

They Don't Exist

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He could hear the car door in the parking lot slam. His eyes flitted to the clock briefly, an old hand carved wooden deal, the kind with bears carved on the side. It was six in the afternoon and the sun was already over the mountain. Sighing, he leaned back in his chair, which gave him a perfect view of the parking lot. The woman stood next to her car, a black mustang, one of the older ones. He was never good with cars, but who cared? He could see the silvery horse emblem in the grill of the vehicle, which had been the dead give away.

The blonde next to the car was smoking a cigarette, obviously not in a hurry to check in. Her hair was short enough that the wind caught every wisp of it, blowing it past her face so he couldn't get a good look at her. He laughed to himself. If she had been wearing leather pants and a jacket to match, it would look like a scene from a bad action movie. The kind where she would flick her cigarette, pull a pistol from behind her jacket, then make her way down to cabin four where she would exterminate the men who had been hired to kill her. As it was, she was wearing a striped sweater and blue jeans, hardly good fair for an over the top action sequence.

Finished with her cigarette, she stubbed it out on the ground and leaned into her car, placing it in the ashtray. Daniel had respect for people like her. He had worked in this little mountain town for many years and met many people with a complete lack of respect for the surrounding environment. Most people would have just flicked their butts out onto the black asphalt and moved on with the rest of their lives.

What a disgusting habit.

She disappeared from view and Daniel leaned forward. He stood up just as she opened the door to the BrookShire Inn. Stepping inside, she shivered and rubbed her covered arms. The temperature was dropping fast. Looking around, she took in the main office with her eyes. Her eyes were blue and she had more than a couple of ear piercings. Looking around, she saw Daniel standing behind his counter and gave him a shy smile.

"Welcome to the BrookShire Inn." He beamed at her. He was paid to beam.

"Hi. I called about a room not too long ago."

"Ah yes, Miss..." He let his eyes go over his list, but he only pretended to read it. He had had nothing to do all night and had read the guest list multiple times already.

"Williams, correct?" He smiled up at her. "You got the last one."

"Sounds like it." He could tell she wasn't a talkative one, not with strangers anyway. Her arms were crossed over her chest now as she leaned forward over the counter.

"Ah, yes, um," he turned and grabbed a room key off the pegboard. The key had a little brown tag on it that bore the number 110, and the key itself was covered in a thin layer of dust. "So, you will be in our Cliffside cabin, room 110, at the end of the dirt road just behind this building. You have a deck overlooking the river, with an oversized Jacuzzi tub in the bathroom, and a full kitchen, fireplace, and a DVD player. Checkout is 10 a.m."

The blonde looked surprised for a moment.

"What's in all the other rooms?"

Daniel was confused. "Beg pardon?"

"When I spoke to the guy on the phone earlier, he said that room was the cheapest you had. What's wrong with it?" There was suspicion in her voice.

Daniel was hoping she wouldn't ask, but he had no choice but to tell her.

"Well, there have been, uh, strange happenings in that room..."

“Strange how?”

“Um, lights turn on and off in the middle of the night, stuff gets moved around, you know, like its...”

“Haunted?” She laughed.

“Well, yes.”

She stopped laughing when she saw how serious his face was. “You’re serious, aren’t you?” He nodded his head, his cheeks slightly red from embarrassment. “That’s why that room is the only room left in the whole hotel? Because a ghost lives there?”

“Poltergeist, actually. You know, because stuff moves.”

“Yeah, okay.” She held the key up in her right hand. “I’m going to go to my room now.” She pulled her credit card out of her back pocket and finished paying for her room. After she walked out of the door, Daniel leaned back in his seat again to watch her go. Already, she was on her cell phone, talking with someone and laughing. He was more than a little frustrated that she had taken the whole situation so lightly, but was certain she would end up leaving in the middle of the night just like everybody else did.

* * *

Stephanie Williams pulled into the marked parking space outside of the cabin. From the outside, the cabin looked brand new, like it had been renovated recently. As she got out, a cold mountain wind caught her, blowing her hair forward. She shivered. Reaching into her backseat, she pulled a small duffel bag forward. Her trip had been largely unplanned, so she had packed only a few extra sets of clothes in the first thing she could find to pack them in. She pulled the key to the cabin out of her pocket and whistled to herself as she made her way to the front door.

Stephanie unlocked the door and let herself in. The cabin smelled like pine needles and the heat had not been turned on, leaving the whole room cold. It took her a couple of minutes to find the thermostat, and after a few more minutes, she found that the living room window had been cracked slightly, letting all of the cool mountain air in. She closed it and took another look around the room.

It had the look of a room that didn’t see much use. Usually cabins like these ones had serious wear and tear in the off season, but the whole place looked brand new. Lights with bears climbing up the poles were on either side of the bed and the faucet in the kitchen was made by the same people who had all of those fancy plumbing commercials on television. Hard marble countertops, tiled floors. The Jacuzzi tub in the bathroom had a layer of dust around the ring, as if it hadn’t been used at all since it was installed.

That Jacuzzi tub was already starting to look wonderful after a full day of driving. Unfortunately, Stephanie had other things to attend to. A quick trip into town later, she returned to the Cliffside Cabin with a bag of Taco Bell in one hand and a six pack of beer in the other. Whistling a nameless tune, she turned the key in the lock and paused.

She thought she had heard something move inside.

She stood there for almost five minutes, listening and waiting. She debated going back to the office and getting Daniel the desk goof to come down and search her room for her, but was afraid he would mistake her caution for a belief in ghosts. Which weren’t real to begin with.

Making her decision, she unlocked the door and walked inside.

Part of her almost expected all of the furniture to be rearranged, stuck to the ceiling, or stacked like that movie with the little girl in it, the one whose title she couldn’t

remember. But this was the real world and her furniture was where she had left it, thankfully. She made a quick search of the cabin, opening up the closet and the bathroom door. She was about to relax when she felt something cold run up the back of her neck. Her neck hairs stood on end as she turned around. The living room window had been opened again.

A brief panic struck her as her mind attempted to rationalize. She approached the window, looking at the glass and the frame. She had once heard that old houses did stuff like this when they settled, but her window opened vertically. She opened and closed it experimentally, hoping to grasp onto a thin straw of logic. Her eye caught movement outside in the waning light and her heart skipped a beat.

The little grey creature paused once to look back at her with black circled eyes as it chattered incomprehensibly. The raccoon disappeared behind a bush and was soon gone.

Laughing, Steph held her hand to her chest and decided that it was time for beer first. Satisfied that she was alone, she threw the deadbolt and slid the security chain in place, and made sure that the living room window was latched and locked. She popped open a beer and began to sip at it. Halfway through her first bottle, she grabbed a bean and cheese burrito from its yellow bag and made her way out to the deck. She could barely see the water below, but she could hear it. She stood out there looking around until she finished her beer. It was way too cold to stand outside any longer, so she went back inside and grabbed another beer from the fridge. After her second beer and another burrito, she decided that a bath was in order.

She checked her cell phone and replied to a text from one of her friends. She set it down on the counter of the kitchen and walked over to the closet. She pulled out the white cotton robe hanging at the back, making sure to check its pockets. Satisfied that it was empty and mothball free, she peeled her sweater off. Self conscious, she paused to make sure all of the blinds in the cabin were shut first. Satisfied that her privacy was assured, she then kicked her shoes into the corner of the room and slid out of her jeans. She started to put the robe on and winced. It was scratchy as hell. She deliberated between the robe and just walking around naked, but settled on the robe. Being naked in a strange place was simply creepy, ghost or no.

It took several minutes for the Jacuzzi to fill, so she spent her time messing around with the television. She flipped through the channel guide and settled on a horror movie she had seen a hundred times. She laughed to herself as the heroine spent thirty seconds walking towards the closet in her house, only to scream in terror as the killer leaped from it, burying his butcher knife in her chest. Starting to tip past buzzed into drunk, she began poking fun at the dead woman on the television.

“Shouldn’t have looked in the closet lady.” The police were busy digging up the girls body in the middle of the woods when she remembered to check on her Jacuzzi. She made it just in time to prevent it from overflowing. Already the room had filled with steam and she was starting to disrobe when she saw the words in the mirror.

GET OUT. The words were straight and to the point.

Her heart began racing again as she stared at the mysterious words and wondered at their origin. Obviously, she hadn’t seen them before, and it didn’t take her long to realize they were somebody’s version of a practical joke. She began to look closer when she heard the phone in her room ring.

When she answered it, she heard Daniel on the other end politely inform her that the office was closing for the evening and he asked if she needed anything before he left. She told him no and hung up. Bastard probably did this himself, she thought. She wasted no time in the bathroom as she wiped the mirror clean of steam and left a message of her own.

FUCK YOU, she wrote with her little finger. Soon the hot steam from her bath caused it to solidify and she hoped that Daniel would get the message when someone cleaned out her room tomorrow.

The water felt simply delicious as she slid into it. Grateful she had another beer at hand, she sipped at it, savoring its cold texture down her throat. She pulled a hand towel off of the towel rack and dropped it in the tub. She rolled it up and placed it across her forehead, closing her eyes. It felt absolutely wonderful on her body as her muscles began to relax.

She wasn't aware of how long she had been asleep, but when she awoke, the water in the tub had cooled significantly. Yawning, the rag on her face fell off and made a loud plopping noise when it hit the water. It took her a bit to drag herself from the tub, due mainly to lack of motivation.

"Bed time for me." She wrapped a towel around her chest and went to grab her robe when she realized that it wasn't there. Confused, she looked all around the bathroom. It wasn't on the floor and it wasn't on the door hook anymore.

"What the hell." She opened up the door and walked out of the bathroom, and froze. All of the lights in the cabin were off. Spooked, she began flipping the switches on. She had thought she left a couple of them on, but maybe she hadn't. That still didn't account for her robe, which she couldn't find anywhere.

During her investigation, she noticed that there were now five beer bottles standing on the counter above the trash can, six when you counted the one in the bathroom.

It wouldn't be the first time she had had too much to drink, nor the first time she would misplace something while drunk. She was at a higher altitude than normal, after all.

Still, it wasn't like her to turn off all of the lights. She was afraid of the dark.

It occurred to her that her cell phone wasn't where she had left it either. It took her a minute to find it. It was on the floor, its cover flipped open. When she picked it up, she realized that the battery had gone dead.

"This is stupid." That stupid clerks' ghost crap had her all freaked out. There was a logical explanation for everything. Disgusted, she put her face in her hands. Stress and alcohol combined, and as she held her head in her hands, she felt the beginnings of a migraine begin in the back of her right eye. She grabbed her discarded jeans and pulled one of her migraine pills out of the pocket.

"Ah, shit." She had started getting them more frequently of late. It took her a minute to dig through all of the cupboards before she found a glass she could use. Filling it with water, she swallowed her pill and began drinking. Three full glasses later, she pulled the sheets back on her bed and fell in, wearing only her towel. The faster she could get to sleep, the better the chance her migraine would die before morning.

* * *

She could feel its presence. Her eyes snapped open in the blackness. She could feel her heart beating rapidly, as if she had awoken from a nightmare. Stephanie rolled over in

her bed and froze. All of the lights were off again. She knew for a fact that she had left some of them on. As her eyes looked around the room, her eyes caught some of the starlight coming in her bedroom, and the shadow that passed in front of it.

In that moment, her chest felt numb as her pulse skyrocketed. She sat up, holding her towel to her chest. Her left hand snaked out and fumbled at the lamp next to her. The light remained off, even as her finger pushed at the knob. Realizing that the lamps were controlled by the light switch, she jumped out of bed and ran across the room, her breath coming in gasps. When she found the switch, she flicked it on.

Her clothes had been strewn about the room. Trying to catch her breath, she grabbed the first pair of pants she saw and slipped them on. She soon found a shirt and some socks and went running out into the living room for her keys.

All of the cabinets were open in the kitchen. She was sure she had closed them all in her search for a glass. Her headache was already coming back again, another result of her fright. Her head was pounding so hard that she barely made it to the sink before she threw up. Staggering, she barely managed to get her shoes on.

She started to run back to her bedroom for her belongings but let out a small scream when she saw that the door had closed after she left.

“Calm down, damn it.” She took several deep breaths, fighting the pain in her head. A gust of wind hit the cabin and she could hear the foundation creaking. “Ghosts don’t exist!” She yelled it more for her own benefit than anything else. Fighting her fear, she began turning all of the lights off.

“C’mon, haunt something!” She began banging on the cabinets. In a small corner of her conscious mind, she could recognize that she was still drunk.

“You can’t haunt anything, because ghosts don’t exist!” She opened up the door to the bedroom and glared. She was angry with herself for feeling helpless. There was a reason for everything.

The hairs on her skin prickled as she got the feeling that she was being watched. She held her nose as she realized a foul odor had permeated the room. The blood drained from her face as the presence in the room began to overwhelm her. She fought every impulse to leave, determined to prove it to nobody in particular that she was untouchable. Unshakeable. Smart, steady, and too intelligent to let irrational fear dictate her actions.

She circled the room briefly and the feeling of eyes on her refused to leave. The smell reminded her of wet leaves and mud, with a tinge of bad breath.

A ghost was one thing. A stinky room something else.

She began to gather up her things, ready to leave. She could rationalize the room smelling bad. God, she needed a cigarette, right now.

As she fumbled through her belongings, she dropped the box of Marlboro’s and it bounced away from her at an angle. She lifted up the covers from the bed, but her cigarettes had gone underneath the kitschy, hand carved bed frame. Sighing, she got down on the ground and reached her hand underneath.

Something clamped down on her wrist and pulled. Her face slammed into the thick wooden panel on the side of the bed and she felt a tooth loosen. Stunned, she couldn’t let out a scream when she landed on her side and saw him, lying there on his chest. He was wearing clothes that looked like nurses scrubs and his hair was wild. The look in his eyes was wild and she couldn’t help but smell the odor of rotting fish on his breath.

“You shouldn’t have looked under the bed, lady.” His voice was a whisper, promising untold terrors to come. Her mind began to make connections, clicking like tumblers in a lock, as he pulled her towards him and into the darkness.

* * *

“Is this her?” The light from Officer Webber’s flashlight played along her bare feet, over her legs and onto her arms. The bite marks on her limbs were still an angry red color. When at last the light caught up to her face, Daniel just swallowed and nodded. It was hard to recognize the woman who had disappeared from the Cliffside Cabin last night, especially as he stared into the dark hollows where her eyes had been.

“Yeah, that’s her.” He choked on his own bile, already making up his mind to turn in his two weeks notice. They had found her killer a mile from here, laughing quietly to himself and talking into her broken cell phone. It had taken six men to subdue him and put him into police custody.

“Wow.” Officer Webber just shook his head and looked back in the direction of the BrookShire. “He dragged her almost six miles. Sick fuck.” He spat off into some bushes as the coroner came in with the body bag. “To think, all this time he was living in that cabin.”

Daniel just nodded, thinking of all the times he had cleaned that very room, feeling watched.

Almost four hours later, Daniel arrived back at the BrookShire Inn. The police had finished with the Cliffside Cabin, though the opening to her room was still surrounded by yellow tape. He found himself drawn there, and could still see the bloody handprints on the bedroom window. Her Mustang was still parked out front.

“Damn.” He turned to walk away, but felt a cold blast of air on the back of his neck. He turned to look again and blinked.

For just a second, he had seen her, her eyes empty, blood leaking from the sockets, her mouth opened in a soundless scream behind the glass, fists pounding. Just his imagination.

“Shit. There are no such things as ghosts.” As he walked away from room 110 in the Cliffside Cabins, the presence trapped inside for all eternity couldn’t have disagreed with him more.

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About the Author:

J.R. Leckman currently resides somewhere in Colorado with his wife and a house full of pets. He is currently pursuing a degree in physics, but still finds that writing is his first love. He hoped you enjoyed or hated this story enough to leave a highly opinionated review and looks forward to inviting you into another of his worlds very soon.

About the Artist

Laurie Ricard lives somewhere in Florida with a husband, (the creepy guy on the cover), a dog, and a psychotic rooster. She came highly recommended by a fellow author and did not disappoint. Friend her on Facebook, and she may just make you a snazzy cover too!

<http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1225417402&sk=info>

About the story

This story started one day when a coworker flat out stated, "There are no such things as ghosts." I found the statement interesting and about 48 hours later, this story was written.

My other works

Bucketheads: <http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/32578>

Anasazi: <http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/33010>

The Quick and the Unholy: <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/33703>