

# FEAR OF THE DARK

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The late evening light that had been filtering through the curtains in the bay window was now gone. I could no longer see the flower patterned cover on my parents' bed. Instead, it became a blurred silhouette that started to move around. Beyond it I knew was my sister's bed, but that was empty too. She was still out playing somewhere. The high ceiling was now in darkness, but I could just make out the demons and their acolytes hovering below it.

I pulled the sheets up over my head and smelt their lavender-scented freshness. They were stiff, almost starched, and the whiteness pressed against my face. If only there were more of them. Then they might be enough to hide me from the fearful spirits that floated around the room whenever my parents weren't there, and which spoke to me in strange voices.

"Come with us, little boy. We're going to take you away . . . away . . ."

"No," I whispered back, as if in prayer. "I'll never go with you. My mummy's coming soon."

This, I thought, might frighten them away, so I lifted the blankets and peeped into the forbidden world outside. All was dark and silent. I turned and peered towards the far end of the room. It looked blackly back at me.

Nothing.

But wait. There was something in the shadows, just emerging from the recess at the far side of the chimney breast. I stared hard to

make out what it was. Yes, it was taking more shape now.

It took me back to where I had seen such creatures on country walks with my mother and sister, when we crossed miles and miles of fields and forests where no-one had ever been before. It was where the largest wild animals that ever were lived, and only the light of day prevented them from getting us.

It was a cow. I could make out its head and neck, though it was changing shape continually. It made to come towards me but then changed its mind. Fatigue overcame me at last and I lay back in my bed once more. I pulled up the protective covering over my face and held my breath to listen for any movement the creature might make, but there was none. I kept still, not daring to stir, for what must have been several hours. The animal may have forgotten about me and I didn't want to remind it. But I was uncomfortable and had to turn on to my side.

It seemed the bedside cabinet was leaning over, trying to touch my face. A glint of light reflected itself on the surface, highlighting the wood grain, seeming to make it reach up to the ceiling. It wasn't the pattern of the wood any more, but the frame of the french windows in the back room. I could see it all very clearly. It was still light outside although the flowerbeds were clothed in darkness. From them were emerging once again the dwarfs and pixies.

One by one they emerged from the gloom and skipped across the lawn towards the house. They formed a single line, joined like Christmas paper chains. There were lots of them - too many to count - all hunchbacks clothed in forest green jerkins and tights, with pointed shoes and crooked, pointed hats.

They laughed at my helplessness and gestured at me as they started a grotesque, jerky, horrific dance. The leader turned towards me and drilled into my head with his gaze. He peeled back his lips

with a mocking sneer, revealing his blackened teeth, and pointed menacingly at me.

I tried to get up, to turn and run, but I couldn't move. My arms and legs were paralysed. Panic welled up inside me. I watched in dread as they entered through the open doors. They chanted an evil, rhythmic diatribe, but I couldn't understand the words. Closer, they came, and their voices grew louder. They were coming to carry me away, into the garden, off to the underworld outside.

At last I could raise my arms, but it was no use. I screamed out, but no sound came. They relentlessly advanced, waving and kicking their legs, turning their stooped heads from side to side. Hideously deformed goblins with wicked, elfin faces.

"No, no. You mustn't come here. No, no." And then gushing tears stained the crisp sheets and pillow slip. Sobbing uncontrollably, I cast about, desperate to escape the little men now so close to taking me. But it was no good . . . no good.

Someone was picking me up and I was aware of the brightness pervading the room. I looked into my mother's face and cried.