as wide as saucers as he couldn’t believe what he was witnessing.

Ashley fell down on the cold wet pavement in front of him. Then her body just disappeared in a puff of smoke. He rubbed his eyes he looked at his hands he looked back the spot she just disappeared in front of him! How?

“Holy sh--” he swallowed hard and backed up into Uncle Rick.

“Dwayne it’s going to be okay.”

“Uncle Rick she just disappeared!”

“Lower your voice we are beginning to attract unwanted attention. She was no one don’t worry about her. You are far more important than any of them.”

“We have to get out of here,” Dwayne looked over his uncle’s shoulder. The ones that were outside his house were starting to approach them.

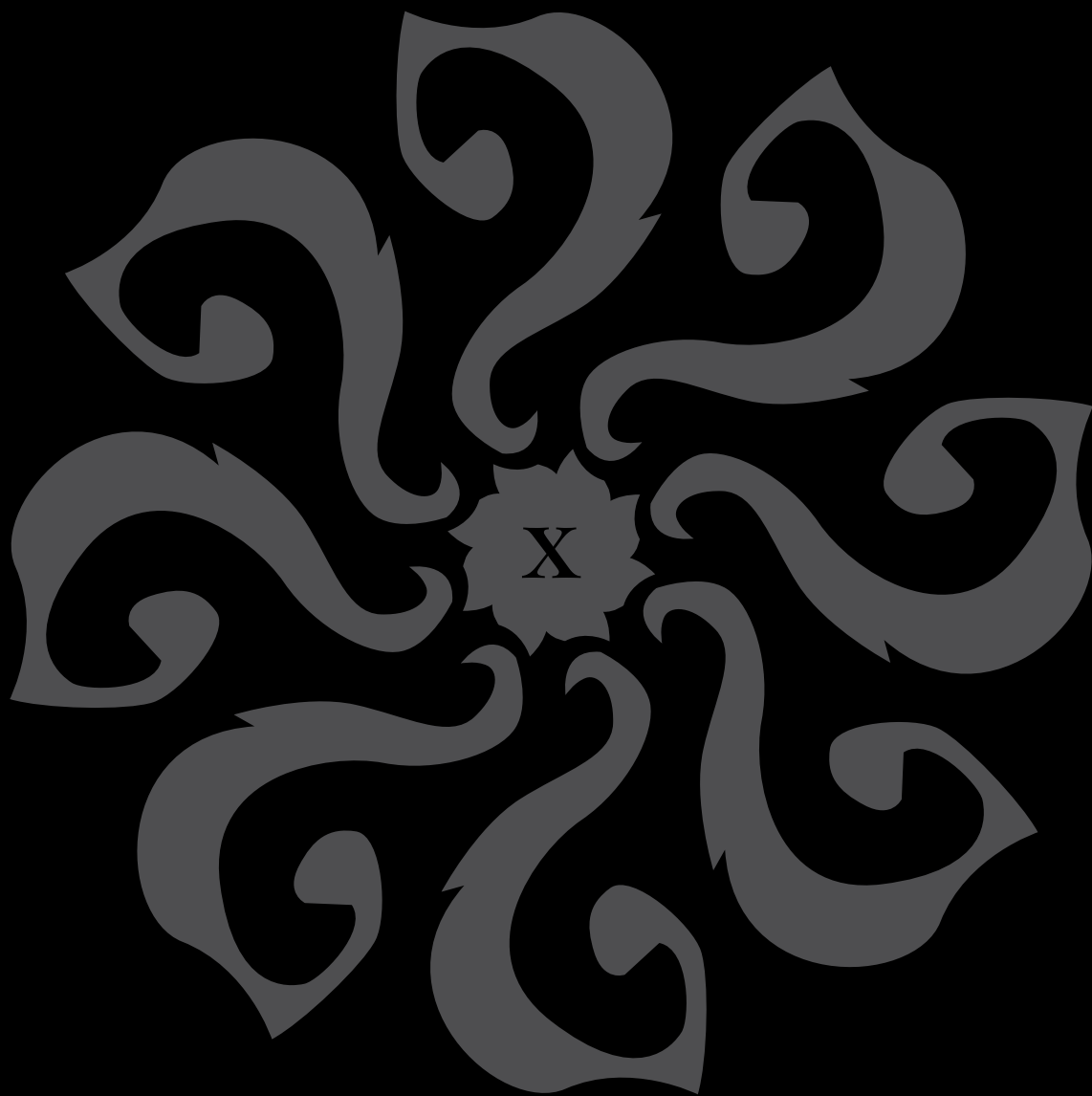
“Dwayne, there are some doors in life that should remain closed you don’t have that luxury. You are so special even you don’t know how special you are but you will soon find out. Your mother and father don’t understand how important you are.”

His uncle touched his shoulder and suddenly everything went dark. How did his uncle do that? He felt the world around him slowly dissolve in front of him. A small part of him was trying to warn him that this man in front of him wasn’t his uncle but it was too late as darkness took over.

“Everything is going to be okay, dark prince, your kingdom has been waiting for you and you will be great...”



Large, White Olive Branch
Jonathan Kruschack



Large, White Olive Branch

Jonathan Kruschack

Hello, how are you? Well, I hope. What was your name again, lady? Sorry, I'll try and remember. I've had better days.

I think. Thought? It's hard to remember much since...that day. The day I met that giant.

What? Sure, I'll tell you what I remember, forgive me if it doesn't make much sense. I didn't understand it as it was happening until it was over. And I do apologize if I go back and forth with how I describe it with past and present tenses, it just doesn't seem important now. I'm sure you understand.

The day was going as most of my days went.

I was walking along, looking for food and shelter among the green of the jungle, which shaded me from the intense light and heat of the sun.

By nightfall, the air was finally cool. I needed to be careful though, even though my armour was tough and strong, I am not a fighter. My kind, hide when confronted, curling inside our armour until the aggressor gives up.

It works...for the most part.

Moving along the dirt I reached the enormous lair of a giant. My kind tells tales of these giants. They are to be avoided. They often attack without provocation, as they are fiercely territorial. I didn't believe them, though. Why would a giant care about us? And how could they even notice us.

I've seen them from afar, and even hundreds of miles away they tower over most things, especially us. Hungry, I press onward, climbing the stone of the domicile. It took me hours but I finally got to the first ledge. I could see light, faintly.

The ledge was some kind of porthole to the giant's home.

There was a ginormous netting meant to keep my kind out, but it had a tear in it. Apprehensive at first; I thought to run away, the risk not worth it. My stomach growled, though and my foolhardy pride kept my feet planted.

I was brave and I could prove my elders wrong about the giants, maybe even be like one of the truly brave who ventured into other giant's homes and lived there in secret. Forward went my feet, rhythmically tapping as I scurried along. Upon entering the home, I promptly fell off what I thought to be a cliff.

Without time to think about how afraid I was I reflexively hid in my armour, hoping it would cushion my fall.

The feeling of the impact was...jarring to say the least.

But after a few moments not being sure if I was dead or not, I realized I was in fact still breathing. Ceasing my orbicular stance I looked around my surroundings. I was on a ledge again. But the material was different. Not the stone I had climbed or the alabaster wood I'd fallen off of.

This was cold, hard and a brownish grey. There was a crevice, which my kind loves as I often seek shelter in them though I could not fit into it. Oh well, what's over — OH NO. GIANT. There is a giant.

Oh, please don't notice me, please. I had shut my eyes and prepared to curl inside my armour again when I noticed something. I hadn't been immediately crushed by its mountain-sized fist. In fact, it wasn't even looking at me.

Exhaling, I regained some confidence in my earlier thoughts.

It won't notice me. I'm too small. Laughing at my cowardice, I began to look for food and shelter, as I was confident, not stupid. Unfortunately, there was none.

Oh well, plenty of time to — SHIT, THE GIANT IS MOVING.

I froze. The giant stretched its elongated limbs as it rose from its bizarre throne in front of the light-creating rectangle it manipulated with what I could only assume was magic. The sound of its joints popping was like thunder, and its yawn like the roar of a great beast.

Or more accurately, like the roar of a great beast multiplied by a thousand. It stretched its neck to one side then the other, vertebrae grinding loudly. It looked very tired, with its huge eyes barely open. I calmed down slightly but not much as I realized it may just be going to sleep. I resumed moving, albeit very, very slowly. Then the giant turned to face the wall where I was. I watched his brown eyes trail down, again thinking I stature too minuscule for him to care.

He seemed very uninterested, which made me feel very good. That feeling died though, as I noticed he was now staring, face devoid of any emotion, at the exact spot I was occupying. Staying incredibly still, the most still I had ever been in my life unless I was asleep, I once more looked at his eyes.

They were slowly focusing, fighting his sleepy state.

Appropriate, because I was slowly losing any hope of a continued existence, fighting the urge to commit suicide. Please, please don't see me. I'm not worth it I'm not — HE SAW ME.

RUN. RUN AND NEVER STOP RUNNING, OH WHY AM I SO SLOW? STUPID, STUPID ARMOUR! STUPID SHORT LEGS!

As I cried and cursed myself the giant moved, easily crossing a distance that would've taken me hours in the blink of an eye. Panicking, I shut my eyes tight.

Hoping for death's grip to be gentle, quick and painless; alas, he didn't smash me, though. I opened my eyes. He didn't look angry. Or scared. Sometimes the giants kill because we startle them. But he didn't look at me with any malice that I could see. Curiosity? Maybe. Pity? I can see that. A kind of obligation? Yes, actually.

I certainly wasn't happy. But he did seem as if he had to do whatever he was about to do. I just hoped this task he didn't like wasn't called 'Murder The Small Thing'. I saw something I'd never seen before, suddenly. A huge, alabaster rectangle of a soft material. It was flat, and the giant placed it in front of me. Why?

I turned away and the giant placed it in my way again.

Why, I asked again. He definitely wanted me on it.

What could it be? Then I had another one of my great ideas, in a moment of hope. What if it was a makeshift vessel of some sort? A kind of large, white olive branch.

Maybe...maybe I was to be an emissary between our people. Usher in a new age of peace, where we coexist in harmony. So, I stepped onto the white rectangle, finding it very soft. Ah, what comfort.

He may not look happy when tired but, boy, is this giant friendly. He said something, though I did not understand it. But there would be time to work out a way to communicate later. Come, my new friend. Let us rest and why is he folding it over me? Oh, he's sealing me inside it.

I HAVE MADE ANOTHER TERRIBLE DECISION.

Oh no, oh no, I must find a way out but there's no way out — WHY ISN'T THERE A WAY OUT?! Wait, I know, I'll just curl into a ball. Yeah, that's what I'll do.

That always works. It has to work. Please, please let it work. He's lifting me up. Carrying me, but where? I can't see out. Maybe he'll take me outside his home and release me?

Oh, how foolish I was.

He carried me very quickly and then let gravity take me. I fell for what seemed like ages, and then I landed in a lake. At least I think it was a lake. The water was very cold. Wait, is he drowning me? I can't get out of here and the material is taking on water and HE'S DROWNING ME?

Is that why he looked unhappy? He didn't want to crush me but knew he couldn't let me live, so he gave me this for a death?

A watery grave? THAT DUMB, LUMBERING BASTARD—what was that noise? Why am I spinning?

The water was rising very fast. Oh no, I thought. This is it. With my last gulp of air I curled into a ball but as usual, it did me no good.

I was rushed down with the water, wherever it was going.

I knew it wasn't taking very long but when you're drowning it feels like an eternity.

Then, I lost consciousness and true blackness took me.

And when I...awoke...that would be appropriate word for this, right? Okay, when I awoke I felt no pain.

And there were no water or giants. Only you...

Just you, lady. With your robe and your big grin;

I guess I can't really call that a grin. Yeah, you totally do need lips for that.

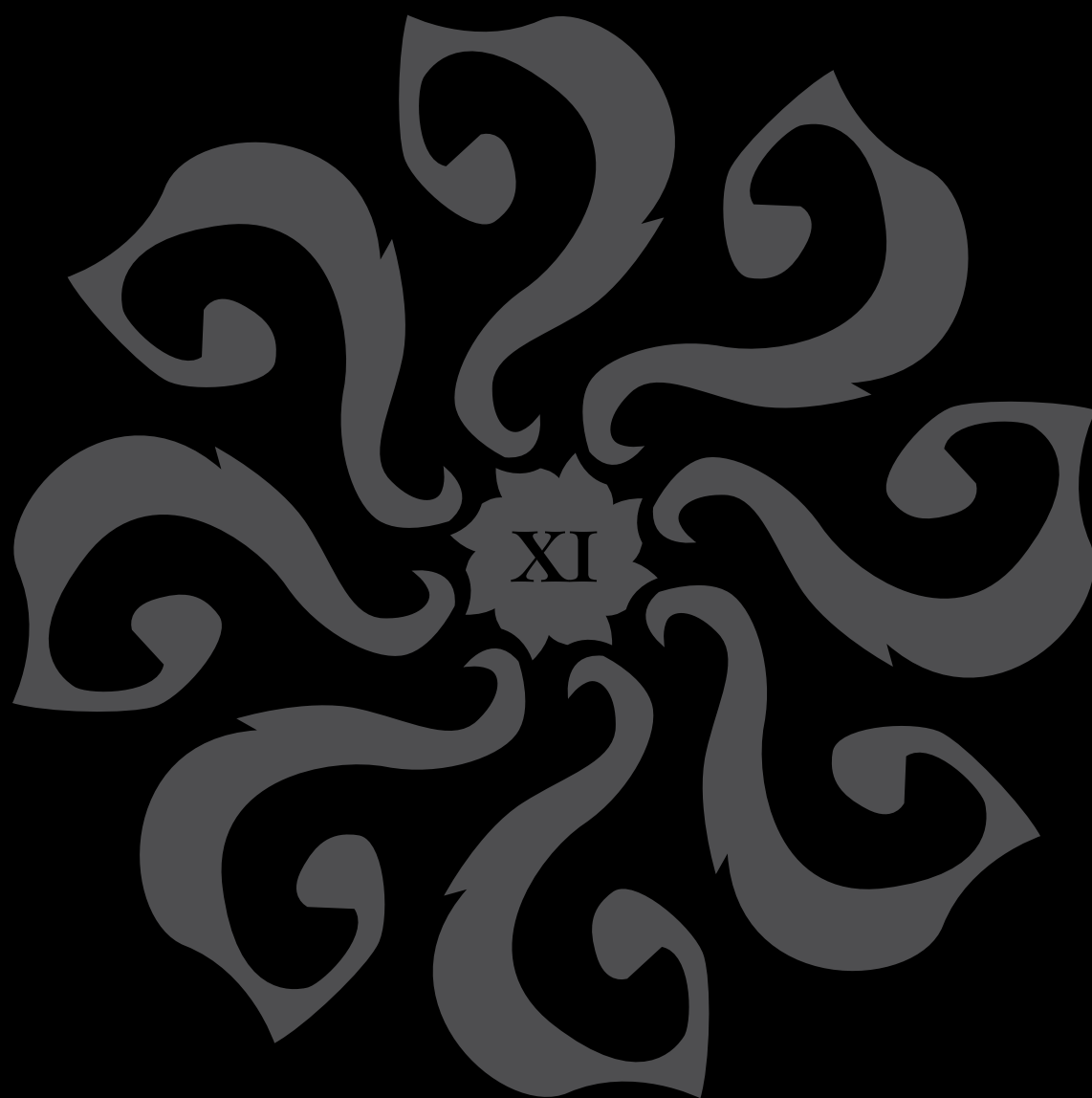
Oh well, I still like you. Nice robe, by the way. I like how it compliments your sharp, shiny thing on that curvy stick.

Thanks for waking me up. So, what's this place you're always going on about? The sunless-lands, huh? Sounds neat.

Hey, how come I hear wings?



Visitor
Denziel V. Mornix



Visitor

Denziel V. Mornix

He saw a dog following him around the last couple days.

It seemed like it didn't have a home, it had to be a stray dog, he thought. Peeking out the window he saw the large sandy brown dog outside across the street looking up at him.

Watching the dog, it was just sitting there doing nothing.

A neighbour from down the street had her big German Sheppard, Missy out for a walk, and were coming up the street. Victor watched as the big German Sheppard began to whine and pull back on the chain.

The woman stopped and tried to calm her dog down, when she saw what was causing the distress of her dog she tried to shoo the sandy brown dog away but it didn't even look at her. It kept staring at him. She looked up at his window to see what the dog was looking at.

"Your dog is supposed to be on a leash!" she called up to him.

"He's not mine," Victor called back to her.

She took her dog up onto the neighbour's lawn and went around the strange sandy brown dog.

Frowning he watched the dog. No one went near him.

Everyone went around him and gave him room as they did or crossed the street. It was like they were afraid of the sandy brown stray. He didn't look like a mean dog either.

In fact he looked like a friendly brown dog. Yet he was a stray he reminded himself.

His mom came outside and had a bowl in her hand.

She was whistling and calling the strange brown dog over to her. He looked at her and then up at the window.

Then stood up, wagged its tail and came over to her. Victor almost called down to his mom to be careful but watch as the dog came over and was gentle to her.

She pet the dog and patted his back.

"Are you lost? I'll bet you're lost mister. What's your name, pretty boy?" she was petting it and playing with him.

“Mom, it’s a stray, be careful or it might bite your head off!”

he called from his window. “Would you bite me?”

Oh no, you wouldn’t, would you?” He rolled his eyes and went back to playing his computer game. His best friend pop online and they decided to meet on a new server they found to get some aliens.

It wasn’t long before his mom was calling to him lights out.

He had already had a quick shower and changed into his pajamas. Peeking outside he didn’t see the dog out there.

Smiling, he thought he must have went home.

Crawling into bed he had some strange dreams.

The dog was following him home from school and he was

getting attacked by a dragon. Waking up he was covered in sweat. Getting up he went to the bathroom to brush his teeth.

Opening the door he paused in mid-step. The sandy brown dog was sitting on the toilet with a newspaper in his paws.

It looked up at him with a knowing look, “Do you mind?” it asked him. Rubbing his eyes he looked again.

“Do you mind?” the sandy brown dog asked again.

“Sorry,” he stepped back outside and closed the door.

He had to be dreaming still. He heard his mother downstairs making breakfast. His dad and brother were talking to her about the weather and something they had saw on the news. Swallowing hard, he still held the door knob to the bathroom. He wanted to peek back inside but wasn’t sure how rude that would be. Letting the door knob go, he stepped back and prepared himself to grab the dog when it came out.

The toilet flushed and the sandy brown dog came out with the newspaper in his mouth. All thoughts of grabbing the dog escaped him as he watch the dog on all fours. Walking pass him and down the stairs. Victor had to have imagined that the thought as he went about his morning business. Getting dress for school he headed downstairs and saw the dog sitting at the kitchen table with a fork in his paw.

“What the hell mom!” he pointed to the dog.

“Watch your mouth Victor,” she snapped.

“The dog,” he nodded at the dog.

“What dog?” his mother looked at him as if he was crazy.

“That dog!” he pointed at the dog.

The dog looked behind him. Everyone looked in the same direction. “Victor! Don’t be so rude to our guest like that.” His mother snapped.

“I am so sorry,” his dad began to apologize to the dog.

“Are you kidding me? What the hell is going on here?”

“Victor enough!” his dad turned to him and glared.

“Not one more rude word from you this morning young man.”

He sat down beside his brother. “What’s wrong with you?” his brother Billy asked.

“What’s wrong with me? Everyone can’t see that it’s a dog sitting here and there is something wrong with me?” he whispered back to his brother.

“Excuse us,” Victor grabbed his brother and dragged him out into the hall.

“What’s wrong with you? You’re acting like such a spaz!”

“Dude that a dog sitting at the kitchen table, he’s a four legged, bow wow.”

“No Vic, that’s our cousin Pete from Vancouver.”

“Okay, listen to yourself. When had we ever had relatives that lived in Vancouver? Like come on...like never?”

His brother looked at him and thought hard. “Yeah, I kind of thought that was weird too.”

“I’m telling you I saw that dog following me around for the last week. There was something strange about it too. No one goes near it. It’s not like other dogs. Then this morning when I went to the bathroom it was sitting there reading a newspaper and told me to get out.”

“But he looks human to me,” his brother Billy countered.

“Well I’m telling you he’s not and hell, he’s probably not even a dog.”

“What is he? Like an alien or some mutant?”

“I have no idea!”

“Well we can’t leave mom and dad alone with it.”

“Maybe we should call the dog catcher?” someone suggested.

“That’s not a bad idea except it doesn’t look like a dog to me.” Billy said. “Well he does to me,” Victor nodded.

“Me too,” a third voice interjected.

Victor and Billy looked at each other, than over to the dog who was standing on his hind legs looking at them.

Billy and Victor screamed and bumped into the wall.

“What’s wrong with you guys?” their dad asked.

“Saw a spider,” the dog called out to him.

“Keep it out there,” their dad replied and disappeared down the hall in the other direction.

“What are you?” Victor asked.

“OH GOD! Vic,” Billy grabbed his arm.

“I see the dog thing you were talking about.”

“Okay guys hold on, three, two, and one.”

The dog held up a paw in front of them. Neither one moved and kept staring at the dog.

“See you guys later!” yelled their mother as she headed out the front door.

“Don’t be late for school and keep an eye on your cousin!” their dad called and followed her out the door.

The dog looked at them and grinned. “Well fellas, it’s just the two of you and me here now.”

“What do you want?” Victor asked.

“What are you?” Billy stared wide eyed.

“Okay let’s make this quick and painless.”

They nodded in agreement still in awe that it was a dog talking to them. “Yeah you guessed it I’m not your cousin from Vancouver. In fact you don’t have any relatives from Vancouver and I’ve never been there myself. Heard it was great place for sushi, whale watching and that sort of thing. Anyways the reason I’m here, Victor, is because of...you.”

“Where are you from?”

“Some place pretty far from here. I’m not really a dog either. I just chose this form so I

wouldn't freak you out or anything."

"Yeah, bad call on that one." Victor never took his eyes off the dog.

"I just need your computer and I'll be gone."

"You want my computer?" Billy asked.

"No, Victor's computer."

"Why do you want my computer?"

"Because Victor, you and your little friend downloaded some codes that you shouldn't have. I need to get them off your computer and make sure it doesn't happen again. Now we can do this the easy way or the hard way boys your choice."

"You're a dog what can you do?"

"Do you really want to find out?" he grinned.

They looked at each other then back at the talking dog.

"Alright my computer is upstairs in my room. Maybe you can just taking the info off it and let me keep it. I really like it, if you know what I mean."

"I'm sorry that's not an option."

"What the hell did you download dude?" his brother looked at him.

"No idea."

The dog continued to walk on two legs all the way upstairs with the boys following close behind him.

"Why didn't you just take it? Why risk exposing yourself?"

"Well we tried that already but it didn't work out so well. We almost got caught in our regular form with your buddy Nick last week and didn't get what we wanted. It was just easier this way. Once we knew which kid it was."

"So what was it that I downloaded?"

"Sorry, that my little human friend is confidential," the dog smiled.

"Will we ever see you again?" Billy asked.

"If you are lucky . . . nope," the dog laughed.

"No one is going to believe this can we get a picture with you?" Billy asked.

“Nope that would be a violation of protocol.”

“Alright here it is.” Victor frowned. “You do realize you’re taking away my life here.”

“Sorry, Victor.” The dog grabbed the computer and put it under his arm, or front leg. Holding it tightly he smiled at them and nodded. “What’s your real name?” Victor asked.

“Call me Rex,” the dog laughed and then shimmered in front of them until he disappeared before their eyes.

“Okay that was weird.” Billy looked at him.

“Yeah I can’t say that I have ever had a weirder moment. But you did see it was a talking dog right?”

“Yeah it was a talking dog like alien creature who called himself Rex.” His brother laughed. He started out of the room and paused at the doorway. Turning around he looked at his brother. “You didn’t give him your back up drive.”

“What back up drive?” Victor smiled. Then he remembered he didn’t really have a brother either until two weeks ago.



