

The Legend of the Barn Monster

“A great behemoth with horrible, red eyes – eyes that you hope never to see peering at you from the shadows within the old barn – and a roar that shakes the very ground on which you stand. He only comes out at night, at which time he prowls about in search of human children whom he may devour.” Thus were we first introduced to the Barn Monster.

My uncles have many tales to tell about the various buildings that make up the old family farm, and each story is skillfully woven into the natural character of these decaying structures. The hundred-year-old farmhouse, once the home of my great-grandparents, is now a mere ghost of its former self. Its floors are twisted and warped, and the ancient furniture and decor are but shadowy figures of a time long past. Already surrounded by an eerie atmosphere such as this, it didn't take much to spark the imaginations of young minds. I still can't go near that house without wondering if the Hatchet Lady still haunts the place. It was said that an old woman in the area, whose weapon-of-choice lent to her name, sometimes hid out in the old house. Often, as a child, I was certain that I heard the creak of a rocking chair, or caught a glimpse of a face staring out of the attic window at night.

Another such venue for these phantasmal debuts was the hundred-year-old, wooden barn. On the ground-level, one could find scattered about various remnants of past farm life – here an antiquated hay wagon, there a rusty scythe, and just around the corner a tractor retired from active service. Each article in turn captures the imagination, introducing it to scenes from long ago. Rickety, wooden steps lead you up to the hay loft, from which great-grandfather fell to his death so many years ago. The knowledge of this unhappy event always gave me a vague chill whenever I was in the barn, yet that feeling was never quite strong enough to keep me from climbing all over the aged structure, exploring every nook and cranny.

During one wintry visit, my family was stranded on the farm by a fierce blizzard. The storm

raged for a full day, taking its toll on a people unaccustomed to such weather. Presently, the power went out, and some little time was spent adjusting to life without the comforts afforded by electricity. Meals were cooked over a crackling, hearth fire, while cousins searched for creative ways to pass the time. Uncle John proved to be quite adept at keeping the children entertained and set about organizing a trek through the snow-covered woods and overseeing the construction of an igloo of mammoth proportions. Near the end of a few days time, however, an unmistakable restlessness began to overtake us all. It was time for entertainment with a more artistic flair.

“Pssst! Uncle John's holding a secret meeting in the old house tonight! Pass it on.” A message of such import spread quickly among twenty young cousins, and soon all were excitedly exchanging whispered conjectures of the nature of this clandestine gathering. At the appointed time, twenty youths with flashlights eagerly made their way to the dark old house, through the squeaky door, across the creaky floor, assembling in what was once the parlor. Uncle John was already there, as were an aunt and a few older cousins. “After talking with your parents,” my uncle began, “I have decided that you have all reached the age where I am duty-bound to warn you of the grave danger that threatens you; the great evil that lurks here in our very midst. My own uncle told me the story in this very room twenty years ago this night, and now I tell it to you.” Forty eyes fixed themselves attentively on the speaker, who proceeded to describe in no little detail that terror of the night – the Barn Monster! “You will never see him during the day, as he lives underground. However, at night he comes out in search of food, and usually lurks in the shadows of the old barn until an unsuspecting child comes along – he likes them just about your age. Then, he grabs them! One of my best friends disappeared after an evening stroll, and was never heard from again!” Forty big eyes got even bigger, while twenty small bodies shivered at the thought. After a brief pause, Uncle John continued. “Your great-uncle took me up to the old barn that night long ago, for I too was somewhat reluctant to believe. Now, I am going to take you. There is safety in numbers, and he will leave us alone, provided that we stick together. Oh, and you must leave your flashlights behind. Light irritates him. Let's go!”

The moon peeked teasingly from behind the clouds. Twenty youths started out, somewhat less eagerly than before. Uncle John offered unnecessary exhortations to silence, as his followers wished the snow was a little less crunchy beneath their boots. A short walk that seemed to last an eternity soon brought the little party creeping through the shadows of the old barn. Ever drawing nearer that great, yawning opening, whose inky blackness revealed nothing of its interior, so that the imagination was left to conjure up images of its own. Forty boots came to a stop just outside the opening, and all ears strained for anything to prove or disprove what imagination claimed was inside.

Suddenly, the stillness was broken by a most terrifying roar and the rustling sounds of movement within. Twenty figures stood, momentarily paralyzed by fear, before scattering like mice in the presence of a cat. None had seen. All had heard, and further convincing was needless. One small boy ran so fast he left a boot behind and stumbled through the snow without it. Only after much difficulty was his aunt able to convince him to slow down while she helped him back into it. Others fervently hoped that the Hatchet Lady would show up about now to put her skills to good use in combating this monster of the night. That long cold walk of moments ago was retraced in mere seconds by the retreating party. Twenty terrified children raced into the warmth and safety of home.

As twenty pounding hearts slowed and twenty imaginations cooled in the light of reason, twenty heads joined together to find a suitable explanation. There had been growling, therefore a man was indicated, yet all male residents were present and accounted for. Other theories were similarly tried and rejected. No one seemed to notice that twenty became twenty-one, as an elder girl cousin quietly joined the group, cold and out of breath. Presently, twenty-one youths reluctantly crawled into bed. Only one slept soundly, while twenty lay awake, still mystified.