


NIGHT OF TERROR

By A.R. Foote



The old woman sat by the dying embers of a once glowing fire. Her feet blue with the cold, and her faithful cat huddled on her lap for what little warmth the old woman could provide. It was a long time ago that firewood was plentiful in that house. Her husband had died ten years earlier and left her without a penny to her name. There was no work for an old woman in this part of the country so all she could do was ~~be~~ beg or steal to keep herself alive. Her name was Geraldine. The locals all thought that she was a bit crazy, and the children taunted her with chants and pointed at her as she walked in the street. Geraldine never noticed though, her mind always elsewhere. Who knows what thoughts occupied her time. Whatever they were, she and only she knew.

Somewhere in the distance a solitary bell tolled. Dogs barked for a while then stopped to smell the crisp night air. The woman drew her last breath, and as she sat there

limp in her rocking
chair

the fire puffed a little bit, then died for the last time.

Nobody would mourn her passing, it was doubtful that anyone would care. The next morning, a neighbour looked through her window and saw her ~~lying~~^{sitting} ~~there~~^{still}. Two hours later she was buried in a paupers grave. Other poor people in the village looted her house and took all of the possessions that were left behind. In a matter of ~~of~~ hours the little house was picked clean as if by vultures. All that remained was the cat, crying at the window for the return of the old woman who had loved him so long.

Later in the day, the weather turned bad. Rain clouds were forming and the villagers passed the usual comments to the effect that there was a storm on the way. Later that night it arrived in full force. Trees were tossed about like toys, wagons were tipped over and horses ran around in their paddocks screaming in terror. There had never been a storm as ferocious as this one. On and on it went. The rain poured. The wind bellowed and whistled frantically, and the thunder and lightening prevailed over all.

Two men stood in the pub looking out at the wind and rain and lightening, "I never saw nothin' like this before" exclaimed the one nearest the window.

"Me neither" said the other one "I hear tell of old Geraldine croaking this morning eh?, Do you reckon it 's got somethin' to do with her then?" he asked.

"Dunno!" came the reply. The two men returned to drinking. No one ventured out at all that night. It would have meant certain death to do so since the wind had taken the rooves off many houses and dumped them into the street, leaving the tenants grovelling in the ruins, afraid for their lives. They looked up and saw only the lightening flashing overhead.

The storm blew itself out at eleven forty, or somewhere about then as was told by the man who has the only clock in the village. People were gathering outside their damaged homes. There was much chatter and excitement and all was calm. Calm until one small bboy, looking at the sky began to squeal in terror.

There above them was the spectre of a ghostly apparition pointing a glowing finger at the villagers. Nothing was said. Nothing was done as all the villagers stood spell bound. There was this two , maybe three hundred feet high figure standing over them. All the sky was black.

There was nothing in the air except the outline of the spectre. It was golden, glowing as if some giant hand had reached into the heavens and switched on a giant light. An old woman fainted and two men collapsed and died of heart attack. Children held tightly to their mothers skirts and wept hysterically. Still the figure stood there . Pointing. Then, as if like yhunder, a huge voice spoke out. It was so deafening that the people had to cover their ears to stop their eardrums splitting. It said.

"You have all forsaken me. You have all mocked me. None of you have come to my aid and my earthly body froze to death. Come sun up, you will all know what it is like to die alone. Death to all of you. Death....death.....death....death"

The voice stopped and the spectre dissappeared. The villagers asked each other who the spectre was. None of them knew. It was the old woman who had died unnoticed and unnecessarily that day. The people returned to, their homes, those who still had homes that is. and locked the doors. There was general panic in the village. People screaming and pushing , and clawing their way through to their own kin. The little village, in which everyone knew each other had turned around on itself. Most of them had lived there all of their lives and had grown up together.

The wind came up again. The night had become warm and clear. The oddest thing was that there were no animal sounds at all. No cows or horses and no dogs barking in the distance there was nothing at all. Some people were looting the damaged shop fronts and fights broke out. One man was struck on the head with a piece of wood as he tried to protect his wares from looters, and killed. There were two looters on top of him bashing his head while three more stole his guns and tobacco from the store. They then, having done their dirty work, ran off. The home of three elderly people was ransacked as they lay on the floor getting the life beat out of them. One old woman knew the boy who killed her. She gave him money the day before. Now he was smashing her head in with an iron bar. There was blood in the streets and homes of all the villagers by the time the night was over. In the morning, there was nothing. Fathers and sons had killed mothers and daughters and vice versa. Elderly were killed and ^{had} killed, but one thing was certain. There was no-one left there and not one of those people had helped another. The spectre returned and stood tall over the village. "Do you all sleep so soundly that you fail to notice my presence" it bellowed. "Get up all of you" The villagers stood up, one at a time and each one looked into the sky as they did so. In minutes the whole town had stood up and come into the street to behold the apparition who had put each and every one through a personal hell. "Have you learnt anything? Do you know what it is like to be alone and to die that way. Forget me not. and forget each other not" then it vanished. And the light returned. The people were huddling together now. Some were crying. Some were hugging. But they all knew what to do first. A hymn was sung as the villagers went to pay their last respects to the

woman who they had never known. Who died alone because nobody
nobody cared.