

The Rook House Event

By Matthew Tansek

~~I~~

The pale morning light of dawn must have just begun to brush the shades of my windows as the hands of the old man reached my door. I admit that I was not completely aware of this fact at first, the old man's cries and pounding not sufficient enough to reach my ear as I lay nestled in the confines of my second floor bedroom. They were however noticed by my two dogs, who upon hearing such a uncharacteristic noise at such an hour set to barking and raising hell. My pleas for them to cease did nothing to assuage them, and so brought me to my door and to the realization that the old man lay beyond it.

Bare footed and wild eyed the old man sat collapsed like some deflated wizard upon my stoop. The dogs at the sight of him began anew their cacophony of noise, which I would have encouraged had it not been for the glimmer of familiarity in the old man's face. Then upon realizing just who it was at my door, I set about silencing my dogs as best I could, for it was none other than the kindly old hermit I had known since I was a boy.

So weak was he that I practically needed to carry him to the kitchen table. He muttered simple one syllable responses to my barrage of

questions, and it wasn't until a few minutes had passed and a portion of strong alcohol consumed did he begin to regain a cogent demeanor.

“Linus, thank God you were home. I know of no other man that would believe me, that still holds me in any sort of esteem enough to listen.” he said weakly, setting the emptied glass down with a tremulous hand, “Something terrible has sent me to your door at such an early hour my boy. A death, a homicide in point of fact; perpetrated by nothing less than them that only we know to be true.”

“You don't mean,” I stared at him with sober eyes, “those fantasies nearly ruined my childhood. You really shouldn't begin to dredge all that up again, and after startling me out of bed.”

“I do not wish to reopen old wounds my boy. I would have gladly let you alone and remained a fogged memory to you, but were it not for the man that came to me this past night, God rest him.”

“So you were not having a go at me? A man lost his life? If that's true we must notify the sheriff.” I said standing from the table, “I can make the call, just give me a moment.”

“Yes, yes. Although I fear they may only look at me queerer than before. Place your call, and then come back here. I should like to speak my

tale to an audience that will not disregard me at the outset at least once.

And pass me the rest of that bottle will you?”

~~II~~

The rooks knew he was coming before I did, shrieking and crying for nearly ten minutes before I saw the lantern bobbing down the old road. I figured the birds were after another free meal and had come out the back with what little I had to spare for them. Such lovely birds, but will eat you out of house and home if you let them. But then like I told you I saw the lantern down the bend and I knew it wasn't for want of scraps of bread that had stirred them up. You know how shunned my house is, and the names the folk in town refer to me by, so to see someone coming to visit does quite vex me. But seeings how I didn't know who it was, I didn't want to start off on the wrong foot as it were, so I calmed myself as best I could and awaited his arrival.

He was a queer looking young man, as pale as the underside of a frog, limping something fierce, favoring his right leg as he came. He was wearing what might have once been a good looking set of clothes, but had come

frayed and stricken with holes from what I assumed must have come from clumsy maneuvers through the briars and forest of the surrounding country.

“Hello there,” I says to him, in as jolly a manner as I could muster up, “don’t mind the birds, they just aren't used to visitors. It’s a long way from Hawk Lake if that’s where you're coming from.”

I tell you that boy gave me gooseflesh, though I couldn’t reckon exactly why at the time. Figured it must have been that look he had in his gaze, sure as the tide it’s the thing I remember most about him. Eyes wide apart like a carp, mottled color of gold and grey, always rolling and looking away at odd angles. His face had no whiskers, save for a thin moustache that my old lady- god rest her soul- could have put to shame. Gaunt and hungry looking, like the deer when winter’s frozen up all their vittles.

He told me that he had come out this way hiking and had lost his way back to his camp. Which seems more strange to me now than it did at the time considering how he was dressed. But he surely was not prepared to head back out at such a late hour and I, despite my preference for solitude, could not deny him a bit of hospitality.

The rooks didn't care for that boy I can tell you. Even After I started talking to him, they usually can tell from your tone and posture if something is a threat, they all continued on to shriek and snap at him. I brought him into the house, which he seemed eager to enter, and for nearly an hour they could be heard pecking and scratching at the roof. Wish to God I had listened to them.

~~III~~

I built a fire in that old stone chimney, I'm sure you remember it, and me and the boy set to talking about all sorts of things. The history of the town, the change of the wilderness over the past decade, that strange blight that seems to be creeping down from the hills. On that account he had some strange notions, seemed to think that the blight wasn't some fungus at all but rather a side effect of something else. I offered to share what little food I had with him, for I was sure that someone so slight and being lost in the wilderness and all that he would surely be hungry for something. But he refused, saying that all he needed was a roof over his head until the morning light, and then he would be on his way. He did take a cup of tea

that I gave him, but even that seemed to just sit and cool next to him on the end table, never once being raised and pressed to his lips least not I was aware of.

Throughout the whole of the the night the young man seemed to grow increasingly nervous, and insistent that I shut all of the shades on my windows. At first I obliged him, seeings how the rooks had acted, and pulled those closest to the old couch that I had planned on putting him on for the evening. But he asked again about each of the windows as the evening wore on, and started me to thinking maybe it wasn't just the birds that gnawed at him. When I went out for more firewood, a task that he seemed strangely against, he went around and shut them all himself. I don't know what's proper anymore to do in another man's home, so I kept my mouth shut. Drawing the shades being an eccentricity of the fellow and not something I gauged to be worth getting bent out of shape over. Should have tipped me off long before, how nervous that young man was of the windows, that something was not right. Too much of my time has been spent in the company of those birds, as you well know, and not with the civilized. It wasn't until a gust blew through and brought down a limb onto the side of the house that I really got an idea of the extent to which the boy

suffered. The ends of the branches raked the window panes, and I saw a look of fear come over him like Hell itself had opened up to claim him. Made an incoherent sort of wail and made some kind of sign with his hand. White as a sheet he was, and it took a couple of minutes to calm him down. I insisted he give me at least some sort of explanation.

Said he had been driven out into the woods by something he called up from the north hills. Something with great clumsy wings that he had hoped to be able to study in secret. I know you know the stories Linus, I know you remember what we saw that night when you were just a boy playing out at the edge of Mathers field. I confess understanding why the boy had not told me outright of the real reason he was stumbling down that road, what had put that look on his face. But as luck would have it, his feet found their way to me, perhaps one of the only men to know what it was he was is talking about.”

I interjected here, sputtering into my own cup of coffee, “You can’t be serious, the boy mutters something about wings and you jump to conclusions. There are many people suffering from delusions that will tell you that they have seen things with wings wholly unrelated to to the legends of this place. And you said that this poor young man died?”

“Aye, yes. But it wasn’t just the claim of wings that sent my mind a running to them up in the north hills. It was the color of them. He said that the things he called out of the hills were as pink as salmon flesh, and buzzed like an old streetlight!”

“Poppycock. And he claims to have called them up out of the hills?”

“Said he knew what they were looking for, what they *came* looking for. The young man said that the age of these hills is astoundingly old and there was something in the ground that they are working to bring up. Out there working as we speak Linus.”

“I don’t buy it. And you would be best to believe that the police are not going to buy it either. And the death?”

“You are wrong to think that I just hung my hat on such a claim. No sir. I was as skeptical as you, and although I was an adult and I know what I had seen so many years ago with you, I didn’t take him at his word for it. Not until the second limb fell on the house.”

~~IV~~

“Second limb?”

“Or so as I thought. It came to thump on the roof right as I was about to turn in and wish the young fellow good night. The dogs started up outside like I had never heard them, horse mad sounding barks, like they were throwing everything they had into them you know? So I say to the young fellow that I’m going to go out and quiet them down and see if there was any damage done to the house from the limbs that fell. He pleads with me, tells me that he is sure that it is one of the things that have come looking for him. That he has somehow made them angry, and that they’ll kill him to keep him quiet. But I had made up my mind, and had to push my way past him out my own door.

I get out to they yard and as I do I hear only one dog a barking, but not coming from the tether at the back, no it's coming up from the roof. Well you remember how overgrown the trees are by my place, and I can’t see much through the leaves and such. He’s a yelping and sounding like he’s in pain, and I start to thinking that there might be something to what that young fellow was saying, that there really might be something on the roof. Try as I might I can’t really see much up there, even running around to the other side. So I come back in to get my gun and to get more out of

that damn young fellow who brought this to me and I see everything is wrong.”

“What do you mean everything is wrong?”

“The embers and the logs from the fireplace were scattered across the floor, and I see the old couch that I have pointing toward the fireplace is overturned. I remember shouting something then, though I don’t remember what it was, and I heard him. A terrified sort of wail, coming from *up the chimney*.

“My God man,”

“I struck out of there like a shot, but saw nothing. Just heard the whooping of huge wings and the clatter of the trees like something were pushing their way through them. I didn’t know what to do then, so I started for your door.”

I stared at the old man at my kitchen table, rumped and weathered and haloed in a mass of gnarled grey hair. There was no way that anyone would take his story seriously, save for me.

Another knocking at my door sent my terriers a barking again, the sharp white shirt of the constable’s shirt could be seen through the window.