

THE THING THAT WAILED

Margaret and brother Kenny took the usual route home on that hot August afternoon in Utah, after school. Through the scenic woodland path, then the old graveyard with its fallen or tilted tombstones that were slowly eroding away by the ever-changing weather. The names were hardly readable. The final path home was past an old, abandoned mine shaft that was said to have been closed because it was haunted by a fuzzy looking, glowing thing that floated around either wailing like a wounded animal or sometimes crying like a baby. After the mine shaft, the house was clearly visible and only about a hundred yards off.

The Rubin children were just passing in front of the rickety mine shaft when they heard something. It sounded as though a child were whimpering. Kenny, the so-sophisticated sophomore, walked toward the opening of the shaft and the little whimpers became loud crying. He jumped back and turned to face his freshman sister. Margaret looked at him, her eyes big with fear.

"Could it be that thing the old miner in town always talks about?" she asked.

"No. There's no such thing as what he talks about. It's only an old tale he tells to scare people," Kenny replied.

"But that sound of a baby crying is what he says the thing does when it's scared," she told her brother.

"It's only a prankster trying to keep the story alive. The old man says this thing is supposed to come back from the beyond every ten years. We missed it the last time it was here by two years. Now it's due to come back and we're gonna be here to laugh at those who believe in that junk," he said.

The sound of crying echoed on inside the shaft as the two kids went on home.

That night, Margaret looked out her window to the mine shaft. She blinked hard twice to make sure of what she was seeing. A little, fuzzy ball of light was floating toward the house! She ran out of her room and downstairs, screaming about the little ball of light. Kenny and their mother and father ran to the window to see nothing but the night.

"There's nothing out there, Margaret," her father said.

She ran to the window.

"I know it was out there! I saw it!" she cried.

"You need some rest, dear," Margaret's mother said, putting her arm around the crying girl.

Mrs. Rubin was worried about Margaret and stayed with her through the night.

Saturday morning was bright and sunny. The smell of clean air excited Kenny. He was up early and off to town for the mail but this time he took a little longer than usual. The old miner had stopped him to ask if he had seen or heard anything of the fuzzy little thing. Kenny told him about the crying in the shaft and his sister's supposed sighting of the thing. The old man said that he might stop by the house later on.

When Kenny got home, he was surprised to see the many neighbors there. They all were determined to get to the bottom of this mystery. It wasn't long after he got there that he knew what was happening. His father was leading a group of angry townspeople to the mine shaft to prove there was nothing there. Kenny joined the band as they gathered at the shaft opening. Mr. Rubin's speech was quick and to the point. He explained there was nothing to be afraid of and that they were going to find this "thing" that supposedly haunted the shaft.

The fairly large group walked into the pitch blackness. They went as far as they could and dared. Two hours passed when they suddenly saw a small hole in a rock in a corner. Mr. Rubin shined his flashlight into it and a blinding light beamed forth with high-

pitched screaming from what sounded like a little child. The group panicked and ran. Kenny pulled his father from the ground and helped him out.

When they reached outside, Mr. Rubin was fine but badly shaken, as well as the others. Their conclusion was that there was something in there they couldn't explain.

Evening came quickly. The Rubins sat in their livingroom talking about relations that were sick when a whimpering sound like that of a little child came up from the basement. The family listened as it grew louder as it neared the door to the basement. A light appeared under the door. Kenny bounded at the door and threw it open to be greeted by screams of the little glowing ball of fuzz. It settled itself on the floor and the astonished Kenny stepped on it. It screamed again, this time louder as it picked itself up and made a dash at him. Panicking, he picked up a letter opener on a near-by stand and stabbed the little thing as it came at him. Blood immediately flowed down the letter opener and on down Kenny's arm. The fuzzy thing grew brighter as it pulled loose and screeched, frantically flying around the room until it crashed out the window. The family watched the screaming thing as it went to its home in the mine shaft, leaving a thick trail of blood behind it beginning from the living room.

Poor Kenny couldn't believe what just happened. He went to his room and laid down to rest and soon fell asleep.

Later that night, Kenny woke. He felt the presence of someone or something. Then, a finger gently tapped him on the head three times. He looked up, but there was nothing there. All to be seen was the blackness of the room. He tried to move but couldn't. "Scream," he thought. So he tried to scream, but he just couldn't. He was completely paralyzed. Becoming weak, Kenny couldn't keep himself awake. In struggling to do so, he grew weaker and passed out.

In the morning, Kenny still felt weak. There was also a weird feeling in him--like his body had been invaded by a supernatural force. He went downstairs to find the old miner sitting in the living room with the rest of the family.

"Kenny! You're as white as a sheet!" his mother exclaimed.

"I can tell you, Mrs. Rubin," the old man said calmly, "he killed the fuzzy thing and it came to visit him last night."

"How do you know I killed it?" Kenny inquired.

"I'll show you how I know," the miner said, pulling something from inside his jacket pocket. It was the fuzzy thing, flat now with the fur falling out. Kenny could say nothing to his sudden surprise.

"Since you've killed it, it will always haunt you every ten years as long as you live, no matter what," the miner informed him.

Kenny didn't believe the old man. He called him an old fool with foolish lies to stir up people.

The Rubins lived in that little town in Utah for ten more years. After that they left. All except for Kenny. He killed himself after the fuzzy thing came back to "visit" him. He stabbed himself with a letter opener.

The family and the townspeople hoped they would never hear of the thing again. But still, every ten years, people hear wails like a wounded animal in the mine shaft.

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