October 24th – I'm honestly not quite sure what to write as a first entry here. I mean, I feel a little silly doing this in the first place. I also know that I'm taking a big chance, because if anybody should read this and get the wrong idea, I could end up in a padded room somewhere, and I sure as hell don't want *that*.

However, if I don't write down all the weird shit that has been happening to me recently, I feel that I might go insane. So, I really can't win here. But still, who is going to believe such a wild and far out story in the first place? Even I wonder if I have a screw loose sometimes.

Oh well. Might as well get all the basic stuff out of the way first, I suppose. Start at the beginning, and all that. So here goes.

My name is Stephen Johnson. I'm 28 years old, and I live by myself in a small house in the Hudson Valley, in upstate New York. I'm certainly not going to write my exact address or the name of the town, or anything like that, since I don't need any stalkers harassing me. Let's suffice to say that I'm in a rural location, with my nearest neighbor being about a mile away, and leave it at that.

I wouldn't even be living here right now if my parents hadn't left the place to me in their will. They died a few years ago. Car crash, really horrible. Even now, I choke up thinking about it, and how much I miss them.

I'm just glad that the scumbag involved got 25 years in prison for it. He still got off too easily though, if you ask me. Especially since it was his THIRD DWI offense. What was the law thinking in not revoking his license and throwing him into prison sooner? If they had, my parents might be alive right now.

I still get angry and start seeing red when I think about the injustice of it all. My hand is shaking as I type this sentence.

OK. Deep breaths and count to ten. I don't need to be raising up my blood pressure any higher than it already is.

Anyway, the point is that my parents left me the house in their wills when they both died, and so I've been living here for the past three years. I've thought a million and one times about selling it, and pocketing the money to move somewhere else. Maybe one of the big cities? I have heard Albany is very nice, and Buffalo is supposed to have a pretty wild nightlife, which sounds right up my alley. Hell, even New York City would be a welcome change of pace. *Anything* is more exciting than where I live right now.

Yet, even having said that, I can't quite bring myself to sell the place yet. Their deaths are still too fresh in my mind, and selling the house would be like selling away their memories. Despite how I may feel, I could never do that. Not to them.

So I've made myself content to live here for now, save money, and bide my time. The plan was to give myself some time, work through some things, build up a decent bank account, and then leave when I finally felt ready. I knew that moving away made little sense until I was in the right place for it, emotionally and financially. So I figured that was a decent compromise, to help give me time to prepare myself, while not feeling like I was stuck here forever.

Luckily, I have a good paying job, and so I thought it would only take me a few more years before jumping ship forever. I'm not attached right now, by choice, so that helped make the decision a bit easier. I only had myself to factor into the plan. And I thought it was a pretty solid plan.

At least, until all the weird shit started happening around here about a week ago. Now I'm not so sure.

Well, I've stalled long enough. No sense in putting it off any longer. After all, that is the whole point of why I'm writing this damn thing, right? I've got to take the risk of putting all this down in black and white for others to see, even if they decide to haul me off in a strait-jacket. If they do that, at least I won't be around when all the creepy things that have been happening finally hit their peak.

I suppose it makes sense to start at the beginning. It was a quiet Saturday afternoon, about one week ago, as I said, and I had been taking a day off to rest and relax at home. It had been a rough week at work, with the boss giving me a hard time as usual, and so I needed the day to myself.

I had heard some kind of loud rustling in the bushes near my house the night before. It had even been loud enough to wake me up. I figured, at first, that it might be a large animal passing through, like a deer or a bear. I had seen both types of animals around my house, especially at night, and so I didn't pay it any mind. It can be a little intimidating at first to have a full grown bear snooping around your house in the middle of the night, but you get used to it. So long as you don't bother them, they generally return the favor.

So, as I said, I didn't pay it any mind at first, and rolled over to go back to sleep.

Yet, it didn't stop after a few minutes, but continued, and somehow got even louder. It sounded as if something was trying to rip the bushes up by their roots.

I sat up in bed now, just in time to hear a loud knocking, as if somebody or something was banging a baseball bat on the trunk of one of the trees outside. The noise was loud enough to wake the dead, and if I had neighbors who lived closer, there is no way that they wouldn't have also heard it.

I heard one loud bang, then another, then a slight pause, and then three more extremely loud impacts in quick succession. There was no rhythm or pattern to it, it just kept happening, over and over again.

I got out of bed and walked over to my bedroom window, peering into the darkness outside my house. I couldn't really see much of anything. It gets pitch black at night where I live, being so remote, and my outside lights weren't on. There could have been an entire army in my backyard, stomping around, and I wouldn't have noticed.

I stood there for a minute, peering into the darkness. I heard the loud banging and rustling noises again, and by listening carefully, could determine that the noises were coming from an area on the very edge of my property. It was right where my backyard ended and the woods began.

I never ventured back there very much, but I was familiar with the entirety of the woods surrounding my property, having walked through them many times as a younger boy. I used to take hikes along the dirt paths, between the tall pine trees and the vegetation that covered the forest canopy like a concealing umbrella. I would walk through the woods all day sometimes, enjoying the experience of being so close to nature.

That is, until I realized that I had lost track of time, and would rush home to make it back by dinner time, so I could escape being scolded by my parents.

Though, for some reason, Mom and Dad always got really angry when I mentioned that I had been hiking through the woods alone. I usually had to lie, and say that I had been at a friend's house. That made them less angry at me, for some reason.

Less angry, and less afraid. They would always grow so fearful when I approached the woods. Even if they were around, they would yell at me if I went anywhere near them. They told me, in no uncertain terms, that I was to never go into the woods behind our house, or risk being grounded "for the rest of your life".

I could never figure out why, exactly. Even before their passing, they never told me the reason for their fear. I had asked them a few times, and they would simply shake their heads and change the subject.

They said that they had "good reasons for it", and then left it at that.

I had always wondered about that. But now, after the recent events around here, I think I may finally be starting to understand.

It used to be a magical experience for me, walking through those woods on a nice spring afternoon. Seeing the rays of sunshine break their way through the canopy overhead, hearing the birds chirp and the frogs croak. The soft pattering of feet and the occasional snapping of a broken stick as the deer walked past, managing to conceal themselves perfectly among the vegetation.

When I got older, of course, my interests shifted, away from nature walks, and more towards girls and concerts and partying. The typical concerns of your average teenage boy.

I'm afraid to admit that I may have even engaged in a bit of underage drinking as a teen! It happens. Peer pressure can be a hell of a thing, sometimes. Especially when you're too young, and too dumb, to know any better.

However, despite my newfound interest in drinking and breasts, I never quite lost that desire to go exploring. I would still feel the urge from time to time, to go walking through the woods for hours by myself, and enjoy the quiet and solitude.

What was that fancy German word that my English professor in twelfth grade has used once? Wanderlust, or something like that? I seriously should have paid more attention in high school.

Anyway, I was peering out into the darkness that night, trying to figure out what the hell was making so much noise, when I finally heard it bang twice more, and then make a loud grunt, the loudest grunt I've ever heard in my life. It seriously caused me to take a step back and away from the window, I was so startled.

Then I heard the thing, whatever it was, moving off into the brush and vegetation. It rustled a bit more, sounding a bit further off on my property, and then it was gone.

Now, I was home the following day, so I took a walk to the back of my property, to see if my mysterious visitor had left any clues as to its identity. I was rather cautious walking back there, as I didn't want to accidentally bump into the creature, whatever it was. The last thing I wanted was to risk

having to deal with a startled and possibly pissed off bear, or some other animal. I was carrying my rifle with me, just in case. You can feel free to lecture me about gun control and safety all you want, but it pays to be armed in these parts.

Luckily, as I got near the bushes and trees that had been the focal part of the disturbance the night before, I didn't see any sign of the mysterious intruder. My feelings of gratitude about this, however, were quickly intermingled with a sudden shock as I surveyed the scene. The area looked like a cyclone had hit it.

I counted two or three bushes that had been ripped completely out of the ground, roots and all, and thrown a distance of several feet away. They had landed on the ground with the roots sticking straight up into the air. There was no rhyme or reason to it that I could ascertain. They were just strewn everywhere, seemingly left where they had landed. When I had thought the night before about my strange visitor trying to tear out the bushes, it seemed that I had been correct in my assumption.

Looking around now, I also saw large marks and notches on several of the tree trunks, with huge gashes in them. It actually looked as if somebody had been striking them repeatedly with something large and heavy. I'm not exaggerating when I say that a large chunk of the trunks had been knocked off, with wood and sawdust covering the entire surrounding area.

Nearby, I saw a large branch lying in two pieces on the ground. It looked like it had been broken completely in half, and I figured that it must have been used to strike the trees. I walked over to it, and, seeing it up close, it would have taken a professional wrestler to lift that thing. It was easily as thick as my torso, and I'm a solid dude.

Kneeling next to it, I saw something that looked like an imprint in the ground. I examined it a bit more closely, and then saw that there were others, around the branch, and in the surrounding area. I studied it for a moment, not quite sure what I was looking at, exactly.

The imprint next to the branch was the same as the others surrounding it. It was a footprint. They were all footprints. Not of a man, or even a bear, which is what I was expecting.

No, they were *hoof prints.*

Studying them, it looked like the animal had been very worked up last night, for some reason. The hoof prints were scattered all about, and in such a pattern that it looked like my visitor had been prancing and stomping around in great agitation. That would explain the senseless destruction of the bushes, for one thing.

The tracks were deeply imprinted in the dirt and mud, and as I looked carefully, I was able to make out a trail, which filled me with a bit of a chill. It looked like the culprit had walked through the woods towards the edge of my property, had committed its vandalism against the vegetation here, and then walked back the way it had came, disappearing back into the overcast gloom of the surrounding forest. I was clearly able to make out one set of tracks leading towards my property, and another leading away from it.

Now, I grew up in the countryside, and have lived here for most of my life. I've seen deer tracks, moose, bear, coyote, and practically every other type of critter that lives in these parts. I am very

familiar with the size and shape of such prints. I know how their particular hooves are shaped, how deeply they imprint into the ground as they walk, the power and strength behind each print, depending on the size of the animal.

I've also seen those of horses, having visited farms many times as a kid. So I'm pretty good at telling the different tracks apart from each other. I swear, upon my parents' graves, that those were *horse tracks* there in the dirt and mud behind my house.

I must admit to being completely baffled by this. What would a horse be doing behind my house after midnight, ripping up bushes and banging the hell out of trees? And how could it even do so in the first place? Last I checked, horses still don't have opposable thumbs.

None of it made sense to me, no matter how much I tried to rationalize it. However, I was eventually content to just shrug my shoulders and leave it alone. I decided to chalk it up to one of those weird things that happens in the countryside from time to time. Believe me, living out here in the sticks, with your nearest neighbor being a mile away, you see and hear some crazy shit sometimes.

I just went back inside and went around the rest of my day. Cleaned the house as best as I could (always have trouble with getting the dust and dirt in those little side corners), relaxed for a bit, and then sat down in my living room to watch some TV with some home made dinner. I had to learn to cook for myself, living so far out in the boondocks. Nobody is willing to drive this far to deliver here, so it was either that or starve to death. And I've gotten pretty good at cooking, too! I make a killer fettuccine Alfredo that would blow your mind. Part of having Italian heritage on my mom's side.

I was sitting in my living room, with the blinds up, watching the newest episode of Law and Order on Hulu. I was beginning to doze off a bit after having finished dinner, and polishing off a beer or two. You know how alcohol can make a guy a bit drowsy sometimes, especially on top of a big meal.

Hey, I'm sure it's happened to you sometimes, don't judge! Nothing wrong with a guy drinking responsibly in the comfort of his own home. I'll fight to the death for the right to enjoy a beer or two from time to time.

As I was starting to nod off, I heard a faint noise outside. Nothing serious, it sounded like a slight ruffling of leaves, nothing more. It sounded like it might have even been the wind, it was so faint and quick. For a second, I assumed it to be just that. My ears had perked up when I had heard the noise, but then my mind reassured me that it was the wind, and so I slumped back into my chair.

I turned back towards the television and attempted to figure out why it was so important that the perp had been with his girlfriend on the night of August the 24th. Apparently Ice-T was trying to solve some kind of crime. Damned if I knew which one, though.

Then I heard it again, louder this time. This time, I knew for sure that it wasn't the wind.

Instantly, all drowsiness left me as the adrenaline pumped through my body, alertness returning to my mind. I sat up straight in my chair, looking out the nearest window, trying to see if I could get a glimpse of anything out there.

I couldn't see a damn thing, of course, but as I peered outside, I began to hear some noises coming from my backyard. They were a repeat of the same sounds from the night before. The loud rustling of

bushes, the heavy knocking on trees, and this time, the grunting was even louder, if that is possible. And it wasn't just one time, either. The grunting continued, over and over again, at first, sounding neutral in its tone. Then, getting more agitated, and increasing in its repetition.

Each grunt coincided with a loud knock against one of the tree trunks, sounding as if the thing was trying to literally knock the trees down. It was hitting them so hard, I could actually feel the vibrations from my vantage point in my living room.

Whatever it was, it sounded strong, large, and *pissed off.*

I didn't dare go out there to confront it, whatever it was, even carrying a gun. If it should come at me, and I fired and only wounded it, it sounded strong enough to rip my head clear off my shoulders. I had absolutely no desire to tangle with some pissed off wild animal in the dark.

Instead, I moved over to my back door (making sure it was securely locked, of course), and moved my hand over to the patio lights. I wanted to get a glimpse of it, at least. The outdoor lights are practically as bright as the Sun itself, and there was no way that I wouldn't be able to see the thing, even if it was on the edge of my property. I should have still been able to get a quick look at it, if nothing else.

I hesitated a second, looking into the pitch blackness. I could still hear the loud grunting and banging fill the air. It seemed like my visitor wasn't going anywhere, anytime soon. This seemed like the perfect opportunity to identify this mysterious intruder, and I didn't want to miss it.

So, double checking the lock for my back door, I took a deep breath. I hesitated for a second more..and then I pressed the button for the patio lights, turning night into day and dispelling the darkness with revealing light.

It took my eyes a few seconds to get adjusted to the blinding glare as the entire area was now lit up. I squinted as I peered outside, not able to see anything.

Thinking back on it now, it's honestly absurd how bright those lights are. I really need to get softer bulbs one of these days.

I think it must have been the same for my visitor, for it suddenly stopped both the grunting and banging, and for a moment, there was absolute quiet and stillness in the air. I think it must have been trying to figure out what the hell had just happened.

Then, I swear to god, I heard the loudest, most ear-piercing scream I have ever heard in my entire life. It actually made my ears hurt and throb, it was so loud. It sounded like a woman in severe distress, like she was being killed, but even shriller. It was *LOUD.* My nearest neighbors are a mile away, and even they had to have heard it. I legitimately jumped in fright when I heard it. Heart pumping wildly in my chest, I quickly looked over in the direction of the noise.

I swear to god, I thought I saw the outline of a *man* standing up against one of the trees. I only caught a quick glimpse, because the animal was quickly moving away. I could hear it running through the undergrowth as it retreated back into the forest.

But, I swear, in that quick glimpse, I saw a man's head, and two arms jutting out of a torso, exactly like a human being. I couldn't make out any features, since it was too dark for that, even with the brightness

of the patio lights. Yet, as the thing was running away, I could have sworn that it turned its head right before it vanished from my view. It was quick, but I would be willing to bet good money that I saw *two shining red eyes*, right before it disappeared.

I heard it stomping and running through the bushes, and soon enough, the noise had stopped, and it was gone. Yet, as I stepped away from my back door, heart beating wildly, mind struggling to make sense of it all, I heard an extra noise. This time, it was a bit more faint, coming to me from somewhere deep in the forest.

Another high pitched shriek, as piercing as the first, and still incredibly loud, despite the distance that the beast had covered in its retreat. I heard it fill the night time air, and reverberate off the trees and hills that surround my property. I had clearly made it very angry, whatever the thing was.

Then, it stopped, and I heard nothing but silence. Even the crickets had stopped their chirping and lay still. It was now deathly quiet.

I stepped away from my back door, my heart beating wildly in my chest like the drums of the Congo. My mind was racing, as I tried to figure out what the hell I had just seen. It didn't make a bit of sense to me, at all.

My mind jumped through all the possibilities, coming up with several different theories, from the mundane to the outlandish. Each item coming up for consideration, only to be checked off the list as I considered the evidence and found it to be sorely lacking.

A deranged person, some kind of maniac prowler? Well, that *would* explain the strangely human-like body that I had seen. It was possible that some nut was lurking on my property. He could be trying to play a practical joke, or be up to something a bit more sinister. Yet, there wasn't much evidence supporting that theory, so I put it aside.

Though, if it WAS a practical joke, or some kind of prank, it was a most unwise one. Considering I am armed and not afraid to defend myself if necessary, then the prankster, whoever they are, was certainly taking a hell of a risk. They would have to know that people up in this neck of the woods would be packing heat. They would have to be either mighty bold, or mighty stupid.

Some kind of wild animal, like a bear or mountain lion? I had seen bears roaming around in the woods behind my house from time to time, and knew they could grow to a massive size. They were quite strong, and quite capable of ripping up bushes and damaging trees if they wished. It can be hard to visualize just how massive a bear can be unless you have seen one in person, but believe me, some of them would put King Kong to shame.

They were usually peaceful, though, and minded their own business. I heard the occasional story about people being attacked by bears in these parts, but that was usually due to them coming between a mother and her babies. True, sometimes there could be a starving bear who was out looking for an easy lunch, but that wasn't that common. Bears, generally speaking, had more to fear from trigger-happy hunters, than the other way around.

Still, you never quite knew for sure. That's why I always take my gun with me when I walk through the woods. Gotta be cautious, after all.

As for mountain lions, I remember reading sometime that there hadn't been a population of cougars in New York State since the late 1800's. Officially, they were supposed to be extinct in the state.

Yet, I had heard on the news about mountain lion sightings in the Hudson Valley from time to time. None had ever been caught, but the sightings still happened, just the same. The authorities liked to downplay the reports, or explain them away somehow. They usually dismissed the animal sightings as being escapees from somebody's private collection.

I had also watched a documentary about mountain lions a while ago, on one of those nature channels. I knew they could scream really loud, almost like a woman in distress, in fact. It can be quite startling to hear, especially in the middle of the night, and in the dark. I heard it once, when I was a kid, and it almost made me pee my pants.

However, no mountain lion, that I knew of, had hooves instead of paws, and could pick up a giant branch in its hands and smash it against a tree.

What about something more fantastic? It could even be some undiscovered animal species that had somehow escaped discovery by hiding in seclusion from human beings. Hell, in that vein, I even considered the possibility of Bigfoot, since, strange as it would be, some of the evidence *would* point in that general direction. I remember reading that those things are supposed to bellow like banshees, and love knocking on trees.

Besides, there are certain townsfolk around here who swear that they've seen ape-like creatures running through the trees, up in the mountains. They swear that the creatures have glowing red eyes, and a stench that would strip the paint off a Volkswagen.

But I had never heard of Bigfoot having horse hooves, and besides, nobody even knew if the creatures existed. Nobody had ever brought in a Sasquatch carcass for study, after all. So I quickly put that notion out of my head. Best not to try and start solving an unknown with another unknown.

Safe to say, I was stumped. I simply couldn't figure out the identity of that thing, and none of the evidence conclusively matched any of my theories. I was being left with more questions than answers. It was a mystery to me, and each time I tried to put a lid on it and return to my normal routine, it kept bubbling back up to the surface of my mind.

The next day, at the office, I asked around to see if anybody had any similar experiences, but my coworkers had never heard of such a thing. The entire time, I could tell that they were skeptical about my experiences, and didn't quite believe me. When they finally asked if I might have been dreaming or hallucinating the entire thing, I clammed up and dropped the topic entirely.

If not, they might have been calling for the men in the white coats to come and take me away.

It became hard for me to focus on my duties at work, and my job performance began to suffer, as my experience became a bit of an obsession for me. I searched all over the Internet to see if there were any similar reports. I found a lot of really interesting accounts on paranormal and cryptozoology sites, but nothing matched up. Nor could I find out anything about any sort of creature that might come close to fitting the description of what I had seen. I spent hours looking online, but had no luck.

I began to fall asleep at my desk more, and my boss even caught me one time. Gave me a verbal warning, but let it go otherwise. I should be thankful for small mercies, I suppose.

It had just become harder for me to get any sleep at night when I was home, because I now heard the terrifying screams every night. They were further away in the distance at first, but getting steadily *closer.* I have heard them every night for the past five nights, in fact. Shrieking, unearthly screams, loud enough to wake the dead.

I know the intruder, whatever it is, is steadily making its way back towards my property, and it's only a matter of time before I encounter it again. God, the screams are so *loud.*

Tomorrow, I am going to visit my nearest neighbor to see if he has seen or heard anything this past week. He lives only a mile away from me, so the possibility exists that he might have experienced something. We'll see if Tom has anything to say. I only hope I don't hear the screams tonight.

October 25th – I had a hard time sleeping again last night. I heard the screams again for over an hour, and this time, I can tell that they are getting much closer to the edge of my property. I haven't heard the tree knocking or rustling of bushes again, but I know it's only a matter of time. I must have startled the creature enough to scare it away for a bit, but it sounds like it's starting to come back, and it's none too happy.

I went over to Tom's house today. I have to say, it's funny how speaking with someone can trigger memories in your mind, things that you thought were long lost. Things that haven't been in your mind since you were a kid.

Earlier, as I mentioned, I drove over to Tom's house, hoping he would be at home. It was a bright, sunny day, not a cloud in the sky, and despite my troubles these past few nights, I was in a good mood. I tried not to focus on the creepy things that were happening, and the disturbing things I had seen in the dark.

I just felt happy to see an old friend again. Tom and I went way back, to our high school days. We had been pretty bad troublemakers in those days, and shared many laughs. I was always happy to hear from him, and figured that he would probably be glad to see me, too. We usually reminisced a bit about the good old days, and had a beer together whenever we met. I hadn't seen him in a while, and had been missing that a little bit.

For as long as I've known him, he's lived in the same townhouse, on the same street, with the same car parked in the driveway. Even the same curtains hanging in the windows too, I'm pretty sure. At least, they certainly *look* the same. Same basic gray pattern, kinda boring, not much to look at. Tom is a good friend, but he never had much in interior decorating taste.

His house has always been a bit larger than mine is, though, a fact that has made me envious on occasion. It has a nicely decorated front porch, and a long driveway. Two stone pillars stand at its entryway, molded into the appearance of two lions, guarding the entrance from unwanted intruders like twin sentinels.

I asked Tom about them once, why he had those two pillars in front of his otherwise mundane looking townhouse, seeming so out of place. He had just looked at me, shrugged his shoulders, and said that he

thought it looked cool. It reminded him of “one of the medieval castles in Europe”, was his exact reasoning.

I’ve known him long enough to just shrug my shoulders, and go with it. That was *exactly* the kind of thing he would do, entirely because he saw it in a movie, or read some old book about kings and knights. That was Tom for you.

To be honest, it always reminded me of that scene from The Fellowship of the Ring. You know the one, with the river and the giant statues, and the epic music?

When the heroes sail down the River Anduin and pass between the Argonath, the sentinels of N`umenor, on their way to Mount Doom, to destroy the One Ring?

That scene always gave me chills, and was one of the few things that I thought Peter Jackson did right with his film adaptations.

Yeah, so I was a bit of a Tolkien nerd when I was in high school. Big deal. What of it? Don’t try to tell me that you didn’t geek out over those movies in the theater as well. *Everyone* did.

But to get back on topic (and keep this diary entry from ballooning out of control), Tom’s house looked in great condition. He had clearly kept it maintained over the years. It looked freshly painted, as if he had only done it a few days before. The lawn even looked freshly mowed, too. I wonder if he did it himself, or if he hired someone instead?

Now, I had always known Tom to be a bit of the loner type. He was a reserved person and enjoyed his privacy. I didn’t see him too often, but had always known him to be friendly, but guarded. He wasn’t really the type to divulge much personal information, even to someone that he considered a friend.

To be honest, I had never really minded it. I understood his position, as I am not someone that likes to tell the entire world my business, either. If you recall, at the beginning of this diary, I refused to even tell you what town I lived in. Despite what the rest of the world may have decided, there is something to be said for having a modicum of privacy, and keeping some things to yourself. Not all your dirty laundry needs to be exposed on Twitter for random strangers to gawk at, and post comments.

Yet, even with that in mind, I was surprised by what I saw when I parked in front of his house, and even a bit taken aback. A tall fence now ran along the entire perimeter of his property, leaving not a square inch uncovered. There were small pointed edges lining the top, jutting up like mini spikes towards the sky. It effectively sealed off his yard and home from the surrounding area. Looking at it, I almost thought it looked like a medieval castle. It just needed a moat around it to complete the image.

A gate, with iron bars, now closed off the entrance to his driveway. I could even see a security camera installed next to the gate, recording everything that happened on and near his property.

I was really surprised by this, since Tom had always been guarded, but never to this extent. It could just be that his desire for privacy had increased recently for reasons unknown. Maybe he had grown more reclusive, and was trying to shut people out, keep them from spying on him. That would explain the fence, gate, and security camera.

Yet, I couldn't imagine why, since I'm his nearest neighbor, and even I only see him every so often. There was barely anybody else around here for probably another mile.

Maybe he had developed some new strain of paranoia as of late? Knowing him, his news consumption had increased again recently, driving up his anxiety levels. He'd always had that problem. He'd watch too much cable news, and then be ready to build a bomb shelter and stock up on canned foods, certain that the Apocalypse was imminent.

I got out of my car and walked up to the gate, ringing the bell. I paused a moment, waiting to be admitted. Then I heard a buzzing sound, and the gate swung open. I walked up to the door and knocked, waiting for a response. I heard a stirring from inside, and then Tom himself opened the door, his features brightening with recognition.

"Stephen!", he said with a happy tone in his voice. "It's been a while, how are you?"

"I'm good, Tom", I grinned, some of my initial concerns beginning to dissipate a bit at the friendly welcome.

"Tom", I continued, "I would like to talk to you for a bit. I had something I need to ask you about, it's very important".

"Certainly", Tom said graciously, stepping back from the door slightly and motioning me inside, "come on in and let's talk".

I stepped inside, and followed him as he walked down the hall, and into his study. I made myself comfortable as he gestured for me to sit in one of those fancy chairs that he has, right in front of the fireplace. I sank down into the thick cushion, putting my feet up on the ottoman, accepting the beer that he handed me with gratitude.

He had decorated his study to look like an old-time library, books filling the walls in all directions. He even had a bit of a fire going, which filled the room with warmth, and made things rather cozy. Despite my earlier comment about Tom's taste in interior decorating, his study was the one room in the house where he had proved me wrong. He had done a magnificent job of putting it together, and it showed.

As he sat down in the chair beside mine, I took a deep breath, and then began to tell him my story.

I told him everything that had happened, from start to finish, leaving nothing out. I explained everything that had happened, and then asked him if he had any idea what the hell was going on.

His expression noticeably changed during my story, in a most significant way. First, his expression had been cheerful and friendly, but as I continued, his face began to darken, and grow more solemn. Finally, by the time I reached the end, his face had grown completely serious, and his expression grim.

He stood up for a moment, after I finished, and walked over to the nearest window, his brow furrowed. He looked outside for a moment, standing there silently, his back to me. He didn't say anything for a minute, just standing silent. It almost looked like he was surveying his property, enjoying a view of the nice day outside. But I knew Tom well enough to know better. Something was obviously weighing heavily on his mind.

Finally he turned and, regarding me with a contemplative expression, finally seemed to come to a decision.

“Stephen”, he began, sitting back down in his chair and speaking to me in a hushed tone. “As you know, privacy has always been something I highly value, and so I’ve have never been much to share my personal life with others. Oh, it’s nothing against any one person in particular. I am just that way, is all.”

“However”, and now he looked at me with an expression that was bordering on near terror, “if I don’t share with somebody else, about what has been happening around here as of late, I might go insane from the strain”. His eyes had grown wide, and his voice had a slight tremble in it.

I had never seen him like this and wasn’t sure what to make of it. What gotten into Tom to make him act this way, make him so afraid? The most that I’d ever seen him scared in our lives was that time that he crashed his parents car into a tree, after borrowing it to go joy-riding into town. I’d thought he’d just about have a heart attack that night!

I sat there and listened intently, a sinking feeling in my stomach, as he spoke to me in the same hushed tone, about the recent events of the past few weeks, and why he had chosen to install the fence and gate so quickly.

He told me about being at the local market not too long ago, and overhearing a farmer talk about a strange experience that had happened recently at his farm, in which his two dogs had been killed.

It had been near midnight, and the farmer had been suffering from insomnia, due to a personal illness. As a result, he was busy reading in his living room when he heard a hell of a ruckus coming from right outside his house. His two dogs were both sleeping on the porch outside, and he heard them suddenly both start snarling and growling with an awful ferocity, as if they were face to face with The Devil himself.

This continued on for several more minutes, getting louder with each passing second. Finally, he got up from his chair to investigate, and that was when he heard a loud grunting coming from outside. The dogs started causing even more noise after that, sounding as if they were ready to rip apart some unfortunate trespasser.

He got to his front door and opened it right in time to see the two dogs launch themselves at a big black shape standing about fifteen feet. The dogs were savagely biting and tearing at the intruder, clearly trying to rip its throat out with their teeth, while the black shape twisted and turned, fighting off the two dogs.

The farmer turned to go back inside and get a flashlight, but as he did, the shape struck one of the dogs in the snout, sending it flying through the air and landing with a thud upon the hard, cold ground. The dog turned around and ran off whimpering, with its tail between its legs.

The shape then seemed to grab the other dog, holding it by the throat for a moment. It then threw the dog in the opposite direction, away from the shape and back towards the house. The dog hit the side of the house and bounced off, landing on the ground. It then dove under the porch and the farmer didn’t see it again after that.

The farmer looked on in awe as the shape turned and ran back towards the nearby woods, shrieking loudly the entire time. The screams were loud enough to make the farmers ears ring and reverberate.

The next day, the farmer had investigated, and discovered a series of tracks, leading from the forest to his property, and then back again. Like me, he had noticed that the tracks were hoof prints, and had been as baffled as I was in trying to deduce the thing's identity.

His dogs had remained in hiding for an entire day, not even showing their faces to be fed. They just whimpered, and refused to come out. They had been spooked, and no amount of coaxing would make them come out . The farmer, for his part, had just hoped that the intruder, whatever it was, wouldn't come back again after the previous night's ordeal. He had hoped that it had enough after being attacked by the dogs, and moved on to go elsewhere. Yet, when he emerged the following morning, to carry out the daily errands and milk the cows, his two dogs had gone missing.

The farmer had searched high and low, looking in all their usual hiding spots, but hadn't been able to find them. Finally, when he looked on the edge of the woods, where the black shape had run off the other night, he had found the body of one of the dogs.

The animal had been torn to pieces, with the grass and brush trampled down all around it, indicating that a great struggle had taken place. The grass was covered with blood, and the organs of the poor dog were strewn all around. Even more unnerving, upon closer inspection, the remains of the dog had been partly *devoured.*

As for the other dog, the farmer never found out its fate. It had simply disappeared.

But, the farmer had stated, he was most definitely sleeping with his shotgun in close reach, from now on. Just in case the shape decided to pay another visit, and come for him next.

Tom told me this with mounting fear on his face, his apprehension coloring his features. It was a strange look for him, making him seem like another person, a total stranger to me. I was a bit put off by it, and his next words did little to put me at ease. I listened with a disconcerting feeling as he stated that he had brushed off the farmer's story as a random wild animal attack at first, and left it at that.

Until he had started to see something prowling around his own property at night.

He had seen occasional glimpses at first. A sudden movement out of the corner of his eyes. A darting shape that was there one moment, and then gone in the shadows the next. Twin red lights, that would only appear for a second, on the remote edge of his backyard, and then vanished just as quickly. These things always happened at night, never in the daytime.

He said that, at first, he thought his eyes had been playing tricks on him. It wasn't these things happened several nights in a row that he had been forced to conclude that there was something making regular trips to his property in the dead of night.

He said that it had been a black shape, one that moved with swift precision. It strictly avoided the light, sticking to the shadows and hiding in the darkness. Due to this, Tom hadn't been able to make out its exact shape, or see any features. He had never gotten a good look at it, and couldn't figure out if it was a man, or some kind of animal.

Funny enough, he even said that, like me, he had even considered that it might be Bigfoot! He has always been more of a believer in those sorts of things than me, even joining a ghost investigation club in college. It had been a big interest of his, and he must have read every book he could find on the subject of ghosts and the paranormal. That, and UFOs, and the Loch Ness Monster, and the Bermuda Triangle, and all the rest.

He had even went up one weekend to Lake Champlain, to go look for Champ, the local lake monster in that part of New York State. He had felt particularly inspired to do so when seeing the famous Mansi photo, the one that had been taken back in the 70s. Sadly, he hadn't seen anything while he was there, though.

Like the farmer and myself, he had found hoof prints, scattered around his property. He had also heard the bushes rustling outside his house at night. And there had been the loud grunts and moans that seemed to be the trademark of this strange visitor.

Like me, he had first thought of it as a bear or some other wild animal. Yet, he had also quickly dismissed that theory. He came to the same conclusion that I had, that none of the evidence matched any of his possible theories. He had investigated, trying to find a clue as to what was harassing him night after night.

He had even staked out his backyard at night, watching through a window for hours, waiting for the thing to come closer and show itself. He had shined a flashlight outside, trying to get a look at it, but it had been clever. It had stuck to the shadows, not getting close enough to be seen, but ripping up the bushes, and loudly grunting.

Despite all his efforts, he had simply come up dry. The sightings, the hoof prints, and the ripped up bushes were the only sign that it wasn't a hallucination, or a bad nightmare.

Tom stated that he had even gone hiking in the woods a few times (being sure to be armed, of course), to see if he could spot anything, or find some additional clues. He hadn't really seen anything out of the ordinary during his hikes, other than an abandoned rust-covered van, and somebody shooting up behind a tree. He must have startled the junkie, because the guy had run off, shouting the worst kind of profanity the entire time. Tom and I shared a pretty good laugh about that one. That kind of thing is more common around here than you would think.

Tom told me about a few other times that he had gone hiking recently, getting a bit sidetracked in the process. He told me about the rare flowers that he had found, the prairie drop seed and white camass. He had always been a bit of an amateur botanist, and so he had clipped one specimen of each and taken them home. He had excitedly made a few phone calls to some other enthusiasts, and even planned to fly out and show them the flowers in person. There was talk about sending them off to some prestigious botany magazine, though I forget the name of the one that he mentioned to me.

He told me about that, and the time that he almost startled a mother bear and her cub one afternoon, luckily managing to escape without being mauled. There was also the time that he had seen a police helicopter fly overhead, hovering nearby. The helicopter had kept its flight path restricted to one particular area of the woods, and Tom said that it looked like they were trying to find someone. His guess had been an escaped convict of some kind, though he hadn't seen anybody else that day.

When I suggested that they were looking for that same junkie that he had scared away, to haul him off to rehab, we shared another good laugh.

Tom's voice had perked up when talking about these things. It was then that I got a short glimpse of the old Tom. My friend, who had invited me over for dinner and drinks on more than one occasion. The same Tom that had gone with me to play billiards in town, or to the shooting range to blow off some steam after a particularly bad day at work. This filled me with hope, and I thought that maybe the malaise that had overtaken him was gone. Sadly, it didn't last.

Suddenly, his mood dropped again, becoming downcast once more. His tone shifted, and his eyes turned downwards. He said that things had been different the last time he went hiking, a few weeks prior. He had been about an hour or two into it, hiking along a familiar and safe route, when, on a whim, he decided to turn down a different path, one which he had never traveled before. He said that he had followed it about fifteen minutes, before making a grisly discovery. His face scrunched up in visible disgust as he recalled it in his mind.

It had been the body of a dog, matching the description of the animal that had recently gone missing at the farmers residence .

It had been decapitated, its head ripped clear off its shoulders, its limbs strewn all around the carcass. Like the other dog, this one had been partly devoured as well, and Tom said that he swore the bite marks looked almost *human.*

Since then, he hadn't gone hiking in those woods again, armed or not.

He said that, after that, the nightly visitations had increased, as if the being had learned of his discovery, and was watching him. He couldn't see it, outside in the shadows, but he could hear it moving around. Sometimes he heard the loud banging on the trees, and found the broken branches in the morning. Tom said that he kept his rifle in close reach at all times, loaded and ready to be used. The intruder hadn't acted hostile towards him yet, but he certainly wasn't going to take any chances.

Finally, he said to me, his face reflecting raw fear, his mysterious visitor had come back one night, and this time, it had been too close for comfort.

He said that it had been one night, about two weeks ago. He had been sleeping in his upstairs bedroom, having turned in early that night, when he had been awoken by a loud thud. He said that it had startled him and nearly caused him to fall out of bed and onto the floor. The noise had come from outside his house, as if something large had struck the side of it. He said that he had gotten up, put on a robe, and went downstairs to investigate, thinking that something may have fallen against the house outside.

He stated that the thought had crossed his mind that it could have been his mysterious visitor, but that he had still felt drowsy and hadn't considered it too much at first.

As he walked into his kitchen, heading towards the living room, Tom said that he had felt that someone was watching him. He had gotten that feeling that we've all felt at some point in our lives. The feeling of eyes on him, and that his movements were being observed. He had casually glanced over to his left, towards the large kitchen windows located over the sink. It had been an absent-minded gesture on his part, still feeling groggy, not even expecting to see anything of importance.

Tom stopped for a moment and took a second to collect himself. He took another drink of his beer, pausing once he was finished. He then said, in a shaking voice, that as he had glanced over towards the windows, he had seen *two burning red eyes staring at him from the darkness outside, only five feet away from where he now stood.*

Tom stated that he had stopped dead in his tracks, terror seizing his muscles and paralyzing him. His heart had been pounding in his chest, and his mouth had locked, unable to utter a sound. He just stood there, staring at the two red eyes as they stared at him through the window. He said that it had been the single most frightening experience of his entire life.

They had stood there for a second, staring at each other, neither of them making a move. Just staring at each other, the two red eyes burning fiercely, Tom's terror growing by the second.

Then the two fiery orbs had blinked, and then, in an instant, they were gone.

Tom told me that, after that night, he hadn't taken any more chances. He had the gate and fence installed immediately, paying a hefty amount of money to do so. It had cost him a fair amount of change, he said, but it had been better than waking up one night and having to deal with the thing trying to break into his house.

He also slept with his gun near him at all times now, just like the farmer.

After the gate had been installed, he had heard loud screams coming from the woods behind his house. The most ear-piercing shrieks, and some incredible banging and crashing, as if the creature was trying to tear down the fence. This had continued for several nights, with Tom not being able to get a moment of sleep, keeping his firearm within reach, ready to shoot to kill if necessary.

Finally, when he had thought that he couldn't take it anymore, the visitor seemed to give up, and Tom had heard and seen it no more.

Tom had told me of his experiences in that same hushed whisper, and turned to me upon concluding his story. His face had turned ghostly white, all the color drained from it, and a expression of sheer terror dashed across his features. He said that when he had gone to investigate the damage done to his fence, that he had found scratch marks all over it, as if somebody had been clawing at it with their bare hands. He also said that he had found huge dents in the fence, and parts where it had caved in, after being hit with extreme force. Seeing this, he had concluded that the creature had tried to break its way into the enclosure, but, being unsuccessful, had taken out its frustration on the barrier.

He found plenty of the enigmatic hoofprints scattered around, of course.

Tom stated that he had been stumped in determining the identity of the strange creature, and had consulted all sorts of zoology and nature textbooks, with no luck. Nothing seemed to match up with what he, and the farmer, had both experienced. He had started to wonder if it was some elaborate prank being played on him instead. Maybe even someone with malicious intent, trying to cause a nervous breakdown, for reasons unknown? He had started to consider calling the cops at that point, having hesitated to do so up until this point. After all, until he knew exactly what he was dealing with, what would he even tell them?

Then, Tom told me next, one day, he had remembered the local legends that he had heard when he was a kid. The stories about the monsters who live in the woods.

Tom's voice sank low, causing me to strain to hear him, as he told me the stories that he had heard as a child. He said that his parents had often mentioned "the things out there", deep in the dark parts of the forest, where few people tread, even in these modern times. They had warned him never to go into the woods alone, and that he should avoid certain parts of the woods, so as to avoid meeting "The Hidden Ones", who didn't like to be disturbed.

Tom said that he had heard his parents whisper about local children who had wandered off into the woods, never to be seen again. There had also been neighbors whose pets mysteriously disappeared, and then sometimes were later found, mutilated and partially devoured.

There had been the old timers who said that they remembered hearing stories from their grandparents and great-grandparents, about the mysterious "things" that lived in the woods, and were best avoided if possible. Some of the old timers had even encountered the beings on occasion, if the stories could be believed, and had thereafter refused to talk about it.

According to the legends, they always emerged in the night, and stayed in the shadows, away from the light. Nobody quite knew what they looked like, and those who had seen them and lived, wouldn't discuss it with anyone, not even close family. They simply shut up and shook their head in refusal if anyone asked. Nothing could get them to speak about it. Not even the most liberal amount of alcohol could pry their tongues loose on the topic.

Supposedly the American Indians had held similar legends, about "the demons of the woods", but refused to recount them to any of the early white settlers. They believed that terrible misfortune would befall them if they did so. They just simply ignored the question if it was asked, or become overly hostile, sometimes to the point of confrontation.

Tom had heard all these legends ever since he was a kid. He had only half put stock into them, and hadn't quite believed them, despite his fascination in all things paranormal. They had held some interest for him, but yet, for some reason, it had been a bit harder to believe in them than say, the Roswell crash, or Nessie. Maybe because they had been more sensational than simply an unexplained object crashing in the desert, or a monster living in a loch thousands of miles away. Here was something right in his own backyard, that seemed to hold all who knew of it in a grip of fear.

Yet, as he was growing up, he had continued to hear the strange stories from the locals. The strange screams that were heard deep in the woods, and the dark shapes that prowled outside their houses at night. There had been the reports of monstrous things that had been glimpsed in the glare of headlights as drivers traveled down dark country roads. And, of course, the pets and children who kept disappearing on occasion, sometimes right from their own back yards.

Tom told me all this in the same low voice, continuing to share the things that he had heard, his face still colored by ominous apprehension.

Then, he suddenly seemed to shut down, for no reason that I could discern. He had finished his train of thought, and just turned away from me and stopped speaking. I tried to get him to continue, but he

refused adamantly with a shaking of his head. No amount of prompting or encouragement could get him to discuss the subject further with me, and I was forced to conclude that the conversation had come to an end.

Shrugging my shoulders, I got up and excused myself, showing myself to the door. My farewells to Tom prompted only a half hearted wave goodbye, and a mumbled response. I shut the door behind me, and drove back to my house, lost in my own thoughts during the drive back.

The conversation with Tom, and the discussion about the legends of things in the woods, had somehow triggered some forgotten memories from my own childhood, about the stories that my grandparents had told me when I was a kid.

I remembered them telling me about *the things,* in the same hushed tones. My parents had disapproved of me hearing about such things, but my grandparents had insisted that it was for my own safety. They said that there were dangerous things out there, lurking in the dark, and that I needed to know so I could stay safe, after they, and my parents, were gone. My parents had grumbled under their breaths, but hadn't interfered after that.

My grandparents had told me about "The Hidden Ones", stating that the beings had been living in the forests since the time of their great, great-grandparents, and probably before even the first Native Americans had set foot in the region.

My grandfather had even told me that his father had encountered one of the things in the woods by chance one August evening, when my grandpa had been a kid. He said that his father had been out deer hunting at night, and had stumbled back into the house hours later, looking scared half to death, and his hair turned as white as snow.

It had taken him two days to regain the ability to speak. When he had, he could only say that he had been walking through some bushes, tracking a giant buck that he had shot a few hours earlier. He had wounded it, and was following the blood trail, hoping to finish it off. At one point, he had heard the rustling of leaves, and something loudly grunting behind him. Thinking it to be the buck, or a bear, he had whirled around with his gun held high, only to be confronted with what he could only describe as "a demon straight out of Hell". He could find no other words to describe it, other than that it was "ghastly" and "horrible".

"And those eyes", my grandfather had still remembered his father repeating over and over again. "Those horrible, horrible burning eyes!"

That had been the only direct personal experience that anyone in my family had ever had with The Hidden Ones, but my grandfather told me that, once, he had heard a rumor in town from several of the locals. Rumor had it that one of *their* bodies had been found deep in the woods, after some hunters had stumbled upon it. It had died through unknown causes, or so it was said. The hunters had contacted both the local sheriff and the clergy, and the body had been swiftly burned, and all those involved sworn to secrecy.

However, that had been several generations ago, when even my grandfather was a child, and so it was impossible to pick apart truth from legend at this point.

Though come to think of it, don't all legends and myths have a kernel of truth in them, if you trace them back far enough?

Well, as I'm writing this, I'm home right now, trying to make sense of it all. It's all a lot to process and take in, and I'm not quite sure what to think. It's probably best if I sleep on it for now, and see how things play out tonight.

Please, god, let there be no screams.

October 26th – Oh, *god.* I saw it. I saw the *thing*. God help me, but I saw *it,* and it's *horrible!*

I am still in shock from what I witnessed. How I wish I could erase the memory from my mind. No wonder that my great-grandfather thought the thing that he saw to be a demon from Hell! How does something like that even exist? Where has it possibly been hiding all this time?

I'm sitting in my upstairs bedroom, with my gun next to me. I'm not letting it out of my sight, not after what just happened. I'm trying to get everything down in writing as coherently as possible, since the incident only happened a short while ago. If I thought I was imagining things before, there is no way on Earth I'm still thinking that now!

I had heard a loud thump outside my house, only about half an hour ago. I had quietly gone downstairs to investigate, praying that it wasn't my unwelcome visitor, paying me another visit. The time was around 11 pm, and it was completely pitch black outside, as it usually is around these parts at night. My house lights were all off, and so I couldn't see a thing outside as I passed through my living room and peered out through the windows.

I heard a loud thump again, this time a bit further from my house, in my backyard. I had walked over to the back door, waiting to turn the patio lights on again.

But, as my hand hovered over the button, I had stopped for a minute, and thought to myself. If I turned the lights on again, the thing would be sure to run away immediately, and there would go my chance to get a good look at it. Indeed, there was even the chance that it could get agitated, and even aggressive.

Put quite simply, I really didn't want to deal with some kind of angry creature trying to break its way into my home. Especially with how strong this thing had demonstrated itself to be.

I quickly made a decision and ran back upstairs, grabbing my gun and a flashlight. My palms were sweaty as I held them tightly, and with silent precision, I made my way back downstairs, to my backdoor. When I was upstairs, I had heard another loud thump from my back yard, and knew that the beast was still lurking close by.

I stood by the door, my tools at the ready, and prepared myself to finally meet the thing that has so haunted my life as of late. My plan was to simply throw open the back door and shine the flashlight directly where I had heard the last thump. And if the thing became violent, then well, I was armed and fully prepared to use it if necessary.

I know that some people might hesitate to admit this, especially in writing, where it's immortalized forever in black and white. And most of all, on the Internet, in front of millions of strangers. But I'm

not afraid to tell the truth, even if other people might mock me for it. So I'll just come right out and say it.

I was pretty damned scared at that moment. Terrified, even.

Well, I mean, it's perfectly natural, isn't it? I lived alone, it was the middle of the night, and some strange creature was banging on my house for reasons that I couldn't even guess. I had no idea what I might encounter on the other side of that door, and my conversation with Tom was galloping through my mind at full speed.

Yet, I also knew that if I didn't find out the answer to this whole bizarre mystery pretty soon, I might crack up and lose my own marbles.

So I gripped the door handle tightly in my hands, my palms feeling sweaty and a bit slippery. As I heard another loud thump again, I threw the back door open with a jolt and shined my flashlight in the direction of the sound.

My eyes took a second to adjust to the darkness, and then I saw that the flashlight beam had hit a solid object, that was standing motionless in my backyard, about twenty feet away. I peered carefully at the object, which almost appeared to be darker than the night around it. Then I recoiled in fear, and felt my heart almost stop beating in my chest.

For I suddenly saw them. *The two burning red eyes, glaring at me out of the darkness!*

The object itself didn't move, just continuing to stare at me with those two horrible red eyes. I would have thought that the flashlight beam might have disturbed it, given the natural aversion to light that is prescribed to the Hidden Ones in the old legends, but it continued to stand there, staring at me. Not making a sound. Just staring.

My entire body had frozen, my legs feeling like jelly. In my shock, I continued to stand there for a few moments more, staring at those monstrous red eyes. The eyes didn't seem to be reflecting the light, but seemed, in fact, to be self-illuminating, burning intensely on their own accord.

We both stood there for several seconds, neither making a sound, continuing staring at each other in dead silence. I almost felt hypnotized as I continued to stare at those eyes. It was like they were pulling my very soul into their depths, stripping my spirit away from me. Like if I just gave up and let go, the thing would take my life essence away with it, leaving behind an empty shell of a man, all that had once been Stephen Johnson.

Then, all at once, I snapped out of it. I thought about raising my gun up and putting a bullet into the thing, to end this whole ordeal. However, I couldn't be sure that I would hit it, and if I only wounded it, I didn't want to have to deal with a giant pissed off creature coming at me in the dead of night.

I wrestled with the idea for a moment or two more, and then, impulsively, I reached over to my left and pressed the button for the backyard lights, flooding the entire area with bright light. I winced slightly as the bright light blinded me for a second, contrasting so greatly with the pitch-blackness of the night outside.

My eyes took a second to adjust, and then I looked back in the direction where the dark shape had been standing. It was at that moment that I wished to God that I had never turned the lights on, or even paid attention to the loud noises outside in the first place.

For I saw *the thing,* in all its full horrific nature, and if I had frozen in fear before, upon seeing the eyes, I felt even more petrified now. I honestly thought I might vomit right there upon my back patio. I only got a good look at it for a few seconds, but believe me, that image will stay burned into my mind for the rest of my life.

How does one even begin to describe something that looks like it just crawled up out of the Pit? The thing had thrown its arms over its face as the blinding light had struck it, and it was shrieking loudly, sounding super pissed off.

I saw that the upper body of the creature was shaped like that of a man, with a solid torso, two long muscular arms, and a head with human-like features. All the normal features of a human being were there: the two eyes, the nose, the ears, and the mouth, with long, stringy hair hanging down from the top of its head, partly obscuring its face. And I saw two medium-sized, sharp horns sticking out of its head, curving towards each other, mostly white but with red tips on each end.

Due to the thing holding its arms over its face to block out the light, I could see that it had a long claw on the end of each finger. They were gleaming in the light, seeming to be covered with some kind of red fluid. I don't dare to guess as to the identity of that substance.

That was horrifying enough, but it was the lower portion of the monster that filled my mind with almost unbearable horror, as all the pieces of the puzzle suddenly snapped together into place, with a terrifying realization.

The top half of the creature, so man-like in its make up and composition, was not attached to a bottom half that could have been called human, in any reasonable sense. No, the lower body of the thing was that *of a horse, complete with four legs and hooves, and a long, winding tail, that swished angrily behind it as the beast continued to shriek angrily.*

It all made sense at last. The hoof prints, the seemingly disjointed anatomy of the creature, the brief glimpse of the man-like shape running through the woods only but a week ago. It all became horribly clear to me, even as my mind struggled to process what my eyes were seeing.

This was no normal animal. The legends are true. There are things living out here in the woods. And they are *monstrous.*

I stared at the thing as it was finally revealed to me, and then it threw its hands down and ran off, back towards the woods, screaming loudly the entire time. As I watched it attempt to escape, I made the second rash decision of the night, another thing that I have since come to regret.

I raised my rifle to my shoulder, took aim at the fleeing monstrosity the best I could, and fired.

I fired off three shots in total, not expecting to actually hit the thing, since it was moving away so fast. As I said, it was a rash, heat of the moment decision on my part.

Two of the shots missed and sailed off harmlessly, but the third hit its mark, hitting the creature straight in its right shoulder. I saw blood shoot out from the wound, and the thing grabbed its shoulder in pain, and screamed loudly.

I saw it run even faster, if that was possible, its four hooves galloping over the grass. The thing was seeking the safety of the woods and the darkness beyond, the wound in its shoulder leaking blood all down its arm.

I had lowered my rifle for a second, when I had hit the creature, but I raised it again, trying to prevent it from escaping and returning another night. I had wounded it, and I didn't want it coming back and trying to get revenge against me for that. I aimed at the creature again, preparing to pull the trigger, but by the time I had it in my sights, it had reached the outskirt of the woods, and then was gone.

My heart pounding, I felt myself reeling from the impossibility of what had just happened. I almost began hyper-ventilating as I slammed the door shut, locking it securely behind me. I half-expected the monster to come back right away and try to break the door down in its pain and rage.

I then ran up upstairs as quickly as I could and began writing this entry, trying to get my experience down in words, as best as I can.

Jesus Christ. *What the fuck was that thing??*

I can't even begin to process tonight's events in my mind. It's just all too much for the mind to take in.

I know one thing for sure, though. I better barricade this place up pretty well tomorrow, because there is no doubt that it will be back, and in a *really* foul mood, too.

Oh, *God.*

October 27th – It's here again, I can hear it pounding on the back door! Thank god that I spent the day at home and barricaded this place up nice and tight. The wood over the door is pretty secure, so it should hold. The windows should be safe for now as well, and the thing is too large to climb in through them, anyway.

God, it's howling something fierce outside! It's really angry, and really wants to get in here.

It started about half an hour ago, when the sun went down. I was sitting inside, in my living room, preparing myself for the inevitable. I had my gun with me, and I had braced myself for the thing's return. I knew that it was going to be coming back to unload its fury on me. It was only a matter of time.

Well, right after sundown, I heard the loudest crashing in the woods outside, and then high-pitched shrieking, and I knew that it had come back. It didn't waste any time either. It immediately made a bee line for my back door and began to pound on it hard, trying to break the door down in its rage.

I heard it bang hard on the door, once, twice. It was screaming bloody murder the entire time, the sound impossibly loud. My ear drums pounded with the noise. I wouldn't be surprised if I suffered some hearing loss as a result, when this is all over.

Then it stopped bellowing, and I heard a loud rattling sound. It continued for a few more minutes, and got louder, the noise puzzling me. I sat there and listened to the rattling, trying to figure out its source. It seemed to be coming from my kitchen, and I felt a bit of confusion at this.

Then it suddenly hit me like a lightning bolt.

The thing was trying to turn the door knob and open the door to let itself in.

I gripped my gun tightly in my hands, ready to defend myself should the monster manage to get inside. I knew that I wouldn't have much of a chance in close quarters, and physical combat was out of the question. But, I had hurt it once, and so I could finish the job if necessary. I kept the lights off, sitting in the dark, not wanting to give away my movements.

I heard the door knob continue to rattle, the rattling growing more intense, the thing's frustration evident as it failed to get inside. It was trying really hard to open the door, not realizing that I had barricaded it shut, making it impossible for anyone to get through, either in or out.

Then it gave up on that strategy and switched back to pounding on the door, screaming the entire time, the wood straining against the impact. It's a miracle that the door didn't go flying off the hinges.

The creature continued to try this for a time, and then it switched tactics. I heard it as it stepped away from the door, grunting softly to itself. I could hear it now, moving along the house's perimeter, and then it began banging every few seconds, each time on a different part of the wall. It continued doing this for a time, just grunting and banging, moving along the side of the house.

I was confused. Had it tired itself out and was using up the last of its residual frustration, before retreating for the night? Could I get that lucky?

I heard it move around, banging every few feet, grunting to itself. It kept doing that for a while, and I wasn't quite sure why, before it finally hit me.

It was trying to find a weak spot.

That had to be it. The damn thing was searching for a point of entry, someplace that was weaker than the others, that it could use to get inside. It was testing out every inch, seeing if there was any spot that was flimsy, or not as well fortified. When it found what it was looking for, it would smash its way through, and get at me.

Yes, that had to be it. I could hear it as it continued along the boundary of the house. It was quiet now, just grunting to itself.

Thinking. Planning.

I know that this thing is not a dumb animal, nor is it some mindless monster. No, quite the opposite. It is intelligent and can most definitely reason. Though, if it can do so on the level of a human being, I'm not quite sure. It looks like a man, at least from the waist up, so it might have the same kind of intelligence as a person. It's really hard to say. But stupid, it is not. Listening to the soft grunts coming from outside, I could practically visualize the wheels turning in its head.

It was quiet for a while, as it moved slowly around my house. It moved back and forth outside, back and forth. I have to admit, the quiet was a welcome reprieve from the cacophony of a few minutes prior. I even began to hope that maybe the night's events had come to an end, and I would get a reprieve from any further attacks, at least until tomorrow night.

Sadly, my hopes were soon dashed, as I heard it run back to my door and start pounding on it again, shrieking as loud as ever. I guess that it hadn't been able to find another way to get in, and was going back to its original Plan A, breaking down the door with brute force.

I've moved my chair from the living room, and now have it positioned in the kitchen, facing the back door, my gun pointed right at it, both barrels ready. If the thing manages to break the door down, I'm going to blast it before it even gets half way through.

October 28th, 6 a.m. - At last. The thing has finally given up and decided to leave. I can see faint rays of sunshine peeking their way through the cracks in the wood, so it's finally sunrise. It must have seen the light starting to creep up on the horizon, and made its escape.

It was a long night, to be sure. The creature never let up once, banging and screaming the entire time, trying its damnedest to get inside and get at me. It must have been pounding away for a good six or seven hours straight. Every so often, it would go back to lurking outside, grunting softly, trying to find a way in that it might have missed. When it failed to do so, it would run back and hit the door again with its fists in frustration.

Every so often, it would rattle the door knob, trying to see if the lock would give way, pushing on the door hard, but failing to open it. I heard the wood creak and complain several times, and my heart would jump into my throat, terrified that the wood would finally snap and the door would fall right off its hinges. Thankfully, the wood held, and the monster failed to gain entry.

I had tried turning on the back lights at one point, since that always seemed to startle the creature and drive it away. But, when I pressed the button, the lights wouldn't go on. I pushed it several more times before finally giving up. The thing must have realized that I might try such a tactic, and had smashed the lights to thwart me. It must have thrown a rock, or some other object, to shatter the bulbs. The rest of my lights were working, so that was the only explanation that I could come up with for it.

At one point, I could hear it moving around to the front of my house, and then I heard a shattering of glass, and loud banging sounds coming from my driveway. I had a very bad feeling come over as I dashed to my front windows, afraid of what I would see. I had a bad feeling of what the thing was up to, and unfortunately, I was right.

For as I watched, the monster smashed its fist through my windshield, shattering the glass and cutting its hand, its blood leaking all over the pavement. It didn't even seem to notice, repeating its action with each of my four other windows, before slashing my tires with its claws, and then bringing its hooves down on my hood again and again, denting the aluminum in its fury.

It repeated this action on every inch of my car that it could, destroying my poor vehicle, and then flipping it over onto its side, leaving it where it lay as the beast returned to the backyard, resuming its single-minded task.

It had known. It had realized that I could use the car to escape, and so it had destroyed it, intending to stop me from doing that, to keep me trapped here. Being that my nearest neighbor is a mile away, and it would take me hours to walk into town, I was stuck here, at the mercy of this monstrosity.

I told you, this thing is *smart.*

Finally, with the coming of dawn, the thing had left. I could hear it moving nosily through the brush, and then it was gone. I breathed a heavy sigh of relief when that happened, and felt super grateful that I had made it through another night.

I am so unbelievably *tired* right now. I didn't get a wink of sleep last night, with that thing banging and hollering the entire time. I'm going to try and get some rest now, and then see about fixing my barricades. I need to make sure that everything is secure in here for tonight. It's sure to come back again, I have no doubts about that.

Guess I'm not making into work again today. I'll have to use another one of my days, and call in sick. I wonder what my boss thinks.

October 28th, 8 p.m. - It's here again, and pounding on my back door, even harder this time, it seems. Like clockwork, once the sun went down, the thing came barreling down from the woods, screaming and trying to break in. It seems even angrier tonight if that's possible, perhaps enraged by its previous failure.

I had been right about the outside lights. I had gone up on my ladder and checked on them in the afternoon. They were both smashed, with a rock lying near by, and shards of glass littering the ground. I had replaced the bulbs and repaired the lights the best I could, but it didn't matter much, When the thing got closer to my house, I heard it moan loudly, and then there was a shattering of glass. I heard a small thump as something hit the ground, and I knew that it had smashed the lights again.

After that, it began a repeat of last night's performance, yelling and shrieking and banging and hitting and trying to break its way through, with just one thing on its mind: coming in here and ripping me apart.

I don't dare go outside, for fear of what might happen if I do. Even armed, I want to keep as much space between myself and it as possible.

I tried calling the police, but reception is bad where I am, and it was difficult to get through. I finally managed to reach the local precinct, and told the officer on the phone that I had a dangerous animal on my property, and to please send someone over right away. I didn't dare tell them the exact nature of the creature, for fear of being dismissed as a lunatic or a drunk.

The officer said that everyone on duty was currently tied up with other emergencies, but that somebody would respond as soon as possible. When I protested and said that I may not make it that long, she

reassured me in a calm, faintly patronizing voice that an officer would be by to check it out once they were free.

And that was the end of that.

I've positioned myself here in the kitchen again, my rifle pointed at the door, ready for anything that might happen tonight. If the cops won't help me defend myself against this thing, then I will have to take care of it myself.

October 29th, 6:30 a.m. - The thing is gone again, and the sun is up. I made it to another day. The police never showed up last night. Time to get some sleep.

October 29th, 8:15 pm - Christ, it's got a *club.* I thought I was mistaken at first, but there's no doubt now. It sounds like it's using some kind of heavy instrument, and it's raising holy hell with it, smashing it against my door again and again. The wood is creaking and splintering apart. It sounds like it's ready to snap under the onslaught at any time. God, the screaming is so *loud.* I don't know how much more of this I can take!

Oh god, it's broken through a part of the door! It's starting to reach its arm through! It's feeling around, trying to find out where I am!

October 29th, 9:26 pm – It's gone again. I managed to drive it away, and I wounded it for a second time. God, it came so close to breaking in! I could see its arm reaching in, trying to grab me, and those hideous red eyes, glaring at me from outside. So full of anger and hatred!

I had lifted my rifle in front of me as its arm had reached in, firing wildly. Panic had overtaken my reflexes, and my aim was sloppy. Still, the bullet hit its intended target, and I heard the thing scream loudly from outside. It jerked its arm back as I saw blood spray from its arm in a crimson fountain. I knew that its appendage would be useless now, and I rushed forward in my kitchen, intending to put a second bullet into the creature's skull and end this nightmare once and for all.

I lifted my rifle to my shoulder again and aimed it through the hole, right at the creature's head, preparing to pull the trigger and fire a second shot. However, by the time I had gotten there, the monster was already running back towards the woods, shrieking madly. Blood was pouring down its arm, in a repeat of its performance the other night. I fired once, trying to hit it, but it was moving too fast, and I missed. By the time I was ready for a third shot, it was already gone.

Once I was sure that it was definitely gone, I steeled up my nerves, got my flashlight, and, with my rifle in the other hand, stepped outside to check out the damage done.

The back door had a giant hole in it, and pieces of wood lay all around, both outside and on my kitchen floor. Nearby, I found the club that it had been using, a giant solid piece of wood, easily able to smash through my back door if I hadn't fortified it so thoroughly. Thank god I did those preparations, or it would have gotten in here in minutes.

I fixed things as best as I could in here, nailing more pieces of wood over the hole in the door, trying to seal it up. I did the best I could, but I know that it isn't going to stop that thing for very long if it returns again. I hope that it's had enough for one night and decided not to push its luck, especially now that it's wounded for a second time. It's quiet out there so far, but I have my rifle right next to me, and I'm keeping my eyes peeled.

I just pray that I can stay awake until day break. I'm so tired right now. So, so tired.

October 30th, 6:35 a.m. - The thing never came back last night. I guess it is licking its wounds somewhere right now. I would pray that it has learned its lesson about coming back here, but I know that I'm kidding myself. It will be back tonight, as soon as it gets dark. I have to prepare. This is ending tonight, once and for all.

October 30th, 10:05 p.m. - At last. At long last. It's over! It's finally over!

I've killed the thing. Its body is lying outside right now, right where I left it on my outside patio. I put a bullet right into its brain, and finally killed that damned thing for good and all. This nightmare is over at last. I can hardly process the events of tonight, and of the last two weeks. It may have only been fourteen days, but it feels like fourteen years.

I can't believe it. I mean, I have a dead creature lying outside on my patio right now, that looks like it came from another world! I don't know who to call first. The police? The media? This is the discovery of the century, and is bound to put me into the history books, for sure. I can't even believe that this all happened to me.

I suppose I should back up a bit and explain the events of tonight, to put everything into context. After all, if future historians are going to examine this diary as an important document, they will want to know everything about how things happened, right? Best to document everything and get it all down in writing.

A few hours ago, right after sundown, the thing came back as I knew it would, and it was *pissed.* It bolted for my door, screaming the entire time, and began to bang on it again with another heavy club. I have no idea how its arm healed so quickly, but it showed no impediment from the bullet wound from the night before. It was hitting the back door so hard, my entire kitchen was shaking from the force of the blows.

I knew that there was no way that the door would hold up against that kind of barrage for long, and that the thing would soon be inside to rip me apart if I didn't think of something quick. I didn't dare go out there to confront it face to face, and couldn't wait until it was inside and try to confront it in my house. I thought for a moment, and knew that I only had one option. It was a risky one, but I had little choice.

I moved out of my kitchen, the loud banging on the door filling my ears as the creature moved ever closer towards its goal. I snuck towards my front door, being careful not to make any noise and tip the thing off as to my intentions. If it heard me and guessed what I had planned, I was done for, no questions asked. I needed to be as stealthy as possible.

Still, with the ruckus that the monster was making, I was able to unlock my front door and sneak out without it becoming the wiser. I had left my flashlight behind, not wanting to tip the creature off that I was outside. If it saw the light, that would be a dead giveaway. I felt my way around the house, using my sense of touch where my vision failed me, and slowly, quietly, made my way around to the back yard.

I don't mind telling whoever may be reading this, but my heart was beating in my chest like a jackhammer. My palms felt extra moist, and I had to grip my rifle tight in order to keep it from sliding out of my hands. I knew that I would only get one shot at this. One shot, and if I missed, then the creature would be upon me, and I was lost. I needed to make sure my aim was true.

I finally turned the corner of my house, and stood there, the thing only fifteen feet away. I had never been this close to it before, without a barrier between us, and it seemed even more terrifying than ever before. I heard it shriek in triumph as it finally smashed through my back door, kicking a giant hole in it near the bottom with one of its hooves.

I saw it look inside, its red eyes blazing, and it reached its arm through, trying to break the remnants down and get inside. It flailed around, its arm waving the air, looking almost comical for a moment.

Then I saw it stop. Stop completely, and stand still, frozen in place.

Then it turned its head a bit, and started *sniffing the air*.

It sniffed once. Then twice. Then its head jerked to its left, to look straight at me, and I knew that it had smelled me, that it knew that I was there!

It bellowed a mighty howl, and then turned its entire body, tensing its muscles and then charging at me, its arms outstretched to grab me and rip my head off from my body. I swear, I could almost see it salivating at the thought!

I raised my rifle quickly, as the thing barreled down on top of me, its red eyes now only a few feet away. I pointed the barrel straight at its ugly, monstrous head, as it screamed its rage at me.

I lifted, aimed, and then fired!

The rifle discharged with a loud cracking sound, and I saw the creature's head snap backwards, its deafening scream cut short. Its arms flailed around as its body carried it toward me, the momentum propelling it forward, nearly on top of me!

I dove to the side, my rifle discharging harmlessly again as I fell, and then I felt a gigantic thud shake the ground as the thing fell to the earth besides me. It was groaning softly now, its red eyes slowly dimming, its movements growing ever more lethargic. It let out a death rattle, its hand reaching out towards me, refusing to give up even in its last moments.

Then its hand dropped, and it lay still, and I knew that it was dead. Blood oozed from the bullet hole in its forehead onto the ground, staining the grass red.

I lay there for a second, trying to catch my breath. I looked over and saw the creature's body lying less than five feet away. I felt revulsion at it being so close to me, and almost puked right there on my lawn. God, it was even uglier up close!

I took my rifle and gently prodded it, wanting to be sure that it was actually dead. I've seen enough horror movies to know that you always make sure of these things before you start celebrating. I certainly didn't intend to have the thing get up and rip me in two because I started to celebrate prematurely. I would put another bullet into it, if necessary, to be sure.

I poked it once, twice, and it continued to lay still, not even twitching a muscle. I slowly stood up, keeping my rifle trained on it the entire time, and kicked it harder. My boot hit it in the head, and I jumped back, waiting for it to rise up suddenly with a bellow and attack me again, claws slashing at my face. But the thing didn't move an inch, and it was only then that I felt my body go limp, collapsing again on the grass. The strain of the night had finally taken its toll on me. I lay there, my muscles pushed to their limit, staring up at the night sky. The stars seemed extra bright tonight, and the moon was out, partly obscured by the clouds, but still shining down. It seemed as cheerful as ever up in its perch in the heavens. I almost felt a sense of relief coming from it, soothed that this series of horrible events had finally run their course.

I'm sitting here now, in my living room, with the body of the monster outside, and I'm making my plans for tomorrow. I'm getting ready to report this to the police and media, and tell them that I have an honest to god monster corpse in my possession. I'll have to call all my friends and family members, tell them not to be surprised when they see me on the national news. I'm trying to figure out what scientific institute to sell the body to, for analysis and dissection. So much to figure out now!

I'll call Tom in the morning as well, let him know that he has nothing to worry about anymore, that the thing is dead. I'm sure he'll be thrilled to hear that news!

October 31st, 9:30 p.m. - I'm huddled upstairs in my bedroom, my rifle next to me, and I'm desperately trying to see if I can reach anyone, anyone at all, who can help me! I can hear them outside, so much screaming! God, they are going to break through and get inside any moment now!

After last night's events, I had woken up in the morning, and stepped outside onto my patio. I had wanted to see the bod of the monster in broad daylight, since I had only ever seen it at night, in the dark. I opened my back door, and stepped outside, looking at where I had left the body the night before.

The body was gone.

I searched everywhere in my backyard, thinking that maybe I had looked in the wrong place, or that my memory was faulty about the events of last night, and I had left the carcass in a different spot.

But no. The body was *gone.*

My first thought was that it must have been stolen. Perhaps there was somebody who had intruded on my property, and found the body, and had thought the same thing that I had, about selling it to the media and to science. They must have taken the body while I was sleeping. Still, it seemed to make the most sense, and I resolved to find out who it had been, and get the body back, by any means necessary.

That is, until the sun went down, and *they* came.

I had heard the screams as soon as the light vanished. They were exactly like the ones that I had heard previously, but there were so much more now!. There had to be at least a dozen different voices, all equally as loud.

I had looked outside, and when the screams were loud enough to discern that they were right on the edge of my property, I was able to see *them!*

I saw an *entire army of red eyes*, emerging out of the woods, and coming straight towards my house!

I felt cold, icy terror grip me as I saw the eyes coming ever closer, and heard the howling and shrieking. I gripped my rifle tightly in my hands, knowing that I could never fight off that many creatures at once, and that I had been a fool to think that such a thing wouldn't happen.

I had killed one of theirs, and they were coming for revenge.

They must have taken the body back with them. Somehow, they had learned that the creature had died, and absconded with the body at some point last night. They know that I'm the one who killed it. That's why they're trying to get inside!

I can hear them now, pounding hard on the door with clubs, it sounds like they have surrounded the house! There is no escape for me now, from any route!

I've called 911 and told them that I have intruders trying to break in, and to hurry! I only hope they make in time!

Jesus! I can hear them inside now, they have just broken the door down now! They are making an awful commotion downstairs, it sounds like they are ripping the kitchen apart in their rage!

I'm going to fight them off for as long as I can! I'll take one or two of them with me, at least! Here goes!

Note: This online diary was discovered shortly after its last publication, and has become widely shared in various corners of the Internet. It has become something of an Internet legend, with many wondering as to its authenticity, or if it is just another piece of online fiction.

There are rumors that local and state police in an undisclosed part of New York State are conducting an investigation in connection with an emergency 911 call to a wrecked house. The resident is reported to be listed as a missing persons case. Nothing further is known at this time.