

It was only a story

It was only a story I kept telling myself. I had told it many times. I know it word for word. Whenever a kid would ask me for a ghost story I'd tell him about the man that lost his head.

I had been to the Eagle bar. Halloween, it was a costume party. I went as an old-time lumberjack. No, I didn't win the contest. I didn't even get runner-up. I did meet a girl in a bat girl costume. Her name was Patty.

We were talking, flirting maybe, having a good time. I was thinking things. I bought her a drink or two. She didn't dance and I said that was okay. No sense in me making a fool of myself. I try hard. She laughed.

I didn't see it coming. All too once I felt a bell ringer to the left side of my head. I turned quickly, only to catch another right straight on. I fell out of my chair. I looked up in time to see this big guy, not in costume at all unless he thought he wanted to look like a guy on his way home from work, grab Patty by the arm and drag her out of the bar.

A couple of guys helped me up. They asked me if I was okay and I assured them that I was. I stepped back slightly, floundering with my hand, for a chair. I sat back down at the table and finished my beer. I got up.

Once outside I heard a couple fighting. That girl Patty and that big lug were having a shouting match. She could surely hold her own. I hoped he didn't see me and want to start back up where he'd left off.

I looked around. Something I always do. I didn't see any cars that looked like cop cars hiding in the shadows. I got in my car. Yes I'd had a few beers, but so what everybody does it.

I drove under the freeway driving towards home. I made the first curve like nobody's business. I drove around the second curve again like nobody's business. I was picking up my speed 50 55 when I crested the top of a hill. There in the middle of the road was a 10-point buck. I jammed on the brakes really hard. The tires screeched as they were begging for traction on the pavement. The deer bolted. For me it was too late. The car was in a skid. The car easily jumped the ditch. I was skidding to a stop along a spiked iron fence. The car near missed a post made of stone before it came to a stop in front of a metal gate. The car appeared undamaged but wouldn't start.

I knew I needed help so I reached for my cell phone. The battery was dead. Who was I going to call anyway? I'd have to walk. I choose to walk toward home. The car was surely and safely off the road. Funny it looked like I had parked it at the gate. It could wait until morning.

I walked a half mile or so. It was one of those nights where the moon was full and I could see plenty.

The trees hung over the road like a tunnel, as it twisted along the side of the river. When I went into the tree tunnel I could see almost nothing at all. All I could see was the white line painted on the edge of the road.

It's just a story I told myself. I made it all up. Tonight it didn't feel like it. I'd have to walk along the river. I thought of all the times I tried to scare children with the story. My story of course was a simple story. It went like this

Long ago these lands were full of trees. Men with axes chopped them down. There was a young man, his name I think was Lenard. Lenard was about thirteen. He was bigger than most

men and could chop like any one of them, but poor Lenard was a little short up stairs. He had the mind of a five or six year old.

It was later in the day, quitting time. It was starting to get dark. Most of the men used a double bit axe. Lenard had stuck his axe in a stump. His axe was also a double bit, sharp on both sides. A sharp side was pointing up. Lenard was running and fooling around. He tripped on a stick and came down on the axe. At this point I'd slip my finger across my throat. His head came right off. It rolled into the water.

Everyone knows that a body can't rest without its head. The men looked and looked. They looked with lanterns into the night.

It is said that Lenard still wanders the river looking for his head. It is said that he will take his axe and chop off someone's head and place it on his shoulders but of course it doesn't fit because it isn't his head. Then he throws it back on the ground. If you look closely on a moonlit night you can see him splashing in the water. No one wants to check the water at this point at least not at night.

At this point I like to stop the car by the water. They can hear the bubbling gurgling of the water as it passes over rocks and things like that and the kids scream, they can't get out of there fast enough.

I'm in the dark now appreciating the white line painted along the edge of the road. I can hear gurgling swirling splashing of water. My stomach tightens. The water doesn't sound quite right. There's something different, it sounds more and more like the splashing of feet in the water. I stop and I put both my hands on the guardrail and I look up and down the river. I don't know if seeing nothing is better than seeing, what what what I expected to see. What did I expect to see a man with no head splashing through the water? It was only a story.

I try to swallow. I step back from the guardrail. I put my hand up to the side of my face to where I couldn't see the river. That splashing, splashing that wasn't right, I knew it wasn't right.

"Whooooo whooooo." I start to run but I realize it's only an owl. Then I hear the flap of the great bird's wings. I wonder what scared him. It was dark, black dark. Somehow I made out the line that runs down through the center of the road. I run. I had to get back into the moonlight. I look over my shoulder. Why? I don't know. I couldn't see anything anyway. Taashee. It is just the leaves rustling in the trees right? Who cares? I'm running now.

I see car headlights coming from behind. They are quite a way off. Maybe a friendly driver that might help me. Maybe that thug from the bar.

Splash Splash Splash. The splashes seem to be getting louder. It is just a hundred yards or so before I'm back into the moonlight then maybe then maybe I can see something. It is difficult to even follow the paint stripe. I'm not into this running thing. I guess I got out of shape somewheres. I'm breathing real hard. My side really hurts and I don't think I can take another step at least not at this pace.

It's quiet now. I can't see a thing. The river, she is washing and gurgly, but I don't hear the splash splash splash anymore. What a fool. I am walking now. I am walking fast. It's all I can do.

I didn't see it coming; it was quick and sharp to the side of the head. I felt very tired. My face fell to the roadway.

My face fell to the roadway again. It was only a story I told myself. None of this was real. I made it all up. It was only a story.