

Lumps

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David Kerrigan kept both eyes focussed on the console games graphics, as his fingers operated the four way pad and the buttons. His mind just wasn't as focussed as his eyes, it kept drifting away from the game and analysing David's persistent but recent dilemma. He knew that one of them would be there by now; they always appeared just after five o'clock.

His mother and father were sat together on the communal living room sofa, both giggling at some comedy programme on the idiot box. David never watched television anymore, not after he had learnt that prolonged exposure destroyed your brain. He'd found that out on Google so it must be true.

David had stopped telling them about the lumps moving across the walls. They thought that he was making it all up, trying to grab attention.

He found his eyes drifting off the console screen. Oh bloody bollocks! This was all his mother's fault. If she had bought him that new Psychokiller game like she promised then he would have had something to keep him occupied.

David had clocked this game four times now; he had found all the hidden rooms and the two levels that weren't even supposed to exist. David was just sick of the bloody bollocking piece of crap. God! How could Mum be so mean to him? Did she not know that Psychokiller was going to be his second favourite game?

Maybe he should have just one tiny peek, a brief glance to check to see if they were still there. He put his console beside him on the chair while keeping a close eye on his parents. If they saw what he was about to do, they would go ape-shit, again and after the last explosion, they had taken away his internet privileges. David would rather die than have that happen again.

They were engrossed, watching some old guy with a red, furry flower pot on his head and performing rubbish magic tricks. It had them both in hysterics. David just couldn't understand why they were laughing. The man on the television clearly hadn't rehearsed or practised the tricks enough; it didn't make sense to David. Everyone knew that if you didn't aim for perfection then people laughed at you. Maybe that was it, the audience and the drooling masses watching this were laughing at him, a form of humiliation designed to force the performer to improve. Whatever, as long as it stopped Mum and Dad from catch him searching for the lumps.

The best place to start looking was in the far corner, just above his father's bookshelf. There was nearly always one there. David took a deep breath, squinted his eyes then counted to ten before he looked.

There was no sign of anything, David was almost disappointed. He moved his eyes a little further towards the ceiling then grinned. There it was, hiding on top on the bookshelf. It was a pimple at first then it began to grow to the size of half a tennis ball.

It slid further up the wall, still growing, finally its size stabilised. The shape altered until it resembled a turtle's shell.

He had no doubt that it reacted to his observation, it was as if they needed him to observe before they could function. It changed its colour to match the background, as it moved from the patterned lemon wallpaper on one wall to the wood panelling above the fire place.

So they were still hanging around, David knew that he really should stop staring now. When one moved, lots more appeared, that was the rule. Soon there would be so many of them performing acrobatics on all four walls that he'd end up having a headache for the rest of the day.

Two more were growing just above the curtain rail while the original one had settled back in its original position.

"Mum! He's doing it again."

David snapped his head down and glared at his older sister. Her face was glued to her laptop screen but he could still see that sly smirk that the grassing cow was trying to hide.

"I thought that we had discussed this, David." His mother said.

He tried to keep focused on his Mum's tired face but it was difficult as two of the lumps were performing figure of eights on the wall directly behind her.

His Dad stood up and pointed to the ceiling. "I think I see one, David. Oh my God! Look at the size of it!"

"George!" His Mum admonished. "Don't encourage him."

"She's just trying to get me into trouble, Mum."

There were five above his Dad's head now; they followed him in single procession as he walked over to his son.

"You're just terrible at lying, David. Your eyes are moving about like they have a mind of their own. I think it's best if you go to your room now."

He stood up, squeezed past his Dad and hurried over to the door. David kept his face forward; there was no way that he was going to let his family see the tears. How dare they accuse him of lying.

His sister sniggered. God, what a mouthy bitch, he knew for a fact that he would be on Facebook right now telling her brain-dead friends all about her freaky brother. David was going to get her back for this.

He pulled open the door, sneaking one glance behind him before he shut it. His parents were sat back down and plugged into some more rubbish on TV. Twenty lumps were now clustered on the wall behind his sister, none were moving, he got the impression that they were all watching her computer monitor.

David slammed the door as hard as he could and ran up the stairs.

David climbed his way out of some already forgotten dream and opened his eyes. His sleep fogged brain cleared straight away when he saw just how dark it was. The only illumination came from the streetlight outside his bedroom window.

He climbed off the bed and padded over to the light switch by the door. David glanced at his DVD player as he passed it. It was almost nine, that couldn't be right. He remembered closing his eyes after watching an episode of Star Trek on his PC, that was at six, it only seemed like a couple of minutes ago.

He turned his head towards the window at the sound of someone revving their engine. If it was nine, it meant that his Mum was going to pick his annoying sister up from her dancing lesson. Maybe, she had tripped up and broke her ankle. Now that would be funny, he could only hope.

Had his mum saved him something to eat? Bloody bollocks, she had better. David's poor stomach must be thinking that he'd forgotten about it. If food was indeed in the microwave, that sister of his had better not spat in it.

David opened his door and peered down the hallway, checking for any signs of activity. There shouldn't be anyone about; Dad will be sat in front of the TV. He sneaked over to his sister's bedroom door and put his ear against the wood. Her room was as quiet as the grave. There was no clattering of computer keys or the sound of her irritating horsy laughter. He opened the door a crack, he had to make sure that she wasn't in.

Wendy wasn't in there, he grinned when he spotted her laptop thrown on her bed. David would have his revenge tonight. Wendy had no idea that he knew her Facebook password. The mouthy bitch would soon find out what it was like to be a social pariah.

He needed to stuff his face first; David couldn't believe how hungry he was. He clicked the door shut and padded over to the stairs. Giggling at the thought of all her friends suddenly finding out that their best mate hated them all and wanted to stick a big knife in all their ugly heads.

There was movement behind him, David glanced behind him and saw three lumps circling his sister's door handle. He turned away and shrugged to himself. He was sick of seeing the damn things now. They kept getting him into trouble; David was getting bored of them.

It had been three weeks since his first encounter with the lumps. David would never forget that first sighting, God, what an adrenalin rush that had been. He had never realised until that moment that it was possible to be terrified and excited at the same time. Those feelings had long since passed but the memory still sent delicious shivers down his spine.

David had been given the dubious honour of looking after the house while his Mum and Dad took Wendy out to celebrate getting into university. He knew that Dad would have rather eaten his own feet then wander around clothes shops with two women all day but Mum had told him straight when he started to complain about missing the match on TV. She had informed Dad that he ought to be ashamed of himself, that this was a very special time for their daughter, something that she'll remember forever. She had said a lot more but David had to go to the toilet so he had moved his head away from their bedroom door.

Poor Dad, it must be very humiliating knowing that he was under Mum's thumb. Not that David really cared how henpecked Dad was, he was only too happy to have them out of his hair for the day. He intended to spend those bliss filled hours trying to day crack this new game that Mum had bought him for his console and he needed a little peace in order to achieve that.

The first one had appeared just after noon, he had just sat back in his chair, his console was between his knees. David was feeling very pleased with himself and a little smug too. It had taken him just one hour to crack the first level. David had discovered the previous night that the fastest time to complete the first level was thirty one minutes; he intended to beat that record once he'd cracked the game.

A few drops of sweat ran into his eyes, he used the bottom of his t-shirt to wipe the horrible salty stuff away. He felt dizzy and a little sick, David always felt like when he had to concentrate for long periods.

He went through all his previous moves, trying to think of ways to improve his time. His play wasn't flawless; there were a couple of occasions when he hesitated but nothing so dramatic that would take off a whole thirty minutes. There must be

something that he missed, perhaps some object that warped you through some the level or most likely a hidden short cut. David sensed frustration building up.

David rolled his t-shirt down and waited impatiently for his vision to clear before he commenced the next level.

He glanced over at the wall; there was a big bulge there. What the bloody bollocks was that? That lump wasn't there earlier, he was sure of it. Was prolonged exposure to the screen making his eyes go funny? David blinked a few times, no that didn't work, the bulge was still there. It looked as though his Dad had wallpapered over a hubcap.

David stood up, his game forgotten; he just had to check this out. The lump moved. He screamed and fell back into his chair.

He watched with astonished eyes as the lump used its body to draw patterns across the wall, starting first with simple shapes like squares and circles before tackling more complex patterns like a figure of eight and a pentagram.

Another one grew out of the wall, this one was smaller. It moved towards the original lump and started to copy the shapes the other one was making.

David wasn't sure whether he was dreaming or hallucinating. He reasoned that it was possible that Wendy had sprinkled something on his cornflakes; she had been very pleasant to him all morning, not one snide comment or anything so it was probable that she had been up to something. Where his sister was getting hallucinogenic substances was a mystery but he figured that she will have met some dubious looking hippy bloke at her new university. Everyone knew that those places were drug dens.

So he was tripping, fine, there was nothing he could do about it so he might as well wait until it had been flushed out of his system. David settled back into his chair and watched this weird follow the leader game. A few seconds later, another one appeared. It reminded him of those tin helmets that soldiers had on their heads during the First World War. That one started to do its own thing.

Within minutes, all four walls were covered in moving lumps, all different shapes and sizes and all performing simple and complex patterns.

His parents found him spread-eagled on the floor, his eyes were like saucers and the carpet was covered in drool. They thought he was having some kind of seizure and rushed him to the hospital.

Their worry and concern soon changed to accusing him of attention grabbing hysteria after David had been pronounced fit and well by the doctor and he made the mistake of telling them about the lumps moving around the wall.

The family had left the hospital the same night after his parents spent an hour having a private talk with a couple of senior doctors. Wendy had told David that he was about to be sectioned and next week, surgeons were going to cut into his weird little brain. Mum and Dad were just signing the consent forms.

His parents pretended that the whole affair had never happened, which was fine by him. Although he found the whole scenario tremendously exciting, the attention was intolerable.

When the lump re-appeared in the living room the next evening, David stayed silent. He just sat there, mesmerised by what only could be described as wall-dancing. David would have stayed there all night if his mother hadn't demanded to know what he was staring at.

He mumbled something about not feeling very well and ran up stairs to his bedroom; his mind was overflowing with a million unanswered questions.

David sighed as he walked away from his sister's door, wishing that he could somehow regain some of that enthusiasm that had gripped him in those early days.

The faint smell of something meaty hung in the air, he was pretty sure what that meant but David wasn't going to build his hopes up just yet.

He crept down the stairs, his feet instinctively missing the floorboards that creaked. He wondered why he was bothering, it wouldn't have mattered if he had run down the stairs in big boots, Dad wouldn't have heard, not with him cranking the volume on the television up but some habits were almost impossible to break. When he reached the bottom of the steps, hunger pangs overrode caution and he ran into the kitchen, his arm outstretched, finger at the ready.

David pressed the door release on the microwave and lovingly gazed at the bountiful plate of goodness in front of him. There was homemade steak pie, mushy peas and chips, all covered in rich, dark gravy.

It was his second favourite meal.

He used the tip of his finger to draw a six pointed star in the cold gravy that had congealed upon the pie crust. It seemed to be the lumps most popular shape, he had often wondered why. He closed the microwave door and set the timer for three minutes.

David used to sit for hours and hours, drawing their patterns into his red exercise book. He used two books; he used his green book to write down all his theories on what they actually were, a new form of life, invading aliens, or creatures from another dimension. He didn't have a clue what they were but he had to keep all options open, no matter how stupid they sounded.

His green book had been his constant companion for two whole weeks. The prominent bulge in his front pocket had given his sister plenty of source material for hilarious gags over his sexuality, the piss taking cow. His dad even joined in with the jolly japes a couple of times. The book was lying on his bedroom window sill now covered in dust; he hadn't opened it in a week.

The timer on the microwave reached zero and the door pinged open. Before David reached in to grab the plate, he paused for a moment to savour the aroma drifting from the hot food. The smell of hot pie was David's second favourite odours.

He put his hands inside and picked the hot plate up. Someone knocked on the side door besides the microwave. He screamed and dropped the plate back on the glass turntable.

Oh bloody bollocks, he had forgotten that it was Wednesday. Dad's friend, Derek always came round after nine. They would sit around for a few hours either talking and drinking beer or playing games on Dad's ancient Playstation. A few months ago, David had sneaked into his parent's bedroom and had a quick play, the satisfaction of beating his Dad's all time high scores had given him a high for at least a week.

He left the food where it was and opened the door. David liked Derek; he was his second favourite person. Derek always had a plentiful amount of dirty jokes and he never dismissed David like his parents did. Derek spoke to him as if he was an adult.

The only thing about the man that he found uncomfortable was those lingering looks that Derek had been giving his sister recently. Of course he only did it when Derek thought nobody was looking but David saw them.

Although he thought it was hilarious that anyone would want to look at Wendy for longer than a micro-second, he still found it a bit creepy. Besides, Derek was approaching forty and David just assumed that you didn't think about stuff like that when you got so old.

He unlocked the door and opened it, allowing his Dad's friend to come in from the cold.

"Its brass monkey's out there lad." He said while pretending to shiver. "So how are you doing anyway David? I swear that you must have grown another full inch since I saw you last week."

David smiled. He'd already explained to him that it was impossible for any child to gain so much height in only seven days and yet he still continued to say it. Derek was a very strange man. "I'm fine thank you."

He removed his coat and threw it over a chair. "That food smells good, are we sharing?"

"No," replied David. "It's all mine." Sometimes he could be rude to Derek as long as the man was grinning or smirking.

"That's okay lad, I was only pulling your leg." He patted his stomach. "Besides, I ate a Chinese earlier. Is your dad in the room?"

He nodded and turned towards his food. Derek wasn't going to recite a joke so as far as David was concerned, he no longer existed. He might as well take his food up to his bedroom while he plotted his revenge on his horrible sister.

"David?"

He spun around; Derek was still there, wearing a solemn expression. Was he going to tell him a funny joke now?

"I've got something to ask you David. I was going to ask you this last week but you didn't seem to be in a good mood."

He certainly wasn't in a good mood this time last week. Wendy had told her best friend that she was going to sell her brother on EBay and the bitch had used it as her Facebook status.

"I've noticed just how distant you have been." He shook his head. "No, not distant, distracted. I'm having a conversation with you and all of a sudden, your eyes dart away in a different direction, as if there's something behind me."

David tried not to sigh; he hadn't told Derek about the lumps. He didn't want him to side with his family; he didn't want Derek to start treating him like a child.

"Now I haven't said anything to your Dad but I've seen the signs, your Ma and Pa are been acting a little odd around you as well. Now, are you going to tell your uncle Derek what's going on?"

David paused for a moment then nodded. Although the man wasn't really his relation, he knew that he was the only person on the planet who really listened to him. He came to the decision to tell Derek everything and hoped that he wouldn't burst out laughing. If he did, if he saw so much of a hint of a smirk on his face then Daddy was going to find out exactly what Derek wanted to do to his darling little daughter.

Getting people into trouble was David's second favourite hobby.

"So David, are you going to spill the beans?"

David swallowed and counted to three. "I've been seeing these lumps moving about on the walls."

"But only you can see them?"

He nodded and waited for the man to start taking the piss. He had already worked out how his Dad would find out about what Derek had been up to.

"Are there any in here?"

Dad's friend was serious; he would not leave him alone until he got what he wanted. Derek's behaviour confused and upset him; he wasn't used to anyone taking him seriously.

He closed his eyes and breathed in his second favourite odour before opening his eyes; it calmed him down and allowed David to have a clear thought.

It could go only one of two ways, Derek would see nothing or he would pretend. Either way, it would be quick and he would be able to get on with eating his food.

David gazed around the kitchen walls, in the early days, he only saw them in the living room but recently, they started to appear in nearly every room. He had yet to discover any in his bedroom, for which he was thankful. He had started to do a private thing in there and even the lumps weren't allowed to watch him do that.

There were a couple of little ones on the cupboard just above the kettle. One was stationary while the other was moving slowly in a small circle.

"Yes Derek, there are two over there." He pointed to the cupboard.

He stood put his hand on his jacket and leaned closer, after a few seconds, he shook his head. "I'm sorry David but I can't see anything different."

There, thank goodness that was over and done with. Now perhaps, he would leave him alone.

"Well it's obvious that you can see them David so why can't I? I've never known you to lie to anybody lad so what does that leave?"

David looked at the man in a new light. He really, actually and truly believed him.

"Maybe it's something to do with your age. Maybe only the young can see them, something to do with the light spectrum or something." He walked over and brushed his hand along the mahogany cupboard door.

David didn't have the heart to inform him that they were now crawling up the wall parallel to the window.

"No, that's a bollocks theory. If only the young can see them then your Wendy would have told everyone on the planet by now."

Derek looked at David. "Can you see them straight away? I mean, do you need to do something special first?"

He did think about shaking his head or maybe shrugging but that would be lying and everybody knew that you went to hell for lying and there was no way that he wanted to live down there. He'd seen the pictures on the internet, it looked awful. Besides, it would be kinda cool to have someone else to talk to about the lumps.

"I can see them straight away now but first I had to look at them funny."

"You mean that you had to squint?"

David nodded.

He clicked his fingers. "Of course. Just like those magic eyes pictures."

David didn't have a clue what he was talking about.

Derek smiled. "You wouldn't remember of course. They were all the rage a couple of decades ago. My Dad had one of them hung up over his fireplace. From a distance, it just looked like a picture of multicoloured vomit. You needed to get right up close, squint your eyes and the image turned into a tyrannosaurus. It was pretty cool."

It sounded like a lot of hard work to David; old people must have had simple pleasures in those times before the digital revolution.

Derek took a deep breath. "Ok, I'm ready. Are they still on the cupboard?"

He shook his head; they both seemed to be taking an interest in his food.

"No, they are close to the microwave."

Derek held his arm out in front of him with his forefinger pointing to the ceiling. "The trick is," he said, while moving his hand towards his eyes. "Is to never lose contact with the finger."

David wanted to snigger, Derek's eyes were almost crossed, it looked really funny until his face abruptly changed to abject terror. Well, that was a surprise; it looked like his Dad's friend could actually see them.

Derek staggered back. "Oh my Jesus fucking Christ, I can see them, they're fucking real."

The man's eyes were rolling about like ball bearings. Did David look like that when he was watching the lumps? No wonder his parents shouted at him. He had to admit though, it did look pretty weird.

"Derek? Are you alright?"

The man didn't respond, his eye movements were getting worse. There were only two lumps on the wall, he shouldn't be doing that with his eyes.

David turned and staggered back himself. The wall was now covered in lumps; there wasn't an inch of the wall that was visible. He hadn't seen this many ever since his first encounter. The lumps were all different shapes and sizes but something was different this time, none were camouflaged. They were all one uniform colour of dark green.

David began to get a little uneasy, several lines of lumps disengaged from the mass and spread along the other walls. They reminded David of huge marching ants. This determined purpose scared him; there was no playful movement this time.

He reversed past Derek and tapped him on the shoulder whilst keeping an eye on those rapidly advancing lumps. They had reached the back wall now and showed no sign of stopping.

Derek didn't move, he was too busy muttering, he couldn't make out all the words but it did sound like he was swearing again. He tapped him again, this time he used his shoe.

As Derek's weight shifted, the lumps stopped moving in unison. The man slowly moved his head and locked his gaze on David. "This isn't normal is it."

David stared back into his scared bunny eyes. He wanted to lie, to calmly inform him that this sort of behaviour happened every day, but he wasn't going to hell for anyone, even Derek. He grinned instead, hoping that it would be translated into a reassuring smile.

The hallway behind him were now covered in lumps as well, all immobile, all one uniform colour, thankfully, Derek had yet to notice this batch.

Derek licked his lips. "What are we going to do?"

So his smile didn't work. "We stay calm," he replied. "They seem to respond to intense emotion; in fact the best solution would be to just ignore them."

His food was going cold; David hoped that he would be able to eat it soon. You weren't supposed to re-heat food in a microwave. It was very bad for you.

"Ignore them?" Derek repeated. "How the bloody hell can I ignore them? They are everywhere."

The lumps were definitely feeding off Derek's agitation; a few on the wall began to vibrate. Derek then noticed the assembled armada gathered in the hallway, he opened his mouth and David whipped up his arm and clamped his hand over the man's mouth.

The rank smell of ozone started to fill the air, the hairs on David's neck stood up; it felt like the prelude to a thunderstorm.

David removed his hand then backed away from Derek; it seemed like the right thing to do. Derek didn't scream but he was shaking very badly, his eyes were fixed on something just above the window.

"Oh God." He whispered.

David followed his gaze. The skin on one of the lumps was peeling back like uncooked pie crust. David's eye darted from one lump to another, they were all doing it.

Beneath was a seething dense clump of light blue vine. He tore his gaze off the unravelling vine to watch a dark, wet patch spreading down from Derek's crotch; he didn't think the man had even noticed.

Derek then jerked forward, another wet patch appeared except this one was spreading across his chest and it was claret red. The man's eye glazed over just before he jerked again.

He saw why this time, a vine from one of the open lumps on the side wall had shot out like a harpoon, straight into the man's neck, Derek opened his mouth. It must have been a gag reflex as he must surely be dead. His movement acted like a trigger. Lumps from three walls and from the hallway unleashed their deadly cargo, each one punching into Derek's flesh.

David turned away; he had no wish to watch anymore. The lumps that had been behind him had not revealed their insides; in fact their vivid green colour had even begun to fade. He knew he shouldn't but David just had to turn back. The vines pushed further and further into his Dad's best friend, they were like eager worms in search of the softest parts.

It was pretty gruesome but fascinating, the vines changed colour to dark red; the lumps were sucking all the moisture out of him as if he was a slush puppy. He couldn't take his eyes off them, David felt along the kitchen top until he found the microwave door. He tapped the pie three times, good, his food was still hot.

Within seconds, the lumps had skeletonised Derek. The lumps in the hallway had all but dispersed but some of the lumps in the kitchen still had vines wrapped around some of the thicker, crimson wet bones. They were trying to get inside them.

David heard the sound of a car pulling into the driveway. Oh bloody bollocks! Mum was back with Wendy! If she saw the remains of Derek, he would be in so much trouble; he'd be grounded for at least a week.

He hurried over to the bones. The remaining vines let go of their prize and retreated into their bodies. David pushed the mess behind the kitchen door with his foot but it was still not good enough. The floor tiles were still streaked with dark red blood and tiny chunks of Derek; there just wasn't enough time to mop it up.

The front room door and the outside door opened together.

"Hiya hunny." His dad said.

His Mother's smile slid off her face when she saw what David was standing in.

"Oh my God!" She said. What the bloody hell is that on my floor? Please don't tell me that you've dropped your tea on my clean tiles."

David retreated back into the kitchen, eager to show her that his food was still in the microwave. Of course he hadn't dropped his plate; David loved his Mum's cooking.

His parents followed him into the kitchen with Wendy just behind them, she was wearing her trademark 'oh you are in so much trouble' smirk. His Dad was the first to recognise what was really on the floor.

"Oh shit. That's blood isn't it David. Please don't tell me that you've been feeding them."

David flew through a rollercoaster of conflicting emotions. He watched Dad's eye as a pair of lumps yo-yoed along the skirting board.

"Have you fed them raw meat?"

"You mean that you can really see them?" he gasped.

“We thought we had got rid of the bloody things years ago. Yet somehow you’ve managed to bring them back” Replied his Mother.

He shook his head, this could not be true. His own parents had been lying to him. “But why didn’t you say anything?”

“Because we all know what you are like.” Said his Dad.

“You get obsessed.” His Mum continued “You’re like a bloody terrier David. Once you get hold of something, you never let go and that’s a very bad thing concerning these things. If you ignored them then they go away. If you knew that we could see them as well, Christ David, it would be bloody years before they all bugged off.”

Wendy and his Mother noticed the bones at about the same time as his Dad saw Derek’s jacket lying over the back of the chair.

The air charged up again, the skins on the remaining lumps had already begun to peel back. Judging by the way their faces swapped from annoyance to terror, he didn’t believe his family had seen the lumps go through this transformation.

That was a shame.

His family were as still as statues. No doubt frozen to the spot with fear. Just like Derek. It was most unfortunate about Derek, he was the closest thing he had to a real friend but Mum and Dad and especially Wendy deserved their fate. They had lied to him.

David had to get out of the kitchen before it got really messy. He grabbed his plate and pushed past them then ran up the stairs. He just had to get his green exercise book; there was so much he had to write down.

The end.