

Big Things Come in Small Packages

By : **Km2**

A recently unemployed father and husband has a strange creature suddenly enter his life. While, at the identical time, bewildering happenings and murders begin plaguing his life and the once quaint, accompanying, little town, of Winchester Gap; now desolated and diseased, left to rot into the ground.



Published on
Booksie

booksie.com/Km2

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Table of Contents

The Arrival

Tail Between my Legs

One Magical Evening

What's in a Name

The Happening

The Awakening

Stairway to Heaven

The Scent / The Church

The Massacre / Feeding Time

The Vision / The Beast's Lair

Eye of Eagle Rock

The Lone Survivor

The Flashback / The Dream

Hunter, Lord of the Flies

Eagle Rock Memorial

The Canyon Community

Hunter Loses It / Deputy Jenkins on the Case

Hunter in Arms / Cindy Cries Wolf

Poor Cindy Lou / Policework

When One Door Closes, Another Opens in its Place

Chapter 1: The Arrival

Dedication

Upon publication, I dedicate this book, first, to my father (Pops) who helped more than anyone else to make me the man I am today and who deserves most to see it finished and to witness at least some life accomplishment.

And second, to Stephen King, for without him this book never could or would have been written. His many books I've read, filled with notes that I've gladly listened to, have helped me to fuel the written and proverbial flame inside me.

Contents:

Part One

Prologue

Chapter I- The Arrival

Chapter II- Tail Between my Legs

Chapter III- One Magical Evening

Chapter IV- What's in a Name

Chapter V- The Happening

Big Things Come in Small Packages

Chapter VI- The Awakening

Chapter VII- Stairway to Heaven

Chapter VIII- The Scent/ The Church

Chapter IX- The Massacre/ Feeding Time

Chapter X- The Vision/ The Beast's Lair

Chapter XI- Eye of Eagle Rock

Chapter XII- The Lone Survivor

Chapter XIII- The Flashback/ The Dream

Chapter XIV- Hunter, Lord of the Flies

Chapter XV- Eagle Rock Memorial

Chapter XVI- The Canyon Community

Chapter XVII- Hunter Loses It/ Deputy Jenkins on the Case

Chapter XVIII- Hunter in Arms/ Cindy Cries Wolf

Chapter XIX- Poor Cindy Lou/ Policework

Chapter XX- When One Door Closes, Another Opens in its Place

PART ONE:

Chapter 1: The Arrival

Big Things Come in Small Packages

Fuzzy Wuzzy Wasn't Fuzzy, Was He?

What song the syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he did himself among women, although puzzling questions, are not beyond ALL conjecture.

-Sir Thomas Browne-

Wanderers in that happy valley,

Through two luminous windows, saw

Spirits moving musically

To a lute's well-tuned law,

Round about a throne, where sitting,

Porphyrogene!

In state his glory well befitting,

The ruler of the realm was seen,

-The Haunted Palace-

Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. -Exodus 22:18-

Prologue:

Our story takes us on the journey of a magical, little creature. Not his entire journey, start to finish, for I do not know it. I can only tell you starting from when our paths crossed, until the day they uncrossed.

I wish I could tell his tale in it's entirety, for it must be a remarkable and breathtaking story. Alas, this creature is unable to speak. Mute. He never attempted to communicate to me in our time together, at least. If he could speak, then he simply refused to do so. We were together six weeks. That's forty-two days. Relatively speaking, not a short amount of time. But for him, it's not even a drop in the bucket.

That is not to say that he was completely inaudible though, by any means. He had a wide range of chirps, grunts, moans and a really annoying squeal he was able to bellow, if the situation was right.

Not too big, it, or he (hell it might be the only one of it's kind left), probably weighing in at less than a pound. Only about six inches tall, with stumpy, little legs attached to tiny, little feet. You'd almost expect to see the feet dressed in small sneakers, but they were bare; pretty plain, really. Not looking much like feet at all. His body's completely covered in dark, almost black, fur with no *visible* eyes or facial features. Sort of like a little walking puffball. Pretty darn cute, even. But I'd hate to get on his bad side. I've seen what that little bastard can do!

Chapter I: The Arrival

I remember the day I stumbled upon the creature, almost as if it were today. It's funny, it felt as if we were two magnets, being invisibly drawn together. Possibly destined to be, but perhaps only dumb luck.

Chapter 1: The Arrival

Big Things Come in Small Packages

I was working in Winchester Gap, right outside my hometown of Stephens City, tired as usual from laying block all week long. It was Friday, almost twelve o'clock, and I couldn't wait for lunch. It was finally approaching. I was starving, per usual.

So as the last grains of sand dropped from the hourglass of "the Man's" time (little did I know, for the last time) I hurried down the scaffolding, snatched up my lunch-pail, and headed for my car. I could already taste the sandwich and the smoke I was about to indulge in.

As fate would have it, however, walking through the parking lot toward the car, I heard an odd noise. So odd in fact, my head snapped towards it as if an invisible giant had bitch-slapped me across the universe. Standing disbelievingly for a moment, I had to force myself to advance and then approach the eerie noise.

Coming from inside the woods edging the parking lot was a rustling and a funny (but almost creepy) squealing sound, unbeknownst to human ears. It did not sound dangerous, but for some strange reason I was apprehensive about entering the woods and seeing what I would find.

I tell you now that what I found was nothing near what I expected. I approached extremely cautiously. I'm sure if anyone else would have saw me, it would have deserved a laugh. I picture Elmer Fudd stalking Bugs Bunny.

As I carefully made my way through the woods towards the noise, a miniature nature show was in progress on the path in front of me. I could see this granddaddy copperhead striking and hissing at this fuzzy... at first I thought rabbit, or some other rodent. It's fur was a dark grey, almost black, and really puffy. Think... Furbie. But this was no Furbie, my friends.

That copperhead didn't even know what hit it.

The viper struck out one last time, fangs outstretched, and when it hit the creature, a strange, wonderfully scary, out-of-this-world thing, happened. I wasn't at the best angle, so I was robbed of the best view. But the second the viper's mouth landed on the creature, I heard a funny sucking sound. The next second, the snake was gone.

The best way I could describe it, is a child slurping up a single strand of spaghetti. Just a quick *slurp*, and then gone.

There wasn't a single drop of blood, nor single scale, or any other remainder, that the serpent had even existed.

As I realized, a strange feeling of disbelief entered my mind, not wanting to grasp a hold of what I had just beared witness to. Then a sudden uneasiness draped over me, as a splitting headache entered my skull and settled in that annoying spot, right between the eyes. For a second, I thought I would hurl. Then slowly, the queaziness started to pass.

As it did, I started to question my own sanity. So I took my pack of Marlboro's from my breast pocket, flipped the top, then stared into the pack for a couple of seconds; deciding.

Then I removed the two joints, hiding within, snapped them between my fingers and let them fall to the ground. I lifted my right foot and ground them into the dirt with the sole of my work-boot.

Unknowing what to do next, I just stood there stupidly. Hoping the moment would just pass. Somehow, just magically resolve itself back to normality.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

In the instant before I was starting to panic, I thought it was about to leave, then it turned and started hopping right in the direction that I was standing.

Every hop the creature took toward me, my heart shuddered and rose that much higher in my throat. I started to gag and for a second I thought I was going to vomit it out onto the path in front of me (to lay next to the two fallen soldiers that lay buried in their shallow graves), still beating away.

Pure fear swept over me and it seemed silly as I was realizing how terrified this tiny, adorable creature had made me. Then I remembered the snake, and the feeling resurfaced as strong as ever.

I suddenly was aware of the unsteadiness of my legs and I thought I was going to faint. It took everything I had to steady myself and regain composure. Then, I looked down and it was right in front of my feet, looking cute-as-the-Dickens. It was tough to resist the urge to reach down and pat it on the top of its head, or pick it up even.

I was extremely nervous (you couldn't have driven a pin up my ass with a sledgehammer) to say the least. I was very close to filling my drawers to the brim; with shit.

Then, unexpectedly, the creature appeared to be looking up at me. It emitted a soft cooing sound that was both pleasant, and sort of relaxing.

Lastly, I remember thinking to myself, 'This thing is dangerous. What ever you do, *do not* pick it up.'

Then without realizing, or any chance to stop myself, I found myself bending over and picking it up. For a moment, I was just staring into where its face and eyes should be, with utmost admiration; for some reason. Then I lifted it up and allowed it to perch itself atop my head.

I remember thinking on the way to the car, 'This is not good. Not good at all. I've seen *Gremlins*, I remember what happened to that guy!'

Big Things Come in Small Packages

Chapter 2: Tail Between my Legs

Chapter II: Tail Between my Legs

Oddly enough, I never even doubled back for my tools. Not even for the four-foot level I bought, used, from my bricklayer buddy that died of cancer. I can't exactly place why I just up and left, except that there was this little voice, deep down inside me, that kept on repeating, 'I need to get home. I better *hurry!*'

Of course I was fired for leaving without permission. But it didn't matter much anyway, because I wasn't planning on going back to work, ever again, for the rest of my life.

The ride home was silent. Only about a fifteen minute trek through the woods. Surprisingly, the drive home was quite calming. Relaxing. Peaceful. Tranquil. Sublime, even. A near state of nirvana. Not a car or other person as far as the eye could see, in either direction. Nothing but swaying trees passing by, on either side of the paint-faded pavement, that stretched ahead of me; seemingly to never end, peering up into a vast, brilliantly blue, cloudless sky. The sun ominously looking down from it's twelve o'clock, high noon, position.

It was so rhythmic, it was almost hypnotic. It wasn't as if I was driving home at all, but floating there, effortlessly, on a magic carpet ride.

What finally snapped me out of that sort-of trance, was the sight of my mailbox approaching. A huge brick monstrosity I ended up building after running over my old box; while driving home drunk one sloppy and unmemorable night. Lucky too, I suppose.

I turned off route 17, into my long, winding driveway; gravel crunching underneath my tires. I slowed as I neared the house, pulled in front of the garage and put my Grand Cherokee into park. I sat there for a moment, unsure of what to do. Until I felt the gentle tapping atop my head.

I reached up and carefully lowered the creature down to rest, standing on my lap. I stared at him again in that awkwardly amazing bewilderment; just for a second. I then grabbed him and moved him over to the passenger seat. He didn't seem to mind, really. Which was sort of relieving.

Funny, I had completely forgotten about him the entire ride home. Him and his escapade with the serpent, so strangely dispersed, it seemed almost imagined.

I spared the creature a quick glance, as I opened the door and said, "I'll be back for you later"; with a chorus of door chimes singing repeatedly, into my ears.

I thought to myself, braving the walk up to my own front door, 'Let's go get this over with'.

Chapter 3: One Magical Evening

Chapter III: One Magical Evening

It actually couldn't have gone any better if I had planned it.

I yelled, "Allie," as I walked through the door, shutting it behind me. I then leaned against it, taking off my workboots, as I always do, and left them on the mat next to the door, as I always do, when Allie came bursting around the corner.

"What are you doing home so early? What happened?;" almost snippy.

But bless my wife, this was all she said and it was only with slight disgust. I was expecting the ass-reaming of a lifetime. My balls were clenched tightly against my body. Nerves shot all to hell, my palms were wet; sweating like crazy. I swallowed hard, trying to push my heart back down into my chest where it belonged, and felt my adam's apple rise; and then fall. The room was so quiet, a pin falling would have sounded like a gong being smashed.

That nerve-racking moment seemed infinite, but it was probably only a couple of seconds.

I finally mustered up, "I got fired. I couldn't believe it."

"What for?" Now her voice was filled with honest concern.

I couldn't believe that was it. I relaxed immediately, I know she had to've noticed, too, but she didn't say. My balls dropped back to their original, much more comfortable, position.

"I left at lunch to go get a pack of smokes and was late gettin back," I told her. Not exactly a lie, but so far from the truth it's not even remotely funny.

"When I got back, seven, maybe eight minutes late, the foreman told me, 'I just can't use ya anymo', sorry.' Yeah, sorry's bout right. He's a sorry piece-a-shit, anyway."

She didn't say another word. She only stepped toward me and gave me a big, much needed hug; embracing me. Then we looked deep into each other's eyes for an infinite, intimate moment; until she finally kissed me lovingly and gently. We eventually made our way to the bedroom.

That, my friends, was the first and only time I ever made love to my wife. Actually made *love* to her. Yes, of course, we had relations over the years (going on ten, actually). We fucked, fornacated, and even sexually reproduced, twice. We were certainly not without a love life.

We lucked out and had one boy and one girl. Both Abigail, seven, and Trevor, nine, were in school that day; two grades apart at opposite ends of the grade school. They didn't arrive home till about twenty after four, everyday. Pretty late for preliminary school kids, really, but they went to school at Tom's Brook Preliminary, in Zeigler's Crossing. Not even a half hour away by car, but a little over an hour as the yellow cheesewagon flies. They weren't due home for another two hours or so, at least.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

I'm not really sure what, but there was something special about that day. Maybe it's because I arrived home early that day to my caring, understanding wife and no screaming kids running around the house. I believe it may be the most quiet I'd heard in almost ten years. It felt great. Borderline intoxicating.

I was also drunk with passion that day, with a feeling of love so deep for my wife, it is impossible to put it into words. The only time I've ever felt that way in my entire life, thus, the one and only time I've ever made love to my wife.

At the moment we reached simultaneous climax, that feeling fled me almost as if it were ejaculated out of me, along with my semen. Completely and utterly strange, I know.

I rolled off her and within seconds, we were both fast asleep.

After we awoke to the arrival of the kids, I spent the rest of the afternoon in a sex-drained doze. Sluggish and barely able to spit out simple responses, such as, 'Huh' and 'Wha'.

Forcing myself to make it through a dinner which I had no interest in eating. It seemed my appetite had escaped me as well, apparently.

After dinner and the kids were put to bed, I sat and watched TV while I drank a couple of beers.

Allie went to bed about an hour before I did. She told me goodnight and said she loved me. I said, "I love you too, Alexandra." I never call her by her real name. She appeared to take no notice.

"I'll be right behind you, I'm sure," I said with a little scoff.

"Don't stay up too late." She was gone before I could even reply.

I finally made it to the bedroom, the hands on the clock almost at midnight, to find my wife already asleep. Snoring softly.

It wasn't till I sat down on the edge of the bed and started to get undressed, that I realized something was wrong. I had completely forgotten about the creature, yet again; until just then.

Chapter 4: What's in a Name

Chapter IV: What's in a Name

Slowly, and as quietly as I could, I started to get dressed again and made my way through the gauntlet of furniture and children's toys, towards the front door. I slipped my shoes on quickly, tying them the least of my worries. I carefully opened the door, trying to allieviate the horrible shrilly, squeak, of the rusty hinges and springs. I got it open just enough and I slipped out.

I didn't bother shutting it behind me, but only stood there staring at my Jeep, parked in the driveway.

The vast cornacopia of emotions I felt rushing through my mind was intense and paralyzing. Temporally frozen with fear. Worrisome of what I might find. Happy this strange series of events may at last be coming to a close. Finally, a feeling of remorse and regret that I never did something better with my life; something with real meaning.

That was the thought that finally got my feet working, slowly creeping me over to where my Jeep sat. The Jeep that may hold a slumbering monster, looming creepily, in the late night fog. A beast who just might be furious at me for leaving it locked in the stuffy car for so many hours. It could just be sleeping in there, sort of in a state of suspended animation (we'll be friends to the end!). But perhaps I hoped most, that I would open the door to find it dead (maybe expired would be the better word), suffocated or maybe starved to death; or gone, just simply vanished.

I crept the last few steps towards the Jeep and was grabbing the door handle as I peered through the window. I saw nothing. No creature. No movement. Not even a shadow that resembled the creature. But then I lifted the handle and opened the door.

Sitting there, right as I had left him, was the creature. He appeared to have moved, not an inch.

He made no movement or attempt to reply as I broke the seal to his makeshift cell, finally returning as promised.

It seems he just sat and waited for me. Either like a lost puppy or obedient guard dog; I'm not sure which. But if I had to guess, I'd say less of the former and more of the latter.

I slowly reached my hand in towards him, almost expecting him to turn and sniff my hand, but invisioning him biting my arm off, clean up to the elbow.

But he didn't move at all. Just sat there, still. You couldn't even tell if it was breathing or not.

I finally said, "Fuck it," and just picked him up. He didn't even stir as I lifted him and held him out in front of me, as if he were a bomb (When are you set to blow, little fella?). It never hurt anyone to be a little extra cautious.

As I started back towards the house, creature in hand, I started to think, 'What am I going to do with this?'

I decided sneaking through the front door, this time quietly shutting it behind me, that the garage was as good a place as any. I snuck into the garage as if I were a burgler in my own house, again closing the door behind me. Certainly, I was born in no barn.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

I decided that the garage would have to do, it stayed partially heated and hardly anyone ever came in here.

As soon as you walk in, there's a closet-sized cubby-hole with shelves that I built in it; on the left. It's close to the front door, so he would get some heat from the house and I could clean off a shelf and arrange a blanket for him. He could have the whole thing to stretch out on, if he wanted.

But before I placed him on the shelf and went to bed, I sat him on the work bench and watched him for a while. Still motionless, I was starting to think something was wrong.

I was unaware the transience out of suspended animation can be quite slow sometimes. Signs of life began to emanate from him one by one. A shudder here, a twitch there. Even the adorable gesture of stretching one tiny leg.

Sitting there watching him reanimate himself back to life, I thought, 'If he's gonna be here a while, he oughta have a name.'

Thinking for a moment, I remembered back to my childhood and my favorite bedtime rhyme. My mother would recite it to me on the nights I was too scared to fall asleep, in hopes of sowing a smile upon my face. It usually worked like a charm.

This particular rhyme was about a follicly-challenged bear.

It went:

Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear,

Fuzzy Wuzzy had no hair,

Fuzzy Wuzzy wasn't fuzzy,

Was he?

Just as he was fully returning to normal, the words escaped my mouth, "Fuzzy Wuzzy."

He appeared to be looking up at me. Then he started rocking on his soles and cooing; approvingly.

He seemed to recognize it as his name and seemed to enjoy it.

"Alright," I said. "Fuzzy Wuzzy it is, then."

Chapter 5: The Happening

Chapter V: The Happening

I awoke the next morning to birds chirping outside my bedroom window. I rolled over to an empty bed. Allie already up and about, taking care of the family; always the early riser.

As I rose and stretched my arms over my head, a feeling of bemusement fell over me. I was feeling completely refreshed.

I slipped on some pants and headed for the kitchen, pulling my shirt on over my head as I walked out the bedroom door.

The smell of bacon as I approached, suddenly made me realize that I was famished. My mouth filled with saliva. I swallowed. It quickly filled up again. I rounded the corner and spied Allie across the kitchen, the table the only thing separating us, madly working over a sizzling pan of delicious, pork backfat; cooking to the perfect crispness.

I crossed the room surefooted and deliberately, slowly making my way to where she stood; her back to me.

I crept quietly as a ninja, and just as I placed a firm hand on her right shoulder, my lips found her left ear and whispered, "Good morning, sweetheart."

Startled, she must have come two whole inches off the ground, coming down with a shriek. She probably even peed a little. I wouldn't have thought any less of her or looked down on her, if she had.

She turned to me sharply, obviously unamused. Emitting her evil death stare, deep into my eyes, seemingly staring beyond, far beyond, into the deepest depths of my soul.

She must of approved what she read, for she allowed a slow smile to radiate upon her still beautiful, early morning makeupless face. Her old, worn, pink bathrobe, not even stealing her beauty away.

She finally managed, still smiling, "K.W!, You scared me!" The last was accompanied with and annunciated by, a firm, open-handed slap to my chest.

"Sorry," I said; habitually. Then I leaned in and kissed her good morning. I walked over to my seat at the table and sat down.

I grabbed the Saturday morning paper that was on the table and began to read through it as I waited for breakfast to be finished cooking, then served.

Allie had a pretty good spread that morning. Bacon, scrambled eggs, fried taters and french toast. I was impressed.

I gorged until I was full, then ate a little more. Filled almost to the point of explosion, I'd be hurting and making an unscheduled pit stop this afternoon, for sure. But it was worth it.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

The kids just sat and picked at their plates, per usual, already occupied with the Saturday morning activities they were planning to indulge in. Waiting to be released from the invisible grasp of mealtime by those four magic words: You may be excused.

When I finally felt able to move, I picked up the paper and headed for the bathroom to make my morning sacrifice to the porcelain gods.

Unbeknownst to anyone, a foul happening was beginning miles below the surface of the small town of Winchester Gap. A happening so fierce, the force that it produced was felt for fifty miles.

To most it seemed a slight tremor; nothing to be regarded. You would have felt differently if at that exact instant, you happened to be standing in the middle of the empty town common of Winchester Gap; called Winchester Square (which ironically, was a circular shape), by the original townsfolk, sometime, long ago; somewhere deep in the past. For far below the center of the town circle, a vibration erupted so strong and so deep, it simply split the earth; easy as a wishbone. Leaving a giant, gaping trench, stretching the circle. At the north end, the trench found the town gazebo; having no mercy. It was split into two shattered, leaning pieces, barely left standing.

The town common lay empty, for Winchester Gap is not without it's demons. Many plagues and abominations have happened within these town limits. These stories, I must save for another day; regrettably.

The unsuspecting residents of Winchester Gap (and all of Eagle Rock County) are completely oblivious to the pain and horror, every last one of them, is about to sustain. Every resident, save for one.

For the happening isn't really a happening at all; it's an awakening. For something has awakened an unknown sleeping monster, who shall be hungry and upset after hibernating; laying dormant, trapped under miles of earth for so long.

Somewhere far down the cavernous crack, perhaps not far from the magma that inhabits the center of the earth, lies a monstrous, dark, shape; motionless. It then stirs and rolls to one side. Slowly, it opens one glaring red eye. If someone could have peered into that eye as it had opened, they would have witnessed the murderous passion, held deep, WITHIN that unflinching eye.

The bestial creature opened it's mouth and let a violent, ravenous bellow escape it's jowels; filled with menacing, needle-sharp teeth.

Something strange happened as I sat down and started reading the front page story--- Nine Murdered in Gruesome Massacre!

I heard first, then felt a vibration through the floor; mid-turd. The vibration then traveled through my feet, up my legs, around the bend of my ass, dropping the current kid I was working on, into the pool and splashin' cold toilet water up to my behind; making ME jump, this time. The tremor then travelled up the rest of my body and seemed to emanate out of the top of my head.

As gravity then returned my ass to the toilet seat, with a *plop*--- I suddenly was filled with an intense feeling of fear. An utterly horrible feeling that something terrible was knocking at a door, just waiting for someone to open it, humbly, and invite them in.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

Not a particularly nice feeling to have; even worse to experience firsthand.

At that feeling, I involuntarily finished releasing my bowels, with a sickening splash. I finished up; and in between wipes, something caught my eye. The toilet paper in my hand was not only stained red, it was soaked through enough to just start dripping down my hand.

I stood up, dropping the paper into the toilet as I stared at the bowl; stained red with blood and seeming to be filled with gore.

Unable to control myself, I doubled over and heaved into the blood-stained bowl--- tasting that wonderful breakfast for the second time that morning. It wasn't so good the second time.

Chapter 6: The Awakening

Chapter VI: The Awakening

The toilet was a disaster. It looked as if something had been slaughtered in there. Mutilated beyond recognition.

When Allie came knocking to see if I was alright, I blamed it on the overeating.

Attempting to clean it up, I almost lost my cookies again; flushing a couple of times as I swabbed the bowl with wadded up handfuls of toilet paper.

It wasn't perfect, but it would have to do for now. I had the sudden urge to get out of the house and go do something.

I stood, thinking for a moment about the creature. I hadn't forgotten about it this morning, as I had the previous afternoon and evening. But I hadn't had a reason to go into the garage and check on him yet.

At that moment, one came to me.

I fled the bathroom, barely catching myself from slamming the door from behind me as I bolted through it; hoping to keep the demon that now dwelled there; locked within.

I went and told Allie that I had some things to do today. "Then this aft'noon I was spouse'ta help Timmy wit'is fo'wheela," I added.

Timothy Daniels (who lived a couple miles down the road), the acquaintance that I knew from work, was the closest thing I'd had to a friend in the ten year span of my marriage. But still, he was just an acquaintance. I just calls em likes I sees em.

"Alright," she said sweetly. "Just try to make it home in time for dinner."

"Yes, dear," habits are, oh, so hard to break.

I leaned in and kissed her goodbye.

"Love you."

"Love you too, sweetheart," as I headed towards the garage door.

I entered the garage, gently shut the door behind me, then turned to my left and looked for the creature.

There he sat, just as I had left him, seemingly not to have stirred all night.

I approached him slowly. "Fuzzy. Fuzzy Wuzzy," escaped my lips.

He chirped with excitement, accompanied by that funny sort-of hop.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"Wait a sec, I gotta get sumpin ta carry ya in," I told him.

I walked across the room to the workbench and the toolbox that was sitting on the shelf above it. I sat the toolbox on the workbench and began to neatly empty it into the milk crate on the floor; next to the bench.

When it was empty, I walked back to Fuzzy, where he was cooing happily, carrying the toolpail. I sat it next to him and placed his blanket inside.

I asked him, "A'you ready to go?"

More sounds of approval as I picked him up, placed him inside the toolbox, shut the lid, and closed the latch.

It was a perfect fit.

I exited the garage through the door on the side of the house and headed around the corner, once outside, towards my jeep.

Toolbox in hand, I felt as I were some strange version of a handyman. K.W.'s creature features. Oddities and Informaties. Fuzzy Wuzzy's: Handyman from Hell.

I sat the toolbox on the passenger seat as I sat down in my own seat. I unhooked the latch and opened the lid for him. It didn't appear that he noticed.

"Alrighty," I exclaimed as I put the Jeep in reverse, backed into the turnaround, and headed out toward route 17.

I turned out of the driveway, not really sure where I was headed. Absently being led by some blind internal ambition. An unfocused burning deep within me; I was desperately trying to channel into some greater, unknown power.

None the less, it existed; it *was* present. I felt it.

However, blind may not be the best way to maneuver the labyrinth and exit, safely, out the other side of the maze.

I literally rode around aimlessly for over an hour, until finally broken and disappointed of my mojo's inability to produce; I pulled over to the side of the road.

I got out and walked around to the passenger side. Extracting the makeshift terrarium carefully, sitting it on the hood, I again found myself locked with those invisible eyes.

"Where do *you* think we should go?," I managed.

Now *he* silently stared into *my* face, drawing mine ever closer to his; until, finally, I unwillingly found myself placing him upon my head; once again.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

With the apparent feeling of ridiculousness absent, I returned the toolbox to the passenger seat and strutted my way over to my side. I opened the door, unconcerned with the possibility of being spotted by a passerby; stepped back into my jeep; dropped it into drive; and sped away.

Back in the cavernous tomb, a sepulcher if you will, positioned directly below the unsuspecting town (what was left of it, anyway) of Winchester Gap, the monster stretched and stirred. Opening it's mouth with a deep yawn and exposing it's many razor-sharp teeth; closing it with a *huff!*

It outstretched one rear leg, clenching it's foot and rolling three long-clawed toes; immediately followed by the other leg. As that rite passed, another ebullience began.

The monster's tail whipped and snapped into life with a loud *hiss!* The tail's head proliferated; extending and exposing it's dual-hinged, double sets of fangs.

When the jaw (slamming shut with a *snap!*) closed again, the serpent that was the monster's tail, flicked its forked tongue repeatedly in and out; smelling air around it.

The monstrous and horrid beast suddenly hauled itself up with a cataclysmic burst that sent it flying up the rocks, clawing its way frantically toward the pinhole of light that is the surface; growling the entire way.

Chapter 7: Stairway to Heaven

Chapter VII: Stairway to Heaven

No more aimlessly driving about for me. Moving toward the destination (unknown to me, anyhow), creature still perched atop my head, I barely noticed the town of Winchester Gap crawling by; a couple of miles to my left. I remember catching a glimpse of the town common, the empty courtyard to the haunted palace; a visibly circular, focal point of the town; even from across the fields, on the road I was traveling on.

It simply just passed me by. Hardly a trace of a memory at all.

A couple minutes later, I vaguely noticed the job that I got fired from, was coming up on the right. It appeared larger and larger as I moved closer, then it shrank fast, into a misshapen dot in the rearview mirror.

The radio may or may not have been on, but I began hearing something form somewhere that seemed way too distant (perhaps even light years) to be coming from the dashboard. I leaned my ear in towards the direction the music seemed to be coming from. I faintly heard Billy Corigan, almost whispering; about:

The killer in me, is the killer in you,

Sit and smile over you.

The killer in me, is the killer in you,

Sit and smile over you!!!

I felt a slow, broad grin develop on my face; spanning from ear to ear. I just drove that way, smiling, for awhile. Until I finally noticed the giant monument, growing ever larger in the distance; that was, apparently, our destination.

I still was smiling when I exited my Jeep.

I had turned off the mainroad, made my first right, ascended the steep drive, and finally arrived atop to the empty visitor's parking lot of Eagle Rock Mountain.

I parked right next to the long, steep flight of stairs that led to the hiking paths. After exiting my vehicle, I turned toward the stairs and followed them up with my eyes. I grabbed the handrail and put my foot on the first riser, hesitating momentarily, allowing another glimpse to the top; as I began to climb the stairway that appeared to reach the heavens; smiling the entire way.

At the gas station closest to the house, a green minivan pulled up to the gaspump. Leaving the kids in the van to watch Spongebob, Allie stepped out and pumped gas into the van. She then went in to pay for gas and grabbed a pack of smokes.

As she was walking out the automatic doors, returning her wallet to her purse, a black Lincoln Navigator pulled up and parked right in front of her.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

A smooth, dark-haired, well-dressed fellow of average height stepped out, glancing her up and down.

"Allie? Allie Landers?," he said excitedly.

"Uh, it's Allie Mullen, now. Do I know you?"

"It's Miles. Miles Donovan. You don't remember me?"

"No, sure I remember you. How have things been?"

"Good," he said, running his hand through his hair. "How bout yourself?"

"Can't complain."

"Well hey, HERE, take my card. Call me sometime if you ever wanna catch up on old times. I still talk and hang out with some of the people from school," he said with a hopeful grin. "Maybe we could all get together sometime?"

"I'll have to keep that in mind. You have a good day, " she said as she turned to head for the car.

She dropped the card into the bottom of her purse; thinking nothing of it, at the time.

I fastidiously ascended the last remaining stairs, finally spilling upon the earth; sickened by the concrete steps that lie behind me. Once again my gaze rose upward, eventually focusing on where the main path came out, near the peak of the mountain. After some time, I broke the trance-like state and headed over to the cross junction of paths; where three of them headed around the mountain and to various things. I chose the remaining one, that climbed up the colossal side of the great mountain; zig-zagging as it went; eventually spilling out below the beak of Eagle Rock.

With miles to go (4.6, to be exact), and daylight beginning to fade before too long, I solemnly picked up the pace.

Most of the trek was wooded, breaking up into clearings at times; some near enough to the edge to catch a glint of the spectacular view below. For the most part, the paths were clear of obstacles and pretty easy going. It became rockier and more difficult to traverse the further up I went; approaching the top. Eventually not even walking at all, but crawling like an animal; scurrying with my hands and feet in surprising unison. Just as surprisingly, I never stopped to catch my breath or felt as if I were dying for a cigarette.

Finally, I reached the spot that I could see standing from the stairs; where the path spilled out to the top of the mountain. At this point, I did sit down for a minute and light up; assessing the situation. Halfway through the cigarette, I flicked it away and continued the final leg of my journey upward.

Nearing the top, I was finally able to see the beak of the great eagle that stretched outward; toward the sky. Above the beak, where the eyes would have been, lies a shallow cave; off to one side, as if the great bird-shaped rock were winking.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

I slowly climbed the rocky peak up to where the cave and the beak were seemingly suspended in midair. By the time that I reached the cave, looking in carefully, the sun was turning rose and orange as it neared the horizon.

I turned around and slowly walked outward toward the tip of the beak, which hung aloft, some 1000 feet plus; almost high enough to peer into the face of god himself.

The beak at it's widest was maybe twenty-five feet; tapering off to a blunt point, which still should have been enough to be terrifying under normal circumstances.

The wind was whipping and howling as I inched my way out to the tip, peering over at the awesome view held beneath; captured in my mind for eternity. My breath was stolen; thirteen minutes slunk by before I was able to regain normal oxygen flow. I looked down, seeing far below; the small, silent town of Winchester Gap, almost the size of a child's train set; perhaps smaller. I could just barely make out the circle that was the town common, at one point in time.

If I would have thought to bring a pair of binoculars, I would have seen something interesting in the middle of that common. Something that had happened as a result fo the tremor earlier this morning.

That huge trench was no wider than a hair from all the way up here.

Suddenly, I felt dizzy, as if I could fall off face-first; tumbling head over heels almost a quarter of a mile to my iminate and immediate death. I'd probably die of a heart attack well before I hit the ground. At that thought, I thought I was going to go; everything started to dim and black spots hung in my peripheral, at random. That's when I felt the tapping and heard the chirps of alarm, coming from atop my head. The spots slowly faded and everything came back into focus.

When I felt that I could move, I took a couple steps back away from the edge. I kept backing up until I neared the cave and fell to my seat; struggling to catch my breath.

"Thank you, little buddy," I stifled between breaths.

When I ultimately began breathing normally again, I got up and dusted myself off; sparing the cave one last look (It'd be big enough to camp out comfortably in), before I headed back down Eagle Rock; towards my Jeep. I didn't dare gamble to look over the side again, as I cautiously and litigiously made my way back down.

Chapter 8: The Scent / The Church

Chapter VIII: The Scent / The Church

Changing from maroon to a deep purple, as the sun began to kiss the horizon, the sky darkening rapidly, slowly covering the town of Winchester Gap in the cloak of nightfall. Beckoning the demon; drawing it ever closer to the surface. Soon it would burst forth from the earth, launched out of the trenches of hell; slamming to the ground; giant front paws shattering the concrete beneath them. It had a shake; rolling off the shock that it felt in its paws from the impact.

Standing still for a moment, just listening and smelling, absorbing its surroundings into its powerful sensory organs. Suddenly, the monstrous beast cocked its head, with a grunt. It was focusing in that direction now, ears perked; its great nostrils flared and retorted, with a big Whoosh! of air.

As it traced the position of its target, its prey, it had gotten a scent of flesh and blood, accompanied by the strong smell of a steadily burning chimney, the beast leapt into action; bolting in that direction.

Located directly across the town limits of Winchester Gap, the side of town nearest the river, lies the town church. The well-kempt Catholic church was nowhere near new, but was far from dilapidated or lying in shambles. It had the charm of a small town; and everything had its place.

This very night, the lights were on in the main room and a chimney was burning; smoke drifting out, into the ever-approaching night. This night, there was a meeting going on in the church, consisting of seven of the town elders; a big portion of the town's survivors, most of which were priests; who had formed a charter of sorts, to govern and regulate what was left of their beloved, desolate, little town.

The seven elders sat in a circle in the center of the great room, fireplace burning behind them, most with books in their hands and laps; open, in front of them.

"What are we proposing to do?," Father McMurtry asked nervously.

"I'm not exactly sure," replied Father Stephens, almost apologetically.

"We'd better think of something; we have to. Just give it time," Father Harris calmly said.

"We hadn't got time, the prophecy says it's to be on this very evening. We all felt that this morning; it appears someone has woken the beast. The prophecy is coming true!," Father Williams exclaimed, looking very nervous; shaking and sweating quite profusely.

"We are ALL aware of the prophecy," Father McMurtry snarked.

Father Williams shut-up and just listened madly for the remainder of the meeting.

"What are we going to do about this demon called--- Faust," Father McMurtry managed more calmly.

While researching the prophecy, one of the elders stumbled upon writings that appeared hidden for centuries. He opened them and slowly began to read through them.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

The writings were journals, memoirs, and some really disturbing scriptures, by a legendary wizard named Faust (pronounced Foust), who, apparently, took residence in the eye of Eagle Rock, at one time, very long ago. Just as death was about to take him from old age, he formed a deal with the devil; eternally sealing his fate. Faust traded the devil his everlasting soul in exchange for extreme power, infinite knowledge and immortality. Faust was not aware the deal had come with, alongside immortality, having to spend the rest of eternity, trapped, inside the horrible, abomination of a beast. The problem with making a deal with one as the devil, one tends to get the short end of the stick. But you should know and expect trickery going into it, for he doesn't really hide it or anything; he is the DEVIL, after all.

Just as Father McMurtry quietly spoke the beast's name, the house shook and the lights flickered; immediately followed by a long, audible, deafening roar.

The entire church abruptly fell gravely silent.

Chapter 9: The Massacre / Feeding Time

Chapter IX: The Massacre / Feeding Time

Halfway down the concrete flight of steps, I could now see my Jeep sitting in the parking lot. Seeing it, parked there alone, was shadowed by a feeling of allievation; soothing my nerves ever so slightly.

Gradually, I made my way to the bottom, while my knees were knocking. Clumsily attacking the last remaining steps, nearly falling when I reached the solid ground of the parking lot. Stumbling to regain my balance; I grabbed the side of the Jeep to keep from going down. I half-stood, hanging on, until regaining some composure and beginning breathing regularly again. When I felt able to, I opened the passenger door, returning the creature to his home away from home; then, lurching my way over to the driver side door, and getting in.

I sat there, thinking quietly and concentrating on my breathing; then I turned and gave a look to the creature.

"That was interesting," I sputtered. "No more of that, please."

Fuzzy radiated an audible chirp; apparantly in agreement.

I backed out of the parking spot, then out of the parking lot; headed for home.

I was arriving home just as the sun was kissing the horizon, now turning the sky from it's deep purple color, to an off grey; slowly darkening until the shadows of nightfall, fell upon the land.

It ended up I was only slightly late for dinner, Allie hardly even noticed, although I never did go by Timmy's house. I never really planned on doing it, anyway. Allie didn't care for Timmy and she had no connections to him anyhow. She didn't even have his number to reach me over there (which I suppose is a little odd), so I wasn't worried.

Restoring the creature to it's nightly resting place before entering the house through the garage, returning the toolbox to it's shelf; empty. I opened the door and was greeted by the smell of meatloaf; wafting through the air. Ravenous and drooling, I entered the kitchen finding Allie just sitting down to eat.

Leaning in and kissing her, I said, "Smells great. Sorry I'm late."

"No worries, you're not that late," as she stood to fix me a plate. "Thank you, dear."

"You're welcome," she said, as she placed the plate down in front of me.

We all sat down and ate a nice, quiet supper. Possibly the last one in a very long time.

Inside the church, a nerve-racking silence, blanketing them in a feeling of apprehensiveness, settled over the charter; the elders all holding their breath in horror; frozen by fear. Slowly, one by one, they began inhaling and exhaling again, but none dared be the first to speak.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

The lights flickered. Once, twice, three times; then they were entombed in darkness again.

Just as they were starting to relax, shoulders untensing, breathing becoming regular, the monster burst through the large, round plate-glass window with a ROAR! One of the priests let out a high-pitched scream. The others may have tried.

The room filled with ghastly smells, not only the smell of human feces, as some unwillingly released their bowels, masked by the stale, rank odor of time itself; entrapped in a small tomb for centuries. As the great beast snorted with a Huff!, their noses were also bombarded with it's dark, dank, breath; flanked only by the horribly fowl smell of the monster in it's entirety.

That was the last thing their brain's registered, as the beast leaped into the center of their circle with one bound. It landed with a Growl!, as it's serpent-like tail snatched the priest closest at hand, piercing his chest with it's deadly fangs and flung his lifeless body, crashing against the wall!

The beast had a fixed stare with the priest sitting directly in front of it. The petrified priest barely had time to flinch, as the beast sprung forward with a force so powerful, the remaining members of the clergy felt the air shift.

With a snap of his mighty jaws, the beast turned toward it's next victim; still clutching the last.

As the beast approached Father Stephens, he looked in the direction of Father McMurtry, seeing his friend's headless body trembling; arms frantically grabbing for air, where his head used to be, as he leaned to one side and slowly fell to the floor; twitching.

The monster opened wide and he could see the chewed, half-swallowed remains, of his fellow charter member and lifelong companion.

It was the last thing his eye focused on, before he met his friend in heaven.

Chapter 10: The Vision / The Beast's Lair

Chapter X: The Vision / The Beast's Lair

After dinner, I sat in my chair in front of the television set, still shaken from my close call earlier that evening; drinking a beer. Allie was washing up after dinner and working on getting the kids into their baths. After being reminded to, 'Brush your teeth', the children were promptly shooed off to bed.

I sat thinking of the days events (those of which I could remember clearly), flipping before my eyes like some sadistic picture show, over and over again; until Allie's hand on my shoulder, finally stopped the projector in my mind.

Sitting there, zoning out, staring deep into the TV, I wasn't hearing Will Smith rapping about being born in west Philadelphia; or seeing him play b-ball, then whistling for that cab; but instead I was seeing ME, driving around misguided and absentminded. I then saw myself pulled over, nobody in sight, placing the creature atop my head (more ridiculous looking than I ever could've imagined), almost strutting back to my door; speeding off, almost spinning tires, spitting gravel and making a trail of dust that followed me down the road for a little while.

Then I watched as Eagle Rock, slowly appeared in front of me; the head and beak appearing much more sullen and foreboding than I had remembered. Then I turned off, pulled into a parking lot and stepped out. I stood, peering up the flight of stairs for a moment.

I slowly began the ascent, one step at a time, creature still upon my head; not missing a beat.

Topping the stairs, I again paused to look up, this time towards the peak of the mountain; every step closer, the mountain top appeared ever more ominous. I was screaming at myself in my mind, trying to warn myself not to proceed any further; to just turn around now and leave that godforsaken place. Ignoring my silent screams and pleas, I still continued on, through the wooded paths that undulated up the mountain, oblivious and unaffected by the shouting. I started to feel ignored, so I shut-up, and just continued to watch.

As I watched myself begin to crawl almost animal-like, nearing the top, I was struck with a peculiar, creepy feeling, and began to feel frightened as I pushed on ever further. I began to break out into a sweat and was holding my breath, as I saw myself reach the area of the mountain; pausing to peak into the open cave that was the eye of the eagle's head.

I forced myself to take one staggered breath, as the vision showed me creeping and inching my way toward the edge of the cliff. Swallowing hard and still continuing to perspire, I then started to break out in gooseflesh. Sparing a single glance to my arm, seeing the rows of tiny bumps slowly form on my skin. Focusing quickly again on my hypnotic hallucination; almost JERKING my head toward the screen, afraid to miss anything interesting, or of importance, that might appear on the screen.

Finally, I watched myself peering over the edge, gazing out over top Winchester Gap; which lay miles beneath. Once again, forcing myself to hold my breath. Completely fixated on the me in the TV, I started to notice something was different; something was wrong.

I watched as I slowly raised my arms to my sides, making that all too familiar T-shape, and rocked slightly forward on my toes.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

Unaware, I was leaning in on my chair; ever closer to the television set. *This isn't right. I don't remember this happening like this?* Something was definitely different.

A second passed before I realized the creature wasn't there; missing from its perch, that was my head. *Why isn't he there? Where could he have gone to?* It was just then, as I was rocking unsteadily near the cliff's edge; when I heard an ungodly roar erupt from the cave, directly behind me. I saw my arms flare, struggling for balance, as I rocked back and then forward again; tumbling over the side. Summersaulting through the air, the ground drawing ever closer; a deafening yell escaped me, as a firm but delicate hand, equipped with long nails, was placed upon my shoulder.

I immediately sobered, leaving the vision far beyond reach, for now; awakening with a scream. Allie looking me over with immediate care and concern; firm hand still grasping my shoulder, was the first thing I could focus on, returning to reality.

I had an odd feeling, buried deep within my gut; almost a premonition. My vision had left me not being able to help but feel that something extremely bad was going to happen; possibly soon.

That thought running through my head had a saddening effect on me, squeezing out a single tear that ran down my face, dripping off my chin, and fell to the floor.

At this, Allie started to become frightful as well.

"What is it, baby?," she cautioned. "Are you, okay?"

I sniffled once, avoiding direct eye contact with her, as it began to pass. "I'll be alright," I managed; finally, looking her in the eye.

"You sure. I worry about you sometimes."

"I'm sure. I'm starting to feel better already," as I lifted her hand off my shoulder, holding it tightly in my own, and kissed it lovingly; never breaking eye contact. "Thank you."

She almost melted, her face blushing, turning her cheeks a brilliant, deep, rosy color. As I stood, releasing her hand and hugging her tightly; she gasped, surprisingly. I thanked her again, kissed her, and apologized for scaring her.

"It's alright. I'm just glad you're OK."

"Yeah, me too," I slipped.

"What?"

"Nevermind. It's nothing."

"No, what is it? Come on, you can tell me."

"Well, I was just a little upset about getting fired," I lied. "What the kids must think of me?"

"Aww, sweetie, that's not true. The kids love you."

"I know, but I still can't help think about it. It's depressing."

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"Come here," she pulled me close; hugging me again. "We'll get THROUGH this baby, we always DO."

When the beast was done playing with it's remaining victims, batting them around like a playful housecat, he took two of the bodies, holding one in each mouth; before exiting the church through the entrance it had made earlier. Careful to chose, the beast simply walked over the headless corpse of Father McMurtry, spralled on the floor; sparing it not so much as a glance; or even a sniff. The remaining bodies lay dead or dying; perhaps left for another day.

Leaping through the broken, round window, the beast's tail smacked the jagged pane, not used to the extra weight of the body, with a YELP!; that could be heard for miles.

It's tail soon forgotten, the beast trotted happily, excited from it's first night's kill, through the fields, with corpses in tow. In the night, occupied with carrying it's prizes, the beast didn't make a direct line towards it's destination.

It's brain still flowing with rage, adrenaline, and blood-lust, the beast was having trouble concentrating; for now. Slowly, he made his way toward the abode that was once it's home, and would soon be, once again.

Up ahead in the distance, a monument began to beckon the immense creature, calling to it; begging it to return home. The monument grew closer; until it became a mountain; until the beast stood at it's base, of Eagle Rock; dinner in it's cluches.

The urge so strong to return home, blocking the distraction of the kill, the beast began to charge the mountain, the body being held by the tail bouncing the entire way. Bolting up the mountainside, avoiding the stairs, then plowing straight through the woods, taking no notice of the paths, the beast spilled out with a LEAP!; almost flying to the top.

It clawed it's way up and sat on the beak for a moment, looking out over his new domain, his kingdom; gracefully.

Even though it was now pitch-black dark, it still saw everything with ease, being a creature of the night; for this beast, as most, sees better in the dark.

Content with itself, it turned and headed for it's newly aquired lair, mangled corpses dragging limply. The beast backed into the rear corner of the cave, bodies hitting the floor like rag dolls, where they were dropped. The monster reared back, shoulders tensed, as a victorious roar erupted from it, so violently loud, the mountain actually shook; showering pebbles and stones down the sides; as if even the ground and earth were trying to escape it's wrath.

Satisfied once again, licking blood from it's chops; the beast lowered his massive head and began to feed.

Chapter 11: Eye of Eagle Rock

Chapter XI: Eye of Eagle Rock

I awoke the next morning, unsure of what time I had retired, completely drained and rundown feeling. Feeling nauseous as I sat up, mouth filling with sour bile and metallic-tasting stomach acids. I was on the verge of puking; holding it back, with my tightly pursed lips. I stood, slipping on pants, venturing to the bathroom. I spat a mouthful of bitter nastiness into the basin. Standing there, both hands, one on either side of the sink, holding on for dear life, I stared deeply at my reflection in the bathroom vanity mirror. I didn't appear well. Dark circles tripled under my eyes, hair awry, I shuddered at the sight of myself; still forcing back the urge to vomit.

I splashed cold water on my face and eventually the nausea subsided. As I became more and more comfortable with the man in the mirror, recognizing him in time, I transfixed on the large vein, bulging and throbbing, rhythmically pulsing on my forehead. I could hear it clearly; feel it in my brain, even. The throbbing pulse slowly rose to maddening beats of far off war drums. Preserving my sanity, I shook it off and spat into the sink once again. I sat on the toilet, relieved myself, then lurched out to the kitchen to greet the family; hand holding my stomach.

"What's wrong, stomachache?," Allie said, apprehensively.

"Woke up feeling sick this mornin. That's all."

"Nerves, I'll bet. You're worrying yorself to death."

"I think I'll make it. I'll be alright."

"If you say so. I still think, maybe, you should go see a doctor."

"That's really not in our budget now, but I'll tell you what, if I still feel this bad later, I'll have to make a trip to see Doctor Rowling."

"That's good to hear. Here you go," as a plate of scrumptious looking and delicious smelling food was placed in front of me; which I hadn't the least desire to indulge in; eating the furthest thing from my mind.

I picked at my plate, making an attempt, until Allie finally broke in, "You really are sick, aren't you baby?"

I handed her my plate with, "A little bit. I'll manage."

"Alright, feel better," before she gave me a peck on the cheek, then: "If you're going out, can you stop at the supermarket for a gallon of milk and a loaf of bread?"

"Milk and bread. Roger that."

"Thanks, hon."

"I have to go to Timmy's again anyway. I didn't end up there till late yesterday, so by the time we drank a couple beers, we didn't get much done. I was gunna go help for an hour or so, then maybe try to catch some of the game." I stood, wiping my face with my napkin, "Well, I better get going."

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"That'd be fine. You'll be home for dinner, won't you?"

"Yes, dear, " I said kissing her goodbye. I went to the bedroom, threw the rest of my clothes on and headed for the garage.

This time, I cut right to the chase; removing Fuzzy from his toolbox and placing him on my head, sitting at the edge of our driveway, waiting to pull out onto the main road.

Instantaneously, I filled with that invisible force, which sent me out, guiding and funneling me into the right direction (Hah!), I suppose.

Pausing not even half a second, I turned right and sped off in the direction of Winchester Gap. For a moment, I frightened, as I suspected that he'd be returning to Eagle Rock again today, until I turned off right after passing the town; heading away from the mountain.

A sigh escaped me in relief, as I settled back to normal.

That feeling slowly receded than deminished as I approached the town church and the previous days horrors unfolded in front of me, leaving me disturbed as I fell to the floor, screaming; hands glued to my face.

In the eye of Eagle Rock, the beast sleeps off a full belly; rolling over from time to time, changing positions. The small amount of light that shined into the cave, radiated from the mornings rising sun, formed an outstretched hand reaching inward towards the monster. As the hand progressed, it uncovered the remains of last nights dinner--- the shredded robe, which now mixed unrecognizably with gore in places, the gnawed remaining bones, which will in time be bleached stark white with the sun, and one half-eaten skull, lie near and facing the opening of the cave. Seperated from it's body, it stared blankly into the vast, neverending heavens, with glazed-over, souless eyes; flesh peeling from it's face and scalp, falling to the ground, blood dripping down forming a small puddle in the dirt, surrounding the base of the neck. In it's right temple, a giant hole gapes and stares; formed by a long, powerful canine tooth; which holds no mercy.

The beast is content with sleep. Dreaming, while the protein in it's stomach digests down into fuel. A lot of fuel is needed to keep the machine running: which is the monstrous, abomination of a beast, the devil's lapdog, but by this evening, it will be fully restored and more than ready to venture into the darkness of night, hunting and killing another night's prey.

As I approached the church of Winchester Gap, making my way down the drive, nothing appeared out of the ordinary. Hoping today would turn out much better than the previous; I don't know if I could handle another scare like that.

Passing two cars parked in the parking lot, one an old Volvo, the other a Lincoln, pulling past them to the front entrance, I'd finally seen why I'd been directed here. At the sight of the giant plate-glass window smashed in, I slammed the Jeep to a stop; my jaw dropped. The grass in front of the window seemed to have been disturbed as well, trampled and disarrayed. A small trickle of blood ran from the broken window, almost reaching the ground.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

I swallowed, roughly, that bad feeling returning to its resting place in my stomach. Wondering whether to enter the church, horrified of what I might find inside, or if it'd be better off to leave well enough alone. I sucked it up, exited the Jeep and headed for the church's main, front set of double doors.

Upon entering the church, everything still appeared normal, nothing out of place. The beautiful main hall, with an immense statue of Jesus as its focal point, below which sat a podium of exquisite woodworking. To its left, the organ, to its right, the choir pit. Flawless rows of pews stood between me and the podium on its raised platform, like statues standing guard.

I turned left, staring at the heavy, wooden door, which led to the adjacent room; pleading with myself not to enter. This room most certainly held the smashed in window. Something had happened inside, that I wasn't sure I wanted to witness. My mind was already running wild from the close call yesterday and horrible vision last night.

I found myself placing my hand on the doorknob; unaware I had moved within arms reach. I grabbed firmly, twisted, and pushed the door inward.

It was dark inside, a draft coming in through the newly constructed window. There was an awful atmosphere hanging about the room; a fowl air lingering, wretchedly.

Entering, pushing the door even further, the horrors began to unfold in front of me. My eyes focusing on one section of terror, seamlessly flowing to the next, and finally falling upon the headless body of a priest, laying in front of the large, stone fireplace.

Taking three steps into the room of death, stopping abruptly, I noticed a large blood spot on the wall to my right, like a splotch on the windshield; but no body lay below it.

Eyes moving to the center of the circle, two mangled corpses lie in a heap, barely recognizable as human; a large, sticky, lake of blood bedded underneath them. Turning left I noticed another body; apparently running for its life as it was ended. The carcass's midsection was completely removed: organs, intestines, even spine. Almost as if he was blasted by a rocket, attempting to escape.

My eyes wandering back toward the center of the room, spotted another shape, lying near the fireplace. As I approached, avoiding stepping over the bloody heap piled on the floor, I realized this body was without its head; severed clean off at the base of the neck. The dark hole of the windpipe seemed to stare at me, thick trails of blood dripped down the robe; staining it crimson.

I felt myself losing it as I turned, attempting to cover my mouth, and lost my cookies all over the place; eventually turning to dry heaves.

"Ugh...", I heard in my mind, I thought; but I certainly didn't say it.

When the stars that blurred my vision, slowly, started to vanish, I looked to the far corner, past the beheaded, in the shadows. There, huddled in shambles, whimpering softly, was a surviving priest; left for dead.

He had lost a lot of blood and was in desperate need of a hospital; and would certainly be needing countless hours of psychiatric care. Shaking violently as I approached, I said to him, "Are you alright?," placing a hand on his spasming shoulder.

He responded only by screaming bloody murder, as he rolled away and faced toward the wall. I can't say I blamed him. I'd've reacted the same exact way, if I were in his shoes.

Chapter 12: The Lone Survivor

Chapter XII: The Lone Survivor

Eventually the man in the corner slowly began to respond. He was quite shook up, but I was more than ready to get out of this madhouse. Surely, any prolonged amount of time spent trapped in this bloodbath would drive a person bat-shit crazy. Lunacy to the point of no return, a nice suite waiting for you at Shady Acres Mental Institution; living out your days, until finally, you grace EVERYONE with your expiration; a blessing masquerading as death.

Snapping my fingers in front of his face and pleading with him that he needed to get the hell out of there, I believe he finally started to appreciate that I was there to help.

Finally, I got him to stand, helping him to his feet; but his legs were so weak, he buckled over and fell to his knees. Carefully helping him up again, we made our way to the exit. His unblinking eyes stared through the open door, into the sanctuary, very careful not to wander about; for fear of falling upon the mutilated bodies of his fellow priests and clergymen, as well as his once, lifelong friends.

His gaze never broke once, as we crossed the threshold, entering the sanctuary. Immediately a huge sigh was released from him, and he seemed to relax immensely. Shutting the door, leaving that shit for someone else to clean up, I paused, wondering, unsure of what to do.

"Stay here a moment." Then I added: "I'll be right back."

Nervously, he watched me go, as I turned away from him, hurried down the aisle, and headed for the kitchen. Hoping he'd be alright, I heard an almost silent whimper, teary-eyed sniveling, being amplified across the communion; so I began to run.

Reaching the kitchen, I turned the sink on cold, located a glass, and filled it; drinking from the faucet as I turned it off. Hurridly, I transported the glass of water back to the old man; careful as I could not to spill.

Upon my return, the whimpering had stopped but the streams of tears lay drying on his cheeks, blurred eyes looking at me for directions back to rationality; normality.

Looking too long into his eyes, I felt myself starting to break down. Grabbing a hold of myself, I stifled the tears, sweeping them under the rug to be resurrected another day.

I struggled to break eye contact, directed now toward the main entrance, as I realized time was a factor; it finally sinking in. Placing a hand on the priest's back, his robe sticky with dried blood, I helped him to the door.

Upon opening the door, the priest flinched painfully. Shading his eyes from the insanely bright light, radiating from the brilliant day unfolding outside, as he stumbled out the door. Being it was so dark in his chosen refuge, where he spent all night, that was the corner which I found him, it took a few seconds for his eyes to adjust. When he was able to see well enough, we made our way over to my Jeep.

It wasn't until I opened the drivers-side door, offering him a seat and giving him the glass of water to drink, that he inquired about the creature. I had forgotten about him again, until just then. My jaw dropped, speechless, I finally managed to muster up: " You'd never believe me."

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"Try me," he said over the glass, holding it with two hands.

"Alright, but in a minute, on our way to the hospital. First, tell me your name, and then you can start explaining what the hell happened back there!"

"Father Harris," he said. "My name is Father Harris, and..." his eyes shuddered, blurring and becoming red; once again, the tears began to flow.

It was 11:30 am when a call came into Eagle Rock County Police Dept., Sheriff Simon Carver answered it himself.

"Eagle Rock Police Department, Sheriff Carver speaking. How may I help you?"

"Yes, I'd like to report an emergency!"

"Alright, son, your name? An what's your 'mergency?"

"My name is Hunter Stephens, I'm 19, and I'm calling about my dad, Father Benjamin Stephens. He left last night, after supper, to go to a meeting, and never returned. I didn't find out until this morning, when I woke up and he wasn't anywhere in the house. After a few hours searching, stopping only to call around to ask if anyone had seen him; no one had. Unable to locate him and starting to get worried, I called you!"

"Well, technically, 24 hours is needed to be considered a missing person, but this sounds as it could be serious, so we may be able to help immediately."

"Thank you, sir. I've been worried sick."

"Understandable. Now, do you have any leads? Have any clue at all where he was supposed to be going last night?"

"I'm not really sure. But I think, maybe, he said something about it being at the old church."

"What old church?!"

"I believe he said it was the one in Winchester Gap."

A pause, then: "Uhhh... That's out of our jurisdiction. Sorry, kid..." followed by 'Click'; the line was dead.

Chapter 13: The Flashback / The Dream

Chapter: XIII: The Flashback / The Dream

"I dare not say his name, now that he's awake, for his ears hear all," said Father Harris as he finished sniffing. Rubbing under his eyes with his fists, he attempted to allieviate the grave circles that now hung there. Looking like he had two black eyes, more apparent now that we were in the light of day; showing and revealing how deathly pale he really was.

"Who's name?," I demanded.

"I won't. I won't say it. I'm not even going to write it down; for fear that you would read it aloud."

"Man, you're really messed up. What in Christ's sakes are you talking about?"

"What happened in there last night, that's what!," he screamed into my face.

"Chill out, gramps. You need to calm down and try to conserve your energy, you're not looking so hot."

He slunked back in his seat; taking a deep breath: "You wouldn't talk, if you'd seen what I have. Things so horrible, they seemed imaginary, too absurd even, to be dreamed in the wildest nightmares."

"Witnessing the aftermath wasn't exactly on my To-Do list, either."

"Apples and oranges, my friend. Apples and oranges." Taking another drink he said, "What sort of GOD allows THAT!" He nodded back toward the church.

Back at Eagle Rock, the beast slumbers, deeply, now laying square on it's belly, muzzle lying on it's enormous front paws. A draft wofting through the cave, bringing a silent message, almost an inside joke, riding on the wind circulated around the monster's lair; bringing him some joy.

As the zephyr gyrated about the beast's head, his ears began to twitch and twitter to and fro, spreading a huge, bloody smile, full of gnarly blood-stained teeth, accross his face.

Soon, He will start counting the breaths, the ones that remain, until his sleep is done. When his time comes.

When darkness falls...

"As you may, or may not know," Father Harris tackled the words with great endeavor, sipping from his glass; then: "We elders elected ourselves to govern this desperate, desolate, stillbirth of a town, knowing all too well the damnation besmudged upon this place; most were here then and we MAY have had a part in it; unknowingly, cursing it for all eternity."

Staring with eyes that showed the great sorrow they held, whilst the tears remained at bay. "But... this was our home. It was all we ever knew. So... we choose to stay. Attempting to, maybe, shift the balance of bad mojo that we had aquired, we began to investigate the towns history, examining the town's ledgers and inquiring

Big Things Come in Small Packages

anyone who had any information at all of our denounced, forgotten, little town."

He paused to catch his breath.

"Where was the church sexton while all that was happening last night?," I asked letting him breathe.

"You mean North Halberstrom," he blurted. "Nobody knew WHERE he was. Nobody had seen him all day."

"That seems strange," I answered, half-bewildered.

"Anyway, from time to time we came across tid bits of info; nothing of much importance. Until, one day, Father Murial was searching through the deep archives of the library, when he found an interesting stack of writings. Flipping through, he slowly realized they were journals and memoirs mostly, written by an extremely powerful wizard; who once inhabited this land. A few of these writings were quite disturbing. Almost scriptures, written in a dying hand, composed exclusively for Lucifer, it's words directed towards the fiery pits of hell. Unsurprisingly, as in tradition, it was signed at the bottom. Written in blood."

At that very moment, Hunter Stephens was exiting the front door of his parent's large, but humble, home; heading towards his car. He paused to peer at the sky, thinking of his father; praying that he was all right.

A sign sent from heaven above, although he could not have known it, dropped his gaze back down to the horizon. It fell upon the hazy, monolithic form in the distance, which began to clear and focus, uncovering the all too familiar shape of Eagle Rock Mountain.

He got in his car, heading for Winchester Gap, towards the church where his father, had hopefully, last been seen alive.

"As the wizard lay on his death bed, he arranged a deal with the devil," Father Harris said, almost trance-like. "Trading his blackened soul for infinite power and immortality. In Satan's cruel attempt at a joke, he embodied the wizard's soul, into a mutated, abomination of a beast; more likely at home in greek mythology. Turning the wizard into Satan's lapdog, his minion, who walks the earth, night after night, never being able to cure his hunger for flesh, or quench his thirst for blood."

"I see," I replied sternly. "So you're saying a MONSTER, with the soul of a wizard trapped inside is what caused, all THIS," waving a hand, palm up, at the church.

"Sounds crazy, doesn't it? I know. But, you see that hole it made? You could almost drive a pick-up through it," his eyes rose momentarily toward the window, before shifting quickly back to me. "You saw the bodies strewn about like rag dolls, the room painted in mine and my covenant's blood; smelling of death, already."

"Maybe not as crazy as you'd think," as my eyes raised, pointing towards my forehead.

"Father Murial was the one who stumbled upon these ancient documents," Father Harris seemed to centralize; concentrating on his words, escaping his injuries for the moment. "Hidden within this collection of papers, Father Murial uncovered an ancient prophecy, which we later deciphered, piece by piece. We were aware of the darkness about to be unleashed on Eagle Rock, concluding that it would begin last night. But we had no idea the bomb was in our laps; helpless; our time already at hand, as it blew up in our faces."

Big Things Come in Small Packages

He paused here, swallowing, coughing once softly.

"A meeting was in progress when it happened, trying to figure out a way to alleviate the situation. We had come up with nothing. I think we all sensed that we were doomed. Father McMurtry, Father Stephens, Father Williams, Father Murial, Father Irving, Father Hubble, and myself, were all sitting around the circle in the great room, in front of the fireplace, discussing the prophecy and what could be done about it."

He stopped for a breath.

"When Father McMurtry... spoke the wizard's name, whose name shall remain nameless, the church shook on its foundation. As we all froze, a roar erupted from beyond the window; shaking the building again. Seconds later, the beast was upon us, crashing through the window, spraying shards of stained glass in every direction. Landing with another roar, Father Williams was picked up and thrown against the wall by the beast's tail.

"The monster, HUGE, stood almost as tall as your Jeep, walking on all fours. Each leg ending in a massive paw, equipped with great claws. With the head and body of a scruffy, black, maneless lion, only twice the size, and a lengthy tail which ended in the arrow-shaped head of a viper; complete with two sets of fangs, apparently a top set and a bottom set. To me, the titan-hybrid appeared imaginary and mythological."

I stood, listening intently; almost trance-like.

"The beast had the brightest red eyes, I dared not stare directly into. You could get lost in those eyes, sealing your fate, reserving your suite at chateau Beelzebub. Seeming to glow in the dark, you had to force yourself not to follow and stare into those wicked, blood-colored eyes. Small ears twitched, listening to the room, picking up every sound we made. His mouth, overflowing with pointy, razor-sharp teeth, poised and ready to inflict serious damage.

"After effortlessly slinging father Williams against the wall with a splat, he turned to me. He swatted with one mighty paw, flinging me to the corner. I then watched, half-dazed, as he turned to Father McMurtry (the tail's watchful eyes, keeping the others at bay; its tongue flickering in and out). With one quick snap of its great jaws, and a deafening crunch, it plucked my friend's head clean off; easy as a grape.

"The beast then turned to Father Stephens, who was forced to watch Father McMurtry's headless body grasping for air above his neck, still chewing its prize. The monster then paused, exposing the contents of its jewels to Father Stephens, just before, it started eating him alive."

"My God," was all I could seem to mutter.

"It was about that time that I began to black out," he continued, appearing not to hear me. "I do remember seeing a flash, just before I went completely black, and hearing Father Murial screaming as he was lifted, still running, as the tail's head burst through his midsection; showering the room in blood and gore. Dropping his lifeless body to the floor, he directed his attention to the remaining two--- Father Irving and Father Hubble.

"As their mutilation began, I was checking out, that dark cloak falling over me, drifting me into the unconsciousness. I awoke minutes later, being batted around, along with two bloody humps, until finally, I was graced with the blanketing darkness, once again; welcoming it.

"Finally, I began to dream..."

Big Things Come in Small Packages

Hunter Stephens, en route to the church of Winchester Gap, staring out the windshield with teary eyes, was still praying for his father.

Driving well under the speed limit, gazing through the tears, past them, towards the direction of Eagle Rock; a boulder slowly formed in the pit of his stomach, making him feel ill. He pulled over, until the feeling passed. Sitting, unknowingly, staring at the place that had become his father's tomb and final resting place, a strong urge to continue on, proliferated through him.

He sucked up his raging emotions for a moment, and pressed on, towards the direction of the church.

One hazy afternoon, atop the windy hill, behind the Eagle Rock Academy of Catholicism, a small group of children play; enjoying their recess, at first.

The academy, a tall, square, brick building, windows placed uniformly around all sides; letting in maximum amounts of light. Hedges guarding the walk and the entrance, seemingly guarding the place but somehow giving off a feeling of pleasantness and security, as well. An old, worn, cast-iron fence surrounded the perimeter; entrance gate and guard booth centered in the front, fence ending at the edge of the forest a ways behind the school; the woods acting as the rear section of the fence.

The five children knelt around a dirt circle, clearly marked in chalk, were deeply engaged in a competitive game of marbles. You could hear things all the way across the yard, from time to time.

"Here comes my shooter!"

"Lucky break!"

"Look at that cat's eye!"

"Hey man, nice shot!"

"Woo, he's on fire!"

"Dernit, I quit!," and the like.

The five pre-teens, all around eleven years of age, kneeling, playing peacefully, were all especially enjoying themselves today. It had been a great week, the weather had been exceptionally beautiful even today, with the heavy breeze; it was unseasonably pleasant.

The children playing around the circle, all smiling save for one, unaware of the figure, watching from the cover of the edge of the forest. The lone, unsmiling child flared his nostrils, smelling deeply. The heavy breeze had turned, a foulness now inhabited it, forcing it's way around the circle. One by one, the unpleasantness entered their nasal ducts, scrunching the noses upon all their faces.

The figure in the woods shifted, hiding a little better.

The five boys--- Benjamin Stephens, Peter McMurtry, Jude Harris, Ralph Williams and David Bates, all stood, rosaries in hand, trying to figure the direction of the smell.

"Ugh... that smells terrible," one said.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"It reeks! What is it?," asked another, pinching his nose.

"I don't know. Where's it coming from?"

"From the woods!," they all agreed.

One took a step towards the woods, the others in hot pursuit. As it happened, by chance, David Bates headed the group, leading them away from the school, toward the treeline of the forest.

Not one noticed the hunkered shape, remaining absolutely still, hiding among the thick overgrowth; waiting.

As they neared the trees, the forest bathed in shadows, David stopped abruptly, the rest following suit.

"I don't like this," complained David.

"Don't be a sissy," someone howled from behind him.

With a nudge, he once again began to advance, approaching the ominous-looking, shadow-filled canopy.

Just as he placed his first step inside the shadowy barrier, erected by the tall oaks, a loud growl began, coming across the way, from just inside the overgrowth; once again, freezing them.

Followed by not even three seconds later, a long howl, as a great grey wolf erupted from the thicket, charging at the petrified group of boys.

None able to move, frozen by fear, the rogue mongruel tackled David easily; flinging him to the ground with a shriek. The rest were all knocked off balance, falling back, scooting away on their bottoms, as they watched their friend struggle; being eaten alive. Their mouths open in horror, attempting to scream, but no sound escaping. They continued backing away as David's hands, slowly, ceased resisting, falling limply to the ground, as the beast's head dug, hungrily, deep into his bloody midsection; constantly growling, chewing, then swallowing.

Never once turning to look at them, as they all turned, darting toward the school full blast; screaming at the tops of their lungs with tears streaming down each of their pale faces.

Jude Harris looked back once, just in time to see the mongruel dragging his dead friend back into the woods; letting out a vicious sob, he almost fell, then he began screaming so incredibly hard....

"That's when I came to," Father Harris finished his narrative of something between dream and reality.

I was speechless; just looking around, baffled for a moment. Then Father Harris began to cough a little more violently.

"Well, we better be gettin you to a hospital," I said, mostly to myself.

As I helped him up, leading him around to the passenger side, he asked me: "What are you going to tell them?"

Helping him into the seat, I stopped, thinking.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"I'll tell em a car must've swiped you, as you were walking getting some fresh air, knocking you into the ditch, where you laid, helpless, all night."

"That sounds pretty good, it oughta work," he managed, still coughing.

A wide smile, formed across my face, pleased by my quick thinking. I shut the door and walked around to my side. I sat down, still smiling, as I closed the door.

I noticed him staring at me as I located the keys.

"What about that?," he pointed weakly at the creature.

I took him off my head, returning him to his toolbox, and placed him in the backseat.

"I'll explain on the way," I said placing the key in the ignition.

As I turned the key, Korn blared out of the speakers, full blast, screaming about:

Sometimes I can not take this place,

Sometimes it's my life, I can taste,

Sometimes I can not feel my face,

You'll never see me, far from grace!

We both, simultaneously, slapped our hands to our ears, jumping and flinching from the shock; the music so loud and deafening, it seemed your head would explode.

I grabbed the volume knob, violently turning it down, catching my breath from the fright.

"My goodness," Father Harris's mouth formed the words, but I was unsure whether he said them, or not.

"Yikes!," I said, steadying myself. Finished shaking, I exited the church parking lot and headed for Eagle Rock Memorial Hospital.

About a mile down the road from the church, two cars passed each other; neither one showing any notice.

As the silver Jeep Grand Cherokee passed the black Mustang, had either one glanced into the opposite car, one seeing a crushed, teary-eyed young man headed toward the church, the other catching the blood-smearred robe of a priest, that was the last man alive to have seen his father, they would have stopped to spare him the bloodbath that lay ahead of him.

Alas, it wasn't in the cards.

Chapter 14: Hunter, Lord of the Flies

Chapter XIV: Hunter, Lord of the Flies

When Hunter Stephens, Father Benjamin Stephens' only son, turned onto the church drive, the same dreadful feeling that I had felt about an hour earlier, nearing the church, dawned on him EVEN sooner; well before he turned the corner; two cars in the lonely parking lot, giant gaping mouth that used to hold a window, containing an image of Jesus, kneeling and praying.

Pulling into the parking lot and parking, he batted not even an eye at the church. Already assuming the worst, he wasn't even that surprised when he exited the car and his eyes were then led to the destruction, that lay before him, the side of the church bashed in; jags of glass rimming the border.

He let out a sigh as he started for the door, head down looking at his feet, hands in his pockets. Sort of scuffling along, he reached the door, opening it and stepping inside.

Reluctant to knock, he expected nobody would be there to answer anyway. He shut the door, looking about the silent, empty sanctuary that lay before him, undisturbed. He stood for a minute, just breathing and watching, hands still in his pockets. Looking down the isles, checking everything out, he had the sudden impulse to head in that direction; away from the unknown trepidations, that most certainly, lay beyond the heavy wooden door to his left.

He stifled himself, turning his head, looking at the door so strongly, as if he were to have x-ray vision; staring so hard, with such intent, almost as if he could bust it in using only his eyes.

Breaking his gaze with a shake of his head, he said: "Fuck it."

Stepping to the door, he paused, placing his hand on the handle. He became frightened, not wanting to open the door. A fiendish aura proliferated out of that door, through his hand, and ramified throughout his entire body.

Hunter Stephens, having never have felt anything like THAT, nothing as intense, in his entire nineteen years of existence, a small trickle of urine trailed down his pants; reaching his shoe.

He struggled to swallow as he turned the handle, opening the door. Immediately, he was blasted in the face by the smell of blood, backed by the ever-nearing smell of death; growing exponentially greater. A few flies, escaping when he opened the door, buzzed by. The room already beginning to fill with the noisy scavengers. Flying and buzzing about, traveling from one bloody heap to the next, feeding at their leisure upon the fallen clergy.

Entering the room containing the horrifying scene, eyes falling upon senseless deaths and gruesome murders, he fell to his knees. Hands to his mouth, struggling not to lose it, a gurgling began in his throat. His attempts useless, he spewed an ample-sized puddle of puke on the floor in front of him.

Unable to steady himself, he began rocking side to side, still on his knees, just before his eyes started to roll, turning them white; forcing the welcoming blackness over him; ABSORBING him into it; the flies constantly, steadily and monotonously, buzzing all around him.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

Allie was just sitting down to lunch--- peanut butter and jelly for the kids, a tossed garden salad for herself; looking nervous as she was pondering of what she wanted to say.

The kids, munching away, faces covered in peanut butter, oblivious to their worrisky mother, picking at her food, watching them from across the table.

"I want to talk to you guys about your dad," she said, unable to wait any longer.

"What is it, Mommy?," Abigail said, now worried as well.

Trevor just sat, still eating his sandwich, listening intently to his mother.

"I'm worried about him. He hasn't been acting right since he lost his job," she turned away, " almost, like he's hiding something."

"I didn't notice anything, Mommy," Abigail returned to her sandwich. Trevor still just sat and ate; acknowledging no one.

"How do you guys feel about your father getting fired?" She added: "Does it bother you?"

"No, Daddy's the greatest," cooed Abigail. "Especially when he reads me a bedtime story, then he tucks me in and hugs and kisses me goodnight."

"Huht... Baby," Trevor scoffed, under his breath.

"Shut-up, Trevor. Poopie-head!," screamed Abigail.

"Be nice to your sister. What's the matter with you?," Allie asked hastily.

"Nothing. Nevermind," he turned to his sister, "sorry, Abbey."

She crossed her arms, turning away with a Huff!

"Abigail?," Allie reasoned.

"ALRIGHT," she gave in, and then forced: "Okay, I accept your apology."

"Good," said Allie. "Sorry I even brought it up."

I started my story from the top, Father Stephens looking progressively worse; slumped in the seat next to me, while we headed for the hospital in Stephens City; maybe twenty-five minutes, if I really booked it.

I was just about to the part--- I never even doubled back for my tools..., when I glanced over at the Father, once again. He had slipped into unconsciousness; eyes closed and lips turning a shade of blue comparable to the deepest depths of the oceans.

My heart sank, mouth growing dry, river of sweat forming on my brow, I took a deep breath, swallowing nervously. I wiped my forehead with my hand, flicking the cool droplets to the floorboard.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"Don't worry," I said to nobody in particular. "Hold ON!," as I stomped on the gas; hoping, just hoping, that we'd make it there in the nick of time.

With just enough time to....

Hunter lay on his stomach, face smushed firmly against the old, worn hardwood that lay beneath him, next to the drying puke puddled only inches from where he lie. Buzzing surrounding his thoughts, filling the room, as he focused centrally on the droning noise; slipping, slowly, back into conciousness.

The violent buzzing, growing exponentially louder in his ears, until so deafening, unable to stand it anymore, his eyes snapped open. Hazy and distant and unfocusing, they stared blankly for a moment. Blinking away the fuzziness, along with the painful drowsiness that is always accompanied, hand in hand, with the disconcerting act of fainting.

His eyes slowly began to focus on little black dots, scurrying about, coming in and out of his field of vision; monotonously. As he attempted to sit up, the buzzing proving too much for him, his hands came to his ears, slightly muffling the maddening buzzsaw, working on his brain.

As he sat up, everything coming back, he realized the moving dots were flies, feeding on vomit he must of expelled onto the floor, moments before he passed out. Dastardly, sickening, little parasites, crawling here and there, to and fro; the CULPRITS, their little wings holding the power of flight, ALONG with that infernal racket; buzzing as loud as jackhammers, nothing else to be heard for miles. Clenching his teeth so hard, nearly cruching them to powder, while his eyes moved wildly about the room, from one macabre scene to the next; hands still planted firmly against his ears.

At the top of his lungs, he started to scream; turning, he ran; ran out the doors, barreling through them, nearly kicking through as he exited swiftly, busting out the main doors of the church. Running for his car, still howling that heart-wrenching cry, tears streaming down his face, hands pressed tightly to his ears; attempting to drown out that neverending, eerily outragous, earsplitting, monotonous Buzz; embedded; trapped, deep within his mind.

"What about that call earlier, Sheriff?"

"What, that Stephens' boy?," Sheriff Carver said dryly. "What about it?"

"Shouldn't we do something? It just don't seem right," Deputy Jenkins awaited nervously for a response.

"Huh. That so. I tell you what...," Sheriff Carver stared deeply with unflinching eyes; eyes that, obviously, had witnessed too many horrors to belong to a mere, mortal man. The deputy, struggling, managed to swallow as the sheriff finished: "You so concerned. How's about you go check up on it, for me? Huh, hot shot?"

The deputy sat, dumbfounded, thinking for a moment, then somehow managed through unsure lips: "Maybe I will, SHERIFF. Maybe I will."

Chapter 15: Eagle Rock Memorial

Chapter XV: Eagle Rock Memorial

I made it to Eagle Rock Memorial Hospital in nineteen minutes, pulling into the parking lot on two wheels, whipping around the circle, the right front tire bouncing up onto the curb, as I threw it into park. Flying around the front of the Jeep to the old man's aide, praying my efforts wouldn't be futile, I carefully helped him out of the car, half-carrying him to the door.

He hadn't gone completely, opening his eyes to tiny slits that barely exposed his drifting, dilated pupils, backed by whites, stained bloodshot, as we pushed through the doors; harumscarum. Those wandering eyes, struggling to contain the soul trapped within, from escaping; from floating effortlessly, into the infinite beyond. Pursed lightly, below the slightly crooked nose that ends in those bloodshot slots, without a hitch, his lips began to regain a little of their natural color back; the blue still present, but seeming to dissipate.

Stumbling through the door, a couple of the staff, running at the sight of us, came to our assistance. Carefully wrestling Father Harris into a wheelchair, turning to me and asking if I was family. Upon my declination, rolling him away, the one pushing him said over her shoulder: "They'll have some paperwork for you at the front desk."

Oh great, here we go, I thought, rolling my eyes, heading for the desk. Just my luck, I could tell from a distance, approaching with a smile that was nothing more than a farce, the woman working the front desk was a harridan. I could feel the bitterness, hovering about, darkening her personality, even before speaking a word to her. I could see it in her eyes, even buried behind the thick-framed, coke-bottle lensed, granny bifocal, eyeglasses.

"Can I help you?," the receptionist said with atrocity.

"I brought that old man in. They told me to come over here."

"I see," very condescendingly, as she primped her hair; almost completely white. "And what's his name?"

"Father Harris. Father *Jude* Harris, I believe he said."

"Oh, you're not related to the patient?"

"No, ma'am."

"So, how did he sustain his injuries?"

"Well, I'm not exactly sure. I was drivin, on the way to my friend's house, when I saw something out of the corner of my eye. Thinking it was an animal, I pulled over to check it out. He must've been out walking or getting some fresh air or something, when some drunk must've come along and clipped him; flinging him to the ditch, where, he said, he spent the entire evening, unable to move."

"I *see*," she eyed me, quizically.

"That's really all I know," I finished. "I picked him out of the ditch, sat him in my truck, and gave him some water that I had, luckily, before racing him here."

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"OK, well, that was the right thing to do, if you couldn't call an ambulance," she thawed slightly. "You may have saved that man's life."

"I *hope* so. Could you give me his room number, and do you have a pen?," writing down my phone number, then handing it to her. "Here's my number, if he comes to, miraculously, have him give me a call, I'd love to hear from him. Please keep me posted, regardless, though."

"Yes sir, no problem," as she made a note, filing my paper away. "I think I've got everything from you, if you've got things to do. We've got it from here."

"Yes ma'am. Thank you very much."

"Thank *you*, you really did a good thing, stopping and helping that poor, old man; most wouldn't have done as much. He would have had a zero percent chance, if it wasn't for you. Bless your heart."

"Thank you, ma'am. But that's not necessary," tipping my hat to her, as I headed for the door. "Good-bye, now."

"Take care, dear," as I turned to leave.

Deputy Jenkins sat at the counter, nervously drinking his coffee and talking to the waitress at the diner; just around the corner, a few blocks from the police station.

"What's wrong, Deputy?," said the middle-aged, Gladys Shaw, co-owner along with her husband, Henry, saddled upon the grill. "You looks as though, you seen a ghost. Can I get you anything?"

"It's nothing. I just flapped my gums into having to go check a call in Winchester Gap," the restaurant, although far from busy, fell silent at the mention of the cursed, infinitely plagued, town. "What I get, for opening my big mouth."

"That's *horrible*, best of luck to you. You're gunna need it."

"I'm thinking about disregarding it completely. I can always find a new job."

"That'd be wise. Smartest thing I heard *all* day," refilling his coffee mug.

Hunter Stephens, speechless and still bawling, driving erratically through the tears, pulled into his driveway; skidding to a stop. He crossed his arms on the steering wheel, placing his head down on them; sobbing.

Completely lost, unaware of what to do, he headed inside; entering the house, walking with weak legs, struggling to make it to his room.

Opening the door and falling inside, he scurried up, propping himself against the wall; sitting on his bed, still crying, unable to stop. Zoning out, he began sucking on his thumb, for the first time in fifteen years. Sitting there, rocking back and forth, sucking away, he began to wish that damned, infernal buzzing, would just go away.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

I had just about reached home, when I remembered the groceries that Allie had asked for. I turned around, heading for the market, almost completely forgotten, for the milk and bread.

Nobody has to know.

Chapter 16: The Canyon Community

Chapter XVI: The Canyon Community

Eagle Rock, located at the joint at the end of the elbow that the Appalachian mountain range formed, tucked out of society's way, a quaint, little community all alone, stood guarding the town of Winchester Gap. Hovering over it, gazing out over the hidden valley, upon the cozy, quiet towns; spread throughout.

One river, feeding all the towns, flanked the valley; passing right between two of the towns, creating a barrier. Only passable by the newly refurbished bridge that connects the two. Exiting the towns, the river bends, nearing the mountain range, winding, following the curve of the mountain base for a while, then breaking away, fleeing Eagle Rock Valley, eventually forking; each flowing in different directions.

It's funny, the river's name is Tom's Brook, although no where near small enough to be a brook. Even during the dry season, the shallowest points are still easily navigated by boat and plenty deep enough to swim, completely submerged. Named after the town, which sits upon the river on the valley side of the natural, blue, flowing barrier. Some dumbass a long time ago, named the town; and it just stuck. The river shortly inherited the name, as well. Across the bridge from Tom's Brook, stands Zeigler's Crossing, named after the town's co-founder. Other than Winchester Gap, of course, these two towns lay closer to Eagle Rock than the rest.

West of Tom's Brook, lies Stephen's City; in between, almost in the center of Eagle Rock Valley, is the Eagle Rock Memorial Hospital. It's funded by the state, and run mostly by volunteers. It has proven more than enough to provide medical care, throughout the entire valley. The valley, almost broke off from the world, the river on one edge, the rocky, mountain range, forming the other. The shipping trade and radio and television, really the only windows left; to the unaware, uncaring, outside world.

Perched high on one mountainside, as far away from Eagle Rock as possible, but still part of the canyon community, sits the small town of Hangman's Noose; peering down over the valley, almost at the antipode of Eagle Rock. This tiny, mountain town, clinging to the rock face, unaware of anyone's problems but their own, harbors simple mountain life, creating a paradox; stuck in the past.

It also was where all the towns' executions were once held. For a giant wooden platform was built off the edge of the cliff, at the edge of the town. It stretched out into thin air, but built surprisingly well, as most things were at that time, many years ago. At the far edge of the platform, hanging out over the valley, was a large post with a swinging arm connected to the top of it; controlled by a lever. When was still in use, they would blindfold the prisoners to be hanged, placing them on the ledge, built onto the end of the platform. The executioner would then apply their noose and walk back to the lever; pulling it. The arm then would swivel, with such a sharp jerk, that it was usually enough to break the victim's neck instantly; but not always. They then would leave the body hanging there for weeks, or sometimes months, depending on the severity of the crime; as a reminder to all others who even were just only thinking of breaking the laws. For many it worked, and crimes were generally given a second thought.

In between Stephen's City, and Hangman's Noose that roosted over head, nussled into the mountain, backing up to the great base, is the place where I now call home. Maurertown (pronounced Maurytown) seemed as good as any place to settle down and start a family. Pretty much everything you need, held within. Piggly-wiggly, Save-A-Lot, even a nice oldtown area, complete with antique stores, novelty shops, a haberdashery, and the valley's only four-star restaurant.

Two bars to chose from, the first one, Maurertown Tavern, I was thinking about stopping at for a cold one, before returning home; the second one, a high class, exquisite establishment, if you have the extra cash to

Big Things Come in Small Packages

indulge, I recommend going at least once. Called: The Hole in the Wall, located at the back of the town, it's built directly into the mountainside. Inside, it's dark, peaceful, and definitely quite relaxing. Many of the walls still holding the original look of the rock face. Which I always thought to be a really cool feature. Surprisingly enough, even with the high-class prices, it keeps a pretty descent crowd.

My house, located off route 17 just outside of town, sits surrounded mostly by trees. Having built it, almost all myself, means that it's far from perfect. But there is one thing that it is, for sure.

It's *mine*.

A silver Grand Cherokee approaches, about to turn onto the main drive, groceries sitting on the blood-stained passenger seat, creature in the back, quietly sitting in his toolbox. The driver anxiously awaiting to return home, thinking, half-smiling as he went.

Chapter 17: Hunter Loses It / Deputy Jenkins on the Case

Chapter XVII: Hunter Loses It / Deputy Jenkins on the Case

At some point, Hunter closed his watery eyes drifting off to sleep, still sitting on his bed, back against the wall. With his thumb in his mouth and the droning buzzing getting louder in his ears, a kiloton going off in his head, the sound of one thousand buzzing flies amplified through a megaphone, lulling him to sleep and drifting him toward the brink of insanity. His newly aquired, disturbing, sense of reality crumbling away, slipping him into an all too realistic dream world; where his father is still alive.

I walked through the door, carrying the gallon of milk in one hand, the bag containing the loaf of bread, in the other. Allie was in the kitchen, again, just starting to make Sunday supper.

"Sorry I'm late," sitting the bag on the counter and setting the jug of milk in the fridge. I got a beer out and popped the top.

"How was your day?," she asked kindly.

"Good," I kissed her on the cheek, then leaned against the counter next to her; drinking my beer. "And *you*?"

"It's been pretty hectic here, you know, a usual *Sunday*."

"That sucks. Maybe we can watch the game and drink some beers later; let you unwind a little."

"That sounds nice, but... I thought you were going out to watch the game later."

"I think I'll stay in tonight," as I finished the last couple sips of my beer; throwing it in the trash.

Deputy Jenkins sat in his squad car in front of the diner, trying to decide what he should do. On the one hand, he wanted to run, run to his house; maybe further. Maybe he'd pack his bags, get the hell out of Dodge, take a vacation; go to the airport, maybe go visit his sister in Vermont, or perhaps even fly off to some island paradise, complete with bikini-clad beaches and crystal clear, breathtakingly blue lagoons; and coconuts.

You gotta have coconuts.

But on the other hand, he did enjoy his simple life he had made for himself in Eagle Rock Valley, with never all that much policework to do around here. Besides, maybe more so, he didn't want to disappoint the sheriff, as much as he couldn't stand him, but was also someone he sort-of looks up to *and* was sort-of his mentor.

He was thinking, *Man, what should I do?*, when, "*Jenkins!* You checking out that church, *yet?* Quit messing around and get your ass over there!"

He picked up the receiver, pressing the button, "Yes, sir." Then, "Sheriff?"

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"What?!"

"How did you know?"

"I just figured as much; by the looks of you when you left, running out of here."

"Alright, *I'm on it*. For real this time."

A black Ford Mustang, fox-body style, sped out of town, the driver never even looking back in the rear-view mirror. Approaching the house whipping into the driveway, shooting gravel in a cloud of smoke, he slid the car to a stop; almost doing a one-eighty.

Hunter stepped out of the car, slamming the door with anger. Removing his dark sunglasses to stare at the house, where he spent most of his childhood, with sullen, well-hidden, despair. Furling his brow, arms crossed, sunglasses folded in one hand, he listened intently to the pleasant sounds of the day; not seeming to fit, an absurd pairing to the worrisome feeling shrouded over his mind.

A wind rustled through the trees, light and airy, a bird chirping in reaction to it, melodiously rocking in the breeze. In the distance, the cars and trucks buzzed by on the highway; constant droning, like insects going to and from the hive. Across the narrow, thin strip of woods, the neighbor's dog barked, unrelentlessly; apparently, stirred by the noisy exhibition rendered in the driveway across the way. On the other side of the house, a babbling stream trickled away, heading for the fields beyond; where, just barely audible in the distance, came the mooing and moaning of livestock.

Yet, the house was silent. Not a sound came from inside, or even directly around it. The doors and windows, all shut, making it possible that someone could very well be asleep, inside. Heavy sleepers, unaware of the car sitting in the driveway, long graveless ruts trailing behind its tires; a dark, flippant castiff, lingering outside, gathering the fortitude needed to enter the house; for fear of the nefarious malefaction, most certainly, contained within. Swallowing, with a shake of his head, he took a step; forcing himself towards the house, and eventually, the front door.

With a quick knock, and without waiting for a reply, Hunter opened the front door, entering the house. A funny smell hit him immediately, as he entered. After deciphering it to be mostly staleness, covered in ages of dust, he relaxed, slightly. The squeaking hinges, still echoing, the only sound in the silent, barren, house. Stepping in to the house, walking past a couch, placing a hand upon it as he passed; stirring a cloud of dust that puffed its way up towards the ceiling, before dissipating and returning, randomly to the floor; he acquired the urge to yell.

"Father," he said softly at first, then, "Father," slightly louder. Finally, "*Father?!,*" tears hanging on the corners of his eyes.

The house, still silent, beckoned him ever deeper.

Wandering aimlessly now, the troubles felt for his father now guiding him, absently, further into the house. Stopping at the foot of the stairs, looking up, the silence called to him. Gripping the banister, he began to climb. Topping the stairs, he began, "Father? Father..."

Softly, "Hunter...", stopping him dead in his tracks.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

Stepping forward, so as not to fall backward down the steps, he shook his head in disbelief; not wanting to hear.

"Hunter...", even louder, making it even harder to dismiss.

Still frozen, now with confusion as much as fear, unable to decide which direction to turn, he began to lose it.

"Father?," he sobbed. "I thought you were gone. Where are you?"

"Over here, my son..."

"Where?" He began to move now, searching the upstairs, toward the direction the voice seemed to come from; except that was every direction. Finally, he came upon a door which was shut, placing his ear close upon it; listening.

"Hunter...", a shiver was sent traveling down his spine.

"Father?" He said softly, trying the doorknob; it was locked. "Of course," under his breath.

"Quit messing around, son."

Startled, he stepped back, then with a grunt, he kicked the door in; followed quickly by: "You have work to do."

A man sits on his back porch, the infamous Hangman's Noose left as an example to all those who wish to oppose, the only thing between his house and the sharp cliff; leading to the valley below. Buckley Littlin sat in his chair, rocking, with a bottle of Jack in his lap held tightly between his knees, while staring across the gorge watching the sun slowly begin to recede, barely hugging onto Eagle Rock; located across the way. The light depleting as with the man, he struggled for consciousness, wanting to make it through yet another sunset.

One eye opened, the other only half, as the final specks of sunlight disappeared on the horizon, he slouched in his chair; now barely rocking. Arms falling limp to his sides, a soft roar erupted from Eagle Rock, muffled, not much more than a loud vibrating squeak really, by the time it crossed the vast canyon. His eyes, unsteadily settled on the cave of Eagle Rock, only barely visible from this distance; as a bright red glow, flickered, then grew stronger, enfulfing the eye of the mountain. Buckley Littlin noticed long enough to raise one eyelid in wonderment; just before the warm, unrelentless sleep of alcohol, absorbed him deeply; rendering him worthless till the morning.

Hunter crashed through the door, it foundering under his weight with him landing on top of it, falling not into a bedroom, but into a hazy, misty, malign, cesspool; an effluvium in the air, certainly paired with unknown skulduggeries. Rising to his feet, then patting his knees off, cursing, an unlikely knave thrust among an eerie, nightmarish wasteland; he began wandering carefully, feeling blindly, making his way along.

"Hunter..."

"Father?"

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"Hunter..."

"Father? Where *are* you?"

Silence for a moment, only a moment, before off in the distance, seemingly too far to still be located inside the house, a flicker of light shined; just barely visible. Growing and pulsing to a melodious, soft, angelic hum, it began drawing Hunter nearer, calling him with its syren's song, whilst frightening him to the bone.

Then from inside the growing aura: "Over here, my boy. I'm right here."

"Father," Hunter whimpered, "I've been *so* worried."

"Come closer, son. Let me lay me eyes on you."

Feeling it to be a trap, but not knowing what else to do, he continued. Slowly approaching the light, a blinding ball growing ever larger, he started to panic; sniveling and crying.

"Here, son..."

He outstretched his hands as he came to the light, pausing only briefly, then, stepping into it, he began to scream.

Deputy Jenkins was just turning on the headlights to his cruiser, moments before he turned, heading for the church belonging to the plagued town, unknowing what he may find waiting there. No matter the case, it certainly shouldn't be good; happy times and grateful welcomings and all that malarchy.

The night, slowly draping the valley in it's steady, sickening darkness, grabbing hold to every little thing; every nook and crannie, no light safe, unable to escape the relentless, stalking nightfall.

Nervously sweating, underneath his policeman's cap and uniform, creeping down the drive towards the church, before stopping the car and putting it into park. Searching about with the spotlight on his car, he looked over the church grounds from inside the safety of his cruiser; hoping not to find anything.

Dropping his car into reverse, he grabbed the radio, making his report while backing down the drive; away from the crime scene, leaving the multiple homicides, hiding within, to be uncovered yet another day.

Unknowingly saving himself, by not glancing over toward Eagle Rock; for at that very moment, something happens there, just barely visible through everlonging night. Unaware, the deputy turned, headed back for the station.

"Our father's worshiped in this mountain....," still screaming.

"Your time has come....," slowly, as the light faded, something began to come into focus.

"Obey your father....," the white, blinding light, slowly melting, dissolving, then transgressing, into a deep, dark red.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"Take this...," his arms outstretched, were now filled by a large, metal, oblong object of unknown origin.

"And *go...*," the flowing redness waved and twisted, forming into two globes. The deep red globes, hovering in the darkness, began to then grow lines dividing them, forming into slanted pupils, staring deeply into his wide, frightened eyes. Glaring straight at him, the crimson red hate-filled eyes, starting overflowing with red, bleeding, dripping blood that vanished into thin air.

"*Honor me...*," as he fell into the bleeding eyes screaming again uncontrollably, falling out the other side, now awake, holding an unfamiliar heavy, shiny, instrument of death. Immediately, returning to reality, the buzzing returned as well; branded eternally in his ears. Causing him to scream, even more, not stopping until his vocal cords finally gave, burning out. Glancing only once, towards the mountain where his lost ancestors once worshiped, and where he soon would be heading; following the pleadings of his dead father.

Chapter 18: Hunter in Arms / Cindy Cries Wolf

Chapter XVIII: Hunter in Arms / Cindy Cries Wolf

Slumbering in the rear of the shallow cave, a shape shifts in the growing darkness. Rolling from its side to its stomach, with a groan, growing uneasy from the evernearing blackness; welcoming it. Ears twitching atop its head, the first things to react, listening to its surroundings; just before waking.

A smile formed, spreading, parallel with the growing of nightfall and the ending of its dormancy. Next the red eyes flared open, suddenly, and the entire cave was illuminated red from the beast's glowing eyes; giving the cave the appearance of an actual eye. The beast's smile growing ever wider and toothier; obviously pleased with his choice for its den.

Finally standing, walking slowly, stretching its rested limbs as it did. It approached the mouth of the cave, its front paw kicking something without much regard as it lazily passed through it. Like a ball, the object rolled nearing the edge; going over. Bouncing on the rocks for a while, pulverizing it, until finally skipping one good time going airborne. It arched, then dropped and dropped, falling nearly forever; landing with a thud and a slight bounce.

Now even if his own son happened upon his head, the destruction done to it from the fall would make it impossible even for Hunter to identify.

Pleased with itself with last night's kill. With a well rested sleep. With the blackening night. With this night's kill soon at hand; the beast stepped to its throne, the beak overlooking its new hunting grounds. Its kingdom of soulless heathens - unknowingly - their punishment, awaiting to be eaten to death.

The beast stood strong, rearing back, and emitted a roar shaking Eagle Rock and echoing throughout the entire valley. Pleased with itself, the beast leaped down the mountain scurrying to the bottom with amazing speed.

Pausing long enough for a sniff, then bolting off in that direction; chasing the smell.

Pulling into the station, the deputy began feeling guilty about chickening out. Feeling, now, that something was terribly wrong at that church. He should have done more than he did.

But what's done is done, he was thinking, pushing his glasses up to the bridge of his beak-shaped nose. Staring out his windshield, barely noticing the drops of precipitation beginning to cluster there.

Killing his ignition - opening the door and beginning his walk of shame - approaching the doors with Sheriff Carver sitting beyond, he began wishing that he had taken that vacation instead.

Sitting there with Allie on the couch, my arm around her with her head on my shoulder, we watched the game; just after sending the kids off to bed. Drinking a beer, relaxed to the fullest, I picked up on something. I felt a slight vibration or had thought that I heard a sound. I turned my head in either direction, listening intently.

"What is it?" Allie asked sleepily with a yawn.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"Thought I heard somethin'."

I lifted my arm and stood up, Allie leaned until her body reached the cushions. Her eyes forcing to stay open. The strain of the day finally catching up to her and crashing down on her.

"I'll be right back."

She answered with a grumble, something intended to be words or maybe even a sentence.

Walking down the hall approaching the children's room, it's kind of funny, the creature popped into my mind out of nowhere; the first time in hours. Sure it was still on its shelf where I had left him. I stood at the door, worried of what might lay beyond.

Opening the door and peering inside, carefully, as not to disturb them. I saw both snoring away; sawing lumber. With a sigh of relief, I slowly returned the door to its closed position.

Walking back to the living room, Allie was now asleep as well, I headed for the garage. Entering and shutting the door, the moment of pure darkness before I turned on the light frightened me a little.

I called out softly, "Fuzzy?"

Then I saw him as I closed in, he hopped with acknowledgement, seemingly happy to see me. Standing just watching him for a moment, thinking the last few day's events over in my mind.

"What's going *on* here?"

He stopped moving completely, seeming to just stare back at me; blankly. Almost like it was saying I have no fucking idea, or, your guess is as good as mine.

"Tell me about it."

Still nothing but that blank stare.

"All right, then. Good night."

Shutting off the light as I exited the garage - then closing the door - quietly, trying not to wake Allie. I walked over to her, carefully picked her up and carried her off to bed. Her sleeping head resting on my chest, right over my beating heart, listening in her sleep; a small smile forming on her face.

Laying her on the bed and tucking her in, kissing her on the forehead, I admired the look of her peacefulness. Undressing down to my underwear, I - gently - slipped into bed beside her, turning out the light.

Bzzzzzzzz!

Hunter sat staring at the object held in his hands, being driven to the brink by the perpetual incessant pandemonium going on inside his head. He constantly fought the urge to cover his ears with his palms. Looking quizzically at the ancient device, once used for ritual beheadings, deciphering through his thoughts blocked by the cacophony; attempting to forge a plan; hoping to at least come up with an initial, first move.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

Rolling the halberd, the ancient sixteenth century axe-like weapon, in his hands; the shine from the blade sending a glimmer running across his eyes.

Raising the weapon with both hands over his head, the blade nearly touching his back, he heaved it against the wall; where it stuck with a crack!

"Huh," Hunter grunted.

Walking over to it, placing his foot against the wall for leverage, he released his newly acquired toy. Stumbling back from the weight of the axe and the sheer force that was needed to expul it from the wall; having quite a hold.

Catching his balance, he caught a glimpse of something through the other room that interested him. Dragging the axe into the adjacent room, he stood staring over the fireplace. Dropping the handle to the ground, he ascended the hearth and began unlatching and untying what had caught his eye all the way across the great room.

Releasing it from its prison over the mantle he lowered the shield over his arm, now donning the halberd in the other; he looked to be a real warrior. Sparing one more glance out the window towards the mountain before heading out the door; moving ever closer, toward his final battle.

Little Cindy Lou Harrington came into her parents bedroom rubbing her eyes and sobbing.

"Mommy, Daddy..."

"What is it, Cindy?" Mr. Harrington asked.

Cindy, age 5, had been having troubles with nightmares lately. Scared to death almost every other night, by the boogeyman or a monster under her bed. Kids and their imaginations. They can both run wild sometimes and the Harrington's had begun to adjust; expecting none other.

"Yes, sweetie, what now?" Mrs. Harrington pleaded.

"It's..." Cindy sniffled, rubbing under her nose with her tiny fist, clutching her security blanket, "It's a monster. Outside my window. It's h-h-h-horrible!" She began bawling uncontrollably.

"Come on Cindy, you have to grow out of this," Mrs. Harrington said, crossing her arms.

"Alright now, let's get you back to bed. OK, honey."

"Yes, daddy."

Mr. Harrington picked Cindy up, carrying her back to her room. Putting her in bed, tucking her in tightly, he planted a single kiss on her forehead.

"Snug as a bug in a rug."

"Daddy, you're silly."

Big Things Come in Small Packages

"You gunna be okay, now."

"Check outside. I saw the monster out my window."

Mr. Harrington walked to the window - opened it - then peaked his head out, looking in both directions.

"Nothing, sweetie," he walked to the closet, opening it and looking inside for a moment before closing it. Then he walked to her bed, kneeled down and checked under it. "All clear."

"Thank you, daddy."

"I'll leave your door cracked and the hall light on for you."

"Love you, daddy."

"I love you, too."

"Good-night."

"Good-night, sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite."

Leaving the door cracked and the light on as promised, he headed back to bed. When he entered his bedroom his wife was closing her book for the night; marking her spot, and shutting off her lamp.

"D'you take care of it?" Mrs. Harrington asked sleepily.

"You know I did," Mr. Harrington kissed his wife goodnight.

"What was wrong?"

"The usual, monster in the..."

CRASH!

"Ahhhhh! Dadddieeee!"

The Harringtons rushed down the hall to their daughter's bedroom. Reaching it, Mr. Harrington flicked the light back on. The window had been busted in, glass showered and strewn about the room. Cindy was gone from her bed, all that remained were a few warm droplets of blood splattered here and there about her bedspread.

Mr. Harrington dabbed his fingertips into it, feeling its warmth and checking its existence, then staring at them; going into shock. Running to the window, peering out, he thought he saw a shadow running around the corner and could almost hear a faint scream in the distance.

Mrs. Harrington ran down the hall to the phone.

Walking through the doors of the station, Deputy Jenkins - trying to play it cool - headed for the coffee pot; avoiding all eye contact.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

Making himself a cup, he was dreading the conversation that Sheriff Carver was - most certainly - waiting to have with him. When: "*Jenkins!*" came booming from the office behind him.

Freezing for a second, not wanting to turn around, he could already picture the sheriff's face deep in the back of his mind; it was contorted with anger and rage.

"What, *you deaf?*"

This sent the deputy turning around, nervously, almost saluting. "No, sir."

"How'd things go over dat church? You been actin' pretty weird, even for the little strange man that you are. You seem awful shook up."

"It went, alright. Everything seemed normal; tight as a drum."

"Huh. That so."

Just then the phone rang, the sheriff quickly answered and immediately moved the receiver about a foot away from his ear; shrugging at the noise. Even Deputy Jenkins could hear the screaming lady from clear across the room. The deputy was grimacing at the sound.

"Ma'am, you're gunna hafta calm down. Now, get a hold of yourself and try to tell me what the problem is, once again?" Sheriff Carver grabbed a pen and leaned forward, ready to write.

Deputy Jenkins walked over, standing unsteadily, in front of Sheriff Carver's desk waiting to be spoken to; or if necessary, trying to think of something not too stupid to say. He sat down.

"My daughter... My daughter's been taken!" Mrs. Harrington exclaimed with tear-filled gasps, between sobs. "One minute, she was there... the next... she's gone!" Followed by more heavy sobbing, causing the sheriff to remove the phone from his ear, once again.

"Okay, ma'am. You'll hafta calm down. Try'ta give me somethin' I can use, if ya can?"

"My husband... he saw something... something big. She came in crying about a monster... we just sent her back to bed... and now... she's gone!"

Some tumbling noises, as the phone on the other end was being fumbled around, came out of the sheriff's end of the line.

"Is this the sheriff?" A man's voice came on and asked.

"Yes, sir."

"This is Mr. Harrington, our daughter's been taken... by... something *big*. Just send someone over to help us and check things out, *please!* But, more importantly, a small army needs to go out and look for my daughter! We have to try to save her; and *hurry*, for fuck's sake!"

"What's the address?"

Big Things Come in Small Packages

The young ambitious warrior - marches - driven by his father's callings, the only thing hindering him a constant buzzing; drowning out his thoughts.

Brandishing his halberd battle axe, the handle gripped in a hand resting upon his shoulder; the blade just beyond. In his other hand - guarding his chest - nearly covering his entire torso, a solid heavy-duty shield; complete with his family insignia. He wasn't even thinking about, *how long till I get tired of carrying these things?* Just grunting and bucking along, steady and confident; bade by the spirit of his father.

Walking down the side of the road in the darkening night, wearing his favorite tennis shoes - Hunter Stephens - what his friends and family would think of him, if they could see him now?

Prepared for the battle of a lifetime, not knowing what life would throw at him; he pressed on.

Chapter 19: Poor Cindy Lou / Policework

Chapter XIX: Poor Cindy Lou / Policework

The beast strolled in the darkness.

Its jowls held a limp rag doll amidst them. The pressure created by them, the only thing keeping little Cindy Lou alive, postponing her inevitable crossover into the afterlife.

From the waist down she felt nothing. From her torso up - including her mangled, dangling arms - every slight bump or movement the beast made sent a shockwave of pain along the millions of nerve endings, that slowly lay dying; trapped within her crumpled body. Her entire midsection, held inside the mouth of the monster - annihilated - mostly a mixture of blood and saliva, by now.

Held together only by tightly clenched teeth, her torso hung out one side, her tiny legs - protruding lifelessly - out the other. Somewhere along the way she had lost a sock, one bare foot now exposed; growing pale.

A gurgling sound undulated from her chest, making its way to her bloody lips. Just gurgling for a second. But then... one long audible word--

"Whyyyyyyy-hy-hyyy..."

The beast stopped then and seemed almost to glance her in the face, as her last word was dying out, just before she passed into the world beyond. The beast simply answered with one single, muffled laugh.

The monster - not completely heartless - was struck with slight awe at the beauty of this child's life petering out emitted a single bloody tear from each of its accursed, glaring red eyes. Like a switch, possibly the smell of blood triggering it, his eyes snapped back to their normality. Brandishing that hate filled, murderous stare; the kill now fresh on its mind.

In the distance, far off, a whistling grazed its ears. He began moving again, more rapidly now, leaping and bounding as necessary, clearing the obstacles in its path. At times, not often, choosing to go around them.

The whistling growing nearer now, despite the distance the beast was seeming to cover. The closer that it came within ear's shot, the more piercing it grew. Then, off in the distance, out of the corner of its eye the first lights appeared; flashing in the night.

The beast - bewildered - fought the urge to stop and look in that direction; but pressed on, regardless. The sights and sounds frightened it a little; perhaps just the sense of the complete unknown.

The flashing lights filling the night with reds, whites and blues; like some perverse 4th of July party. The whistling now growing to an unbearable squeal so loud, it hurt the beast's sensitive ears.

He fled even faster

Just as the lights grew their brightest and the squeal grew loudest, just forming the endless monotonous annoyance of police sirens, it then passed by and began growing smaller; shrinking into the distance.

The beast took no chances, sparing not a glance back; only a prick of its ears. He hurried on.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

Homeward bound.

The police finally arrived on the scene; Sheriff Carver and Deputy Jenkins leading the small squadron in the deputy's cruiser. Tires squealing along with the sirens, as the three squad cars zipped into the driveway holding as close to the sheriff as possible.

Sheriff Carver - remarkably quick for an overweight, middle-aged man - was out the door and halfway to the front door before the others even had their seatbelts unbuckled. He drew his gun, even though he was quite sure that he wouldn't be needing it; not just yet.

He was knocking on the door as a line was beginning to form behind him. The deputy at the head, breathing down his back, the others seeming so nervous; as if to bump one, with the rest falling like dominoes.

With a hard, cold, glance back they all gave room.

"Eagle Rock Police!"

No answer. He tried the knob. It was unlocked

He cracked the door with, "Eagle Rock Police. You called us. We're coming in!"

As the sheriff entered the house, with a half of a dozen two-wit deputies at his heels, it appeared empty and undisturbed.

"Hello? Mr. and Mrs. Harrington? Sheriff Carver, here!"

There was no answer, but just then they began to hear something from down the hall they couldn't quite make out. As they approached cautiously, it became clear. Weeping.

The lady of the house was weeping, softly.

Before they reached the noise, coming from the back bedroom, the sheriff glanced in the open door, that must of been the child's bedroom; what was left of the once charming room. The mounds of stuffed animals and posters of cartoon characters didn't have to be there to give that away.

The window was broken in, glass strewn about the room, and on the small child's bed sat a man.

"Mr. Harrington?" Sheriff Carver cautioned.

No answer from the man. He continued to just sit and stare, silently, out the window.

"Sir..." But it was no use.

The sheriff noticed the man was sitting amidst shards of broken glass and tiny red droplets, that he would have to assume was the little girl's blood. It was an absolute pitiful sight. Heartwrenching.

Sheriff Carver turned towards his deputies and knodded two of them towards the remaining shell of a man; they knew the routine.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

The sheriff, Deputy Jenkins and the others proceeded down the dark hallway, approaching the gentle sobbing. This door was shut, and strangely enough, no light shown through the cracks and into the hallway. The lights were off.

A knock at the door, "Mrs. Harrington?"

A startled gasp halted the weeping, momentarily. Then it returned, possibly even louder than before.

Sheriff Carver grabbed the knob and swung the door open, softly. In the pitch black they could just make out (their eyes had started to adjust) the master bedroom and slumped on the king-size bed - sitting indian-style - her chin resting on her breastbone, was Mrs. Harrington.

"Oh Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

"Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

"Give us, our Lord, our daily bread. And deliver us not from temptation, but evil..."

He stopped short.

There was a changing in the air, a foulness emurging from the west, it erupted into his nostrils like Vesuvius.

Far off in the distance, aided by the moonlight, he could just make out the rough form which would become Eagle Rock by daybreak; or perhaps mid-morning.

The stench thickened, death creeping to the foreground.

Not so much smelling it, as he was sensing it.

He cringed his nose to it; loathing it.

Perhaps miles in the distance, he thought he saw a shadow flicker. Probably nothing.

His feet aching and head spinning, Hunter marched on ever further towards the mountain. Towards Eagle Rock. The very place where his fathers' once worshipped and the final resting place of his own father. His only company, remembering the words of his father, during the times he was able to hear them; for the buzzing rarely dulled enough.

Two and a half hours had passed by the time the Sheriff's Dept. had completed their vigorous search of the Harrington place, making sure not to venture too far into the dark and away from the house. Having found nothing of much use, other than the sets of enormous footprints - which had to belong to some sort of animal - that the police found outside the bedroom window. Sheriff Carver was trying to wrap things up, so he could get the hell out of there.

First he ordered up an ambulance to come and take care of the Harrington's (whether they wanted it, or not), after all, it is procedure.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

The police left the Harrington's, not wanting to further tempt the fortuitousness of the situation, they wouldn't be searching any longer for the child's murderer. They would have to have an entire army to stop something that size; judging from the size of the prints alone. Every last one of them was scared shitless, but especially Deputy Jenkins.

They didn't even wait around to see if the ambulance arrived.

The beast had picked up the pace, nearing home now. It had felt genuine fear of the noises and lights that it had seen and heard earlier. For it had sensed that they had firepower; and that is one thing that the beast fears.

Leaping and bounding - beginning the gradual incline that would soon turn into the side of Eagle Rock - the body of little Cindy Lou, horribly mangled and now barely holding together at all; smacking here and whacking there (the worst one was when her head just clipped the side of a tree, nearly taking it clean off) as the beast was desperately wanting to return home.

The horrible condition of the carcass didn't matter much to the beast, or otherwise. For prey that small, the beast will be able to consume almost entirely everything; save for a few strands of hair or perhaps an article of clothing. Even that being a stretch.

The beast really turned up the juice, pumping up the mountain, now. Nearing the top, it decelerated to a slow steady climb. Cresting the mountain, the beast crawled up onto the beak and entered his den dropping its prey as it crossed the threshold. He turned around facing the valley and laid down on its haunches in front of his meal, panting profusely.

After looking out the blackened valley for a few minutes, attempting to catch his breath, it lowered its head and began consuming little Cindy Lou.

Chapter 20: When One Door Closes, Another Opens in its Place

Thank you everyone that has followed this book so far, this is the final chapter in the first section. It is with all your guy's help - my fans - that I was able and inspired to finish this conclusion. I thank you deeply for that. Also know, that this book was started way back on Friday, Feb. 13 2009. And this was the first chapter that I've written in this since way back then. Other than my short story, Fall of Winchester Gap, which will be added somewhere in the upcoming next section. Thanks again for all of your support. It is appreciated more than you can know.

-Km2-

Chapter XX: When One Door Closes, Another Opens in its Place

Hunter Stephens marched on through the growing fog. The fog coming forth, spreading through the valleys and over the grassy knolls; but also marching through the fog of his mind. The buzzing always there.

His feet aching, without him paying much mind. His shoes just beginning to wear, covering his feet in blisters. Some beginning to pop, leaving puss to form on his socks, slowly causing his steps to become squishy. He trudged on.

The weight of his shield and halberd pulling him down, just slowly starting to show the first signs of tiredness upon his face. He would never give up, though.

Marching into the night, following the road, eyeing up the vast mountain every so often. Trying to formulate some sort of game plan inside his head while he walked on. But the buzzing made it near impossible.

Traveling the road heading for the mountain, not a single soul seeing him shuffling along on this unstoppable mission; walking him into the next morning. Where the sun rose before his very eyes.

However, he did hear what he thought sounded like an ambulance.

An ambulance buzzes by on the way to the hospital. Inside, the inhabitants completely unaware that less than a quarter of a mile away is the creature responsible for abducting and later eating their daughter. Running in the opposite direction, fleeing from the sirens, heading for the great mountain.

Inside the ambulance Mrs. Harrington is strapped to a gurney being pumped full of drugs; none of which seem to help her.

Mr. Harrington hovers over, not in all that much better shape, attempting to comfort her. Almost all the color has gone from his face.

Mrs. Harrington is inconsolable. She constantly shouts *No!* and *Why?*, usually followed by taking the Lord's name in vein. All the while shaking her head and crying a seemingly endless supply of tears. Mr. Harrington starts to hate her. He then begins to loathe his wife.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

He wishes it would have been her, instead of him having his poor- adorable-perfect-little Cindy ripped from him. Way before he ever could dream. Filling Mr. Harrington with a blind rage. Driving him mad..

I awoke just once in the middle of the night. Having been tossing for hours, it felt like and seemed.

Sore from head to toe from all the night moving, as well as the last few days catching up with me; finally. Or, so I thought.

Rolling over and glancing at Allie's side of the bed, leaving my squinting vision and foggy mind slightly baffled, I noticed her blankets ruffled and her missing from them. Leaning up on my elbow and trying to take a look around, squinting even harder.

My eyes then fixed on the open door to our bathroom; to the soft white light that was pouring out of it and flowing into our room.

Poising an ear towards it attempting to hear something, listening for anything.

Sleepily, my eyes started drooping, now heavy. My head started reeling, filling with pressure, pounding away from unseen and unknown sandbags.

Still listening, my head hit the pillow, never hearing a sound.

The ambulance arrived at the ER, shuffling the Harrington's quickly through the lobby and into the examination room. Mrs. Harrington wailing the entire way.

Mr. Harrington sat incredibly silent. A really unpleasant scowl plastered to his face. His mind filling with hatred. He started to grind his teeth, unknowingly, completely unable to stop.

Just staring and gawking at people passing by, or that happened to stop and ask him questions.

Mostly his gaze never broke from his wife. At times he got lost inside her, sitting with her in this cramped little room. Lost, staring just below her bellowing pie hole - her dick-smackers constantly working - in the soft bit of flesh below her chin. It rising up and down with her every scream and moan; contracting and expanding. He's staring, unblinkingly, at her throat. Dreaming what it would be like to stop her unending, infernal, blabbing; always flapping her gums.

What it would be like to wrap his fingers around...

And squeeze.

Hunter, walking along the road towards Eagle Rock, wished he could lay down and go back to sleep; back to where the buzzing never existed.

His feet working automatically - carrying him on towards the mountain - he had been following the main road for a good bit of time this evening, now. Though, not a single car or person passed by to see or gaze upon him.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

He remained an absolute secret.

A complete mystery. Perhaps never even existing at all.

These thoughts made him turn his head, trying to shake them away.

He had been scared out of these thoughts *the second time* the ambulance went screaming by, obviously heading back towards Eagle Rock Memorial; probably hauling in more nearly dead.

Hunter shuddered at that thought.

Mad he had been startled by the siren, he could now just make out the flashing lights in the distance. He then pointed his long metal weapon towards that direction.

Then spat that way, it landing on the road.

He turned away, leaving the road now, heading on to the next leg of his journey.

The Harringtons were then moved to a more comfortable recovery room, after their routine check-ups, heavily sedated.

With Mrs. Harrington having nearly enough dope to take down a rhino in her system, before she finally calmed down enough to stop screaming. Then, slowly drifted off to dreamland.

She laid there in the hospital bed, breathing spiradically; almost in little gasps.

Perhaps still crying and screaming in her sleep.

Mr. Harrington lay in the bed right next to her's. He went down much more peacefully and with ease. He simply lays there, silent, dreaming good dreams with a smile across his face and his hands interlocked upon his chest; as it rhythmically rises and then falls.

He dreams the dreams of vengeance.

And had they knew who was in the next room and what part that Father Harris may have had in Cindy Lou's disappearance, who knows what may have happened. What different turn of events could have transpired?

But at this point, it didn't matter.

For something was beginning to happen in the next room over.

The beast licks his lips then slowly begins cleaning the blood from his claws and massive paws.

The dribbled remains of Cindy Lou spilled about his feet, along the cave entrance.

Most easily recognizable, and the biggest piece: was a Hello Kitty emblem and chunk of pink fabric. The only thing left after the beast ripped into her chest, through her pajamas.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

The beast chortled - almost laughing - as he licked the last few drops from himself then rose to his feet.

Turning around to enter the cave, but stretching just before, then expelling a huge stream of urine. Almost with the force of an open firehose, puddling and flowing around where he had just finished his meal for the night.

His hunger was just barely abated.

He slunk to the back of the cave, circling once quickly, just before plopping down with a yawn.

The beast laid his giant head on its giant paws.

Closing its red eyes, it slept; digesting.

It was a quiet ride back to the station.

Hardly two words were said as the sheriff sat in the passenger seat in the deputy's cruiser. The deputy never taking his eyes from the road.

Sheriff Carver turned up the radio, not caring what was playing, just hoping to help drown out the silence as well as discourage any ideas of jabberjawing or banter.

He didn't feel like talking. He might never feel like, ever, talking about this.

The deputy turned onto the drive heading up to the station, also happy to be back and free from the burden of talking and questioning.

They all quietly exited their patrol cars, some quietly forming a line heading up the walk to the doors of the station. Others, the lucky ones, made B-lines for their personal cars and trucks; heading home to get some sleep.

Nobody even said a word or waved to their fellow officers as they dispersed. They didn't have to.

The few that headed home attempted to sleep; without having much luck, I'm afraid.

Hunter rambled on through the dark, tripping once on a rotting log, making his way much slower since leaving the comfort of the road. Trudging through the mud - through ditches and gulleys - then up and over the hillsides and back down embankments.

Finally bringing him back to almost clear - nearly level - land; so tired nearly falling over. Many times the long-handled halberd, being used as a walking stick or a crutch, the only thing keeping Hunter afoot.

He stumbled on, moving forward like a machine. Never thinking about stopping, despite his feet feeling like they were about to fall off.

Now reaching the clearing, looking onward as the first hints of the darkness slowly starts to evaporate, drawing towards daybreak. Hunter could now make out in the distance, the giant precipice he was slowly

Big Things Come in Small Packages

nearing. It growing, bigger, and filling his field of vision as he closed in.

Hunter Stephens walked on to Eagle Rock. Where the first small glints and gleams were just beginning to peek their tiny golden fingers, the first rays creeping around the base of the great bird-shaped alp; sunrise.

I awoke the next morning, to sunlight just starting to poke its way through my bedroom window.

Shielding my eyes from it as I sat up in bed. Almost too quickly, as the blood rushed to my head, making me a little dizzy. I turned to look for Allie.

She lay there in bed, cute and comfortable looking, snoring ever so softly. I saw - then - looking across her, the alarm clock read 6:19. Getting dressed quickly and quietly, as I rushed out the door.

I stopped short and turned to check on the kids before running off, like I almost was going to.

Creaking open their door to find them - like their mother - snoring away. I sighed in relief and wiped sweat from my damp forehead as I was turning around.

Heading down the hallway, first stopping to quickly lace up my boots, before entering the garage.

Locating Fuzzy Wuzzy and his toolbox; his dirty, makeshift, home. Pondering over the whole damn situation. Looking deep into the little creature's eyes that weren't there; absent; eyeless.

As he bounced and meeped at me, seeming to be happy--

"Talk to me, little buddy," I said as he bounced away.

Scooping him up into the box, "I got somewheres I gotta be."

Deputy Jenkins drove home after his shift was over, just as day was beginning to break. It looked as if it was going to be a tad beautiful day. You couldn't ask for anything more.

Except he was worried to death.

Worried about the sheriff, he was acting really quiet and strange since returning from the Harrington place. Everyone was really.

He worried about the Harringtons, too, they seemed even more messed up; and he was really worried about the little girl. He, for sure, thought she had to be toast. Jenkins worried about his job and about the safety of this entire valley and every single person in it. Nobody was safe.

Worrying about the department and worrying about that Stephens boy; and his missing father. But mostly he was just uneasy about himself. In particular that maybe he should have done his job and had thoroughly checked the church better earlier, when he could've and should've.

That has been - and always will continue to be - tearing him up and eating him alive, inside.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

For, it probably is already way too late.

Arriving at Timothy Daniels' house then shortly after, with Fuzzy sidekick at my heels, staring with unbelievable shock at what was found.

Parking in the barren driveway - both cars gone - which was highly unusual; somebody was always here.

Flabbergasted as I approached the house by way of the flagstone path - me and Timmy had built, years ago - leading up to the front porch. The set of steps, a wedding gift I did for him and his wife, a fancy brick monstrosity comparing it to the falling down wooden shamble he had called steps before.

Walking up them, a feeling escalated through my mind ascending the last few steps leading out to the decking. The feeling was an awkward one. Almost a feeling of premonition; or of impending doom. Perhaps even mixed with a little *deja vu*.

Reaching the front door, trying the knob but it didn't work; refused to turn. I knocked; no answer.

Knocking again, yelling: "Hello! Timmy! Anybody..."

As I cupped my hands looking into the dirty window, best I could tell the place appeared deserted; basically all cleared out. Gone.

I hurried back down the walk and jumped into my Jeep, taking off in a panicked flurry.

Father Jude Harris lays in his hospital bed in Eagle Rock Memorial Hospital, attempting to recover from his near-mortal wounds; now sleeping soundly.

The Harringtons' also were sleeping away in the next room, but you couldn't say that their sleep was soundly. But it was sleep; just the same.

Jude Harris laid peacefully, breathing rhythmically - perfect chest rise and fall - his arms at his sides. Laying on his back, his EKG beeping away in that slow steady pace of a heart-beating pulse. Continuously beeping away.

Suddenly, his eyes start to twitch.

Quickly turning to fluttering, like his eyes are attempting to take flight.

Still his monitor steadily beeps - announcing his healthy beating heart - as his body sits in this, his perfectly white, bleach-scented-third-floor room; the room bright and silent. Other than the noises coming from the unconscious Jude Harris.

As his eyes seemed to flutter somehow even faster, and his monitor beeps away, he lets loose the most haneous of flatulence known to man.

That's when something changes, when the beeping starts...

Big Things Come in Small Packages

I was driving home, the strange abandonment at Timmy's house still weighing heavily on my mind.

Uncomprehending, unable to wrap my brain around it, still unable to fathom the things that have happened since I've met the little furry one.

At this same exact time, Buckley Littlin was just beginning to stir - breaking out of his drunken, dreamless, sleeplike daze - finishing off last night's beer that was still in his hand. Then searching for more.

Who's Buckley Littlin? I thought, shaking my head.

Almost swerving off the road, trying to refocus - shoving all these obscure, crazy thoughts away.

Turning onto the road that leads to my drive, then down my long access road parking next to the garage. Leaving Fuzzy, inside I went thinking of what to say about Timmy. Or trying to.

Allie was packing school lunches and getting ready to shove the kids out the door just as I was waltzing in through it, rather dumbfounded.

I was just about to open my mouth to tell her, when...

She looked straight at me and said, "The hospital called and said you need to get over there, right away. What's this about?"

"Shit! I'll have to explain later. I'll call you when I get there. Sorry, babe."

Sheriff Simon Carver sits behind his desk in the big office, down at the end of the hall of the county precinct. Inside Eagle Rock Valley Sheriff's Department.

He sits there thinking his life over, contemplating, nervously tapping something against his desk.

Thinking about this whole situation he and all his guys have gotten into. Wondering what choices he has - now - to consider and what decisions he would have to make. Praying everything will be all right, no matter what answers he lands on.

Tapping away. Steel on mahogany.

Wondering why Jenkins had been acting so weird, then with this business happening at the Harringtons' directly after. He hoped things will be alright, regardless of the decisions he makes. He prayed for his everlasting soul. He felt he was starting to lose it. Lose grip.

Tap, tap, tap.

He envisioned his wife; and children; and grand babbies; and felt sorry for them. He hoped they'd be okay. Hoped they would never have to face anything so horrendous. Nothing but love.

Sheriff Simon Carver wished them well as his shaking hand raised up to his face, just as his tongue tasted cold steel...

Big Things Come in Small Packages

Flying to the hospital, with Fuzzy by my side, worrying the entire way. Worrying about what to tell Allie; both about this morning and about this mysterious trip to the hospital. Both would need explaining.

Also worrying about the poor priest.

Fuzzy Wuzzy hopping away in the passenger seat, almost seeming angry or maybe just really excited. He was chirping and beeping, sort-of songlike, almost the entire way.

I reached my hand out towards him, cautiously, but also mindful of watching the road. I patted him quickly on the head a couple of times before instantly retracting my hand back to its original steering-wheel, position.

It seemed to calm him down slightly - or he didn't seem to mind it - anyway.

I pressed the pedal to the metal and floored it the rest of the way to the hospital. Where my worst fears were hidden.

There has to be something wrong with the priest, I think as I slam my Jeep into park in the lot. Hopping out to leave Fuzzy waiting patiently behind.

Rushing over to the doors then practically falling through them, I had to catch myself from going down.

Out of breath, I said, "I got a message... to come quickly..."

"Your name, sir?"

Just then, too, Allie sits down - finally - after getting up early to find her husband already gone; magically vanished. Upsetting her, as he had been more often - as of lately - but her pushing it down and continuing on with her day.

She hustled some lunches and schoolbags and bustled with some school-clothes; and then wrestled the kids into them. Wrangling them out of the door and onto the magic shuttle to Educationland. Allie was finally relaxing with her feet up; desperately needing to be rubbed. Along with something else; another itch she had.

Her husband has been acting strange lately.

Though she's always loved him - and has been the only one she has ever loved - she can't help but wonder. And she wonders what this mess with the hospital could be, as well.

She wishes her husband would pay attention to her more. Wishes he would even just pay more attention to her body. Something. She needed more. She needed love; and to be loved. And needed more than he apparently wanted to, or was able to, give.

Allie grabbed her purse.

Digging through it, she found Miles' card - with her thumb ready on the keypad - already ready to dial.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

After giving the nurses my name and answering their questions, I was finally escorted to Father Harris' room. Sweating profusely the entire walk down the, seemingly, unendless halls. Completely nervous for my friend and what I may find hiding behind that huge, unfriendly and unwelcoming, hospital door.

Once I reached it I could only stare at it, afraid to enter. Until the nurse asked me:

"Are you okay, sir?"

"Yes, ma'am. Just a little scared, is all," trying to shake the chill that was slowly working its way down the back of my spine; one vertebrae at a time.

"You'll be fine, you're strong. Need me to come in with you for support?" She asked uninterestedly.

"I think I can manage."

"Let me know if you need anything." Then she was gone.

Pushing through the door and entering the room occupied by Father Jude Harris. He sat in the far corner, all by himself, all quiet and all alone. He looked so peaceful, finally at rest, finally free from pain. His EKG was disconnected; no longer in need.

I sat and cried, holding his hand, saying good-bye to my new found friend.

There sits a man in a hotel room, far away from Eagle Rock Valley and all the horrors that are slowly - surely - plaguing it. Smiling while holding some things in his hands, just starting to laugh at himself. Proud of what he has done.

Scared nearly to death not so long ago, as the earth split before him - opening up - and then nearly knocking him over the side swallowing him to his death. Somehow, he had managed to hang on.

Regaining his balance, finishing his task; leaving him able to laugh about it now. From the safety of his hotel room, many miles away from the cursed town of Winchester Gap and the - now condemned - entire valley of Eagle Rock.

His smile widened even deeper - exposing his evil tongue licking his cracked, bleeding lips - fueling his foul-hearted- unstoppable chuckling. The chuckling constant, but not loud enough to alert the attention of any of the hotel staff or other guests.

The laughing belonging to none other than North Halberstrom, the missing caretaker of The Church of Winchester Gap, who fled the valley soon as he possibly could. Just as soon as his business there was finished.

Other than that one little slip-up - almost resulting in him falling into the newly birthed gorge, to his death - it had almost been flawlessly executed.

He could only imagine the hell that was now just being unleashed throughout the entire valley. Death being strewn about like beads at Mardi Gras, claiming the lives of all the residents, randomly but continuously. Most of whom who had mocked - and had laughed, at - him.

Big Things Come in Small Packages

North had showed them. Now they would get their's.

And he would have his revenge.

He could envision them all getting their just desserts. What they had coming to them. The entire lot of them bowing down - begging him - begging for their lives; begging for forgiveness.

The thought widening his smile, even more; huffing. It growing and growning - and seeming to glow - like the Cheschire Cat's.

The smile brought him back to the task now at hand. Literally. He held one object limply in his hand. The other one filled with a pointy metal death sentence.

At that very moment, North Halberstrom stabbed the knife into the doll grasped in his other hand; laughing uncontrollably and maniacally, now.

Author's Note: Well, everybody, that's it. You have completed the first section of my book, Big Things Come in Small Packages. I hope you all have enjoyed it so far - and would love to hear your thoughts and opinions on it - even if you have or haven't. I must thank all my loyal fans again, who have read this through and have made this all possible for me. You all really are what helps my writing embers burn the brightest, blazing on and on, for all of eternity. -Km2-

Please stick around and come back, hopefully the wait won't be too long, for the long-awaited and anticipated second installment of three, of 'Big Things'. It will be titled:

The Real Nightmare Begins

I hope everyone looks forward to reading it, as much as I am to writing it. Though I must confess, I am also slightly nervous. This first section was a big project - a lot of work - and the second promises absolutely nothing less. I'm sure there will never be a dull moment for KW and Fuzzy in the new section, as well. I do hope you come along and join us. Thanks again, from the bottom of my heart.

K. W. Mullen

II

Big Things Come in Small Packages

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