

My House

Brian couldn't believe his eyes. His new house was a wreck. Not the usual mess of moving, someone had trashed the place. He walked in and looked over the shredded paper, dumped boxes, and broken glass. He sadly shook his head and walked back out to his car. He searched through boxes until he found his cell phone.

"Hello. Yes, I would like to report a break in. Um, I'm just moving in and I stayed at a motel last night. When I got here this morning, the place was a disaster." Brian walked back into the house as he talked. He walked through the house shoving boxes with his foot describing the damage. "No. It doesn't look like anything is missing. It looks like someone just dumped everything."

Brian finished giving his information to the police dispatcher as he walked up the stairs carefully stepping around the clothes strewn down the steps. He said thank you and good-bye as he reached the top landing. Brian put the phone in his pocket while he passed more overturned boxes. As he stopped and looked back at the stairs, he remembered unlocking the door this morning. In spite of the mess, this didn't look like he had been robbed.

Brian stopped when he saw the attic stairs hung half down. He wiped his mouth nervously and stood very still trying to hear anything. All he could hear was the pounding of his heart. Quietly, he crept over to the stairs

and listened again. Again, he heard nothing. He reached up, gripped the dusty steps, and pulled. The loud groan of rusty springs made him jump in spite of himself. Brian exhaled loudly and rubbed the back of his neck to relieve the sudden tension.

Abruptly making up his mind, Brian began to climb the creaking steps up into the darkness of the attic. Gingerly, he raised his head above the floor level and looked around. The first thing he noticed was the heat. The attic was oppressive with heat and humidity. As his eyes adjusted to the gloom, he could see the locked trunks sat untouched. The boxes of Christmas decorations, however, had been spread out all over the place. The bulbs had been broken and all of the cords tangled into a mess. The little bits of broken glass glinted in the low light. The feeling of being watched began to creep down Brian's neck. He looked behind him. He couldn't see anyone. He looked up at the roof. There was no one there.

The feeling of being watched grew. A nervous sweat broke out on his forehead adding to the heat and humidity. He forced himself to take one more step up the ladder. The sweat beaded up on his forehead rolled down his face.

"Hello. Anyone up here?" Brian's voice sounded dry and weak. There was no answer. Nothing moved. The hair on the back of his neck began to stand. If there was someone up in the attic in that heat, Brian decided to leave them there. As Brian climbed down the steps, he didn't feel welcome in his new home. He went downstairs and then outside to wait for the police. He needed to see sunshine. The gloom of the attic hung in his mind.

He felt relieved to see the police car coming down the street. The massive oaks that lined the way swayed gently in the warm morning air. Brian stood up as the car came to

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a stop. A large well-groomed man in a sharp, blue uniform got out with a metal clipboard.

"Sir, did you report a break in?" He asked in a friendly business-like tone.

"Ah, yes I did." Brian answered as he walked towards the door. "I'm just moving in, so I stayed at a motel last night. When I unlocked the door this morning, this is what I found." Brian opened the door and stepped back to let the officer enter first. The officer walked around for a moment then asked, "Do you have an attic?"

"Yes, just up the stairs." Brian motioned to the stairs as he nodded. "Careful, there are clothes all over them."

"Have you noticed anything missing?" The officer asked over his shoulder as he walked up the stairs.

"No, the place is just a big mess as far as I can tell."

"Were there any windows broken or damage to any of the doors?" He asked from the top landing.

"Not that I could tell." Brian answered from the stairs. He followed the officer to the attic stairs. "They were half down when I got here."

The officer seemed to be looking for something on the steps. Brian had a guilty feeling he shouldn't have touched the attic stairs. The officer turned to Brian and smiled.

"Sir, you're not from Memphis are you?"

"No, I was just transferred here from Kansas with the hub. Why?" Brian was very curious now.

"Well, sir, I think I know who your prowler was. You have raccoons living in your house." He nodded as he talked.

"Raccoons? Are you serious?" Brian looked around at the mess in disbelief.

"Look, here, do you see this print?" He asked pointing to a spot in the dust on the attic steps. Brian leaned in to

look at the small handprint with sharp fingernails. Brian nodded yes. "Was this house empty for a while before you bought it?"

"Yes it was, about a year and a half." Brian answered still looking at the print. "You mean raccoons could do all this in a night?"

"Yes sir and then some." The officer turned to face Brian. "This is Midtown, and the animal control people tell us that there may be more raccoons here than there are people."

"Well, what do I do to get rid of them? I can't have them tearing up my house every night." Brian looked around at the damage and truly began to worry.

"You can call an exterminator or you can get them out yourself. Most folks put a bright light on in the attic. They don't like light. I put a radio on a loud station and mothballs in my attic when one moved in a couple of years ago at my house. He left the next day. I just patched up the hole he made to get in." The officer closed his clipboard and put the pen back into his pocket as he talked. Brian listened intently to the instructions.

"That will work?" Brian asked hopefully.

"It should. If not, you can always call an exterminator." The officer walked towards the stairs. "Just look around the edge of your roof for any holes or loose boards. After they move on, just close it up so they can't get back in."

Brian followed the officer down the stairs and out the front door. "Thanks for coming by. I guess I need to go to the store today." Brian extended his hand. The officer shook it firmly.

"If you have any more trouble just give me a call at the station." He handed his card to Brian. "Just ask for Officer Dixon. You have a good day."

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"Yeah, thanks," said Brian as he watched Officer Dixon get in his car and begin to talk on the radio. Brian turned and went back inside. It was going to be a long day.

Brian finally took a break about lunchtime. He had cleared away most of the mess downstairs. The rest, he shoved back into the boxes. He was hungry and still a little cross. The second moving truck hadn't shown up yet and it had the rest of his furniture including his bed. Brian looked out the window at the street, again. "I know you guys will show up as soon as I leave."

Brian locked the door behind himself and pulled on it just to make sure it was secure. He walked around the house looking at the roof edge. He saw a couple of places that could be loose. He sighed and shook his head. He saw a large tree branch extending over the edge of the roof. "So, that's how you guys come and go. Well, I'm going to fix that." He said out loud to the raccoons that were supposed to be there.

The movers, of course, sat in front of the house when he got back from the hardware store and a drive through. He unlocked the door to the house for them. Brian then sat down on the hood of his car to eat his sandwich and watched as they moved in his bookshelves, more boxes, and finally his bed. The moving team worked quickly. Within thirty minutes the rest of Brian's possessions had been placed in the house. Brian sat on the front steps for a few extra minutes of sunshine before he went back inside.

Hot and tired, Brian realized that the shadows had grown long outside. He looked around downstairs. Most of the kitchen had been put away and the furniture was where he wanted it. He'd even put most of the books on the shelves. Brian looked at the mound of boxes and packing in the front room. He would throw all that out

tomorrow. He looked at the bag from the hardware store and decided it was time. He picked up the bag slowly walked up the stairs. He had found his portable radio earlier and put it at the top of the landing. He took the extension cord out of the bag and plugged it in. He unwound it as he climbed up the attic stairs. The mess from last night still lay on the floor. He would clean this mess up after they were gone. He set the radio down to one side and the bag to the other. Sweat was already starting from the heat. It felt like a sauna in the attic. Brian stood up and unscrewed the old bulb from the socket. He put in a 150-watt spot light. The attic lit up brightly.

"This ought to brighten things up for you guys." He said firmly. Next, he plugged in the radio, set it to an alternative rock station, and turned up the volume. As the sound blared out into the attic, he pulled two bags of mothballs out and opened them. He picked up a loose box top and poured them into it. The smell hit him. "Whew. I think I'm going to leave. Good night wherever you things are."

Brian looked around and didn't see anything moving. The feeling of being watched was making the hair on the back of his neck stand for the second time today. He shrugged his shoulders and went back down the steps with the bag. He closed the steps then pulled a screwdriver and a latch kit out of the bag. With a grim smirk on his face, he installed the latch on the bottom of the steps and locked it. Pleased with the results, Brian turned and went downstairs.

One quick check around the first floor and Brian decided it was time for a shower and dinner at the motel. He locked the door and pulled on it, just to be sure. He took a few steps away from the house and looked back. He could hear the radio softly out there. On an impulse, he

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walked around to the side where he seen the loose boards. As he looked up, he thought he saw something move. It was just a brief flash of white. As he stared, a chill ran down his back and felt as if he were being scrutinized. Two reddish pink spots like eyes caught his attention. They glared malevolently at him from a space between two boards for a moment and then they were gone. All of the hair on the back of Brian's neck stood up again. He shivered involuntarily. Brian decided it was getting late so he turned and walked away quickly.

In the morning, as he pulled up to the house, he saw three raccoons disappearing down the storm drain in front of his house. They were huge. He remembered them as small fuzzy animals with bushy tails and dark masks on their faces. These things were the size of mid-sized dogs. Brian got out of his car and walked over to the drain. As he looked in, he shouted after them, "And stay out you hairy little freeloaders. This house is mine now. Go tear up somebody else's place."

He stood up and walked rapidly to the door. He knew something was wrong as he touched the doorknob. That same cold chill ran down his back. He shivered as he unlocked the door.

"Oh my God!" He gasped as he looked around. Everything had been thrown over. The tables, the chairs, the bookcases, everything was on the floor.

"You little bastards! You little hairy bastards!" He repeated with more anger as he looked around. A noise at the top of the stairs made him inhale deeply. Brian stormed to the foot of the stairs, kicking a path as he went. He grabbed the railing and stopped. A wave of hot, moist air hit him. At the top of the stairs, he saw those eyes again, reddish pink and glowing with hatred. Brian felt the sweat

start to roll. His eyes locked with the glowing points of maliciousness. He couldn't blink, he wasn't sure he could move. The glowing points went out and Brian heard something large walking off into the upstairs of the house. Brian looked down at his bare hands as they shook and took a step backwards.

Almost in a panic, Brian feverishly looked through his car for a phone book. He ripped it open to exterminators. An ad about animal and pest control caught his eye. The woman on the other end of the phone agreed he had a raccoon problem. She said she had someone in the area and they would be by shortly. Brian decided to wait in the car.

About an hour passed before Brian saw a pickup truck with a pest control logo on it pull along side. Brian got out of his car as the pickup pulled into the driveway.

"I understand you got a raccoon problem. Hi, my name's Dale." The young man said as he got out of the truck.

"Ah, you might say that. They keep trashing the place at night. Nice to meet you, I'm Brian." Brian answered as they shook hands.

"Well, let me take a look and see what we got here." Dale tested a large flashlight and picked up a large wire live trap out of the back of the truck. "Let me guess, they're in your attic."

"Yes, they are." Brian nodded in agreement. "Just up the stairs and then there is a set of attic stairs."

Brian led the way to the door and opened it for Dale. They walked in and surveyed the mess. "This is the second time in a row that this has happened." Brian said as he picked up a chair and set it upright.

"Yes, sir, they will sure do a job on a place." Dale agreed then continued, "I'm going to set the trap upstairs."

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"You go right ahead." Brian watched Dale as he took the steps. He couldn't get those eyes out of his mind. He could hear Dale walking around upstairs. Brian checked to make sure the air conditioner was on while he waited. He heard Dale coming back down the stairs. The man looked pale and sweaty.

Dale nervously said, "I set the trap upstairs. Just give us a call if you... um... we catch anything. Here's my card with the number on it." Dale seemed in a hurry to get outside. "I have a few more stops in this area tomorrow. I'll check back with you tomorrow afternoon if I don't hear from you sooner."

Brian had to follow him outside to say, "Okay." Dale already had the truck started and was backing out. He waved as he pulled away. Brian shook his head and walked back inside.

Brian stopped in the doorway as he heard the sound of an object being dragged across the wooden floor upstairs. Brian thought his heart would stop as something came crashing down the stairs. The animal trap rolled to a stop at the landing. Brian scratched his head nervously. He walked over the chair, sat down, and stared at the trap. What in hell was that thing upstairs?

The longer he sat there, the madder he got. This was too much. No dumb animal was going to run him out of his new house. He remembered passing a library on Poplar Avenue on his way to the house. He would start there. He needed more than his bare hands to evict this thing.

The moment he walked out into the sunshine he felt better. The short drive helped him to make up his mind. That animal had to go today. Walking through the library, Brian found the helpdesk in the center of the first floor.

"Ah, excuse me," ventured Brian.

"Yes, what can I do for you?" An attractive middle-aged woman turned to face him.

"Well, this may be a little strange, but I need some advice on how to get a raccoon out of my house. I have already done the light, radio, and mothball thing." Brian explained. He looked at her with hopeful eyes.

"Um, let me see if I can find someone that can help you with that." She answered looking around the room.

The young man standing at the end of the counter leaned over and said, "I might be able to help you."

"I hope so. Those things are about to tear my house apart." Brian answered.

"I have to get them out of my granny's attic every year. Every so often, you get a tough one that won't go on his own." He explained. "They're the ones you got to persuade to move on."

Brian liked the way the man said persuade. After the beating his house had taken the last two days, he was ready to persuade something the hard way.

I have a pair of welder's elk hide gloves. The long ones." The young man was pointing to his bicep as he talked. "My granny doesn't want me to hurt them so I reach down the wall, grab them, and stick them in a carry box. Once I have them all, I take them outside and turn them loose. Then, I patch up the hole."

"A carry box? What's that? Something like you put your dog in?" Brian asked.

"Yeah, you can get one at any of the big pet stores around here. There's one on Madison not far from here." The young man finished by saying, "Be careful, they can bite pretty good. Just get a good grip and don't let him spin around on you."

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"Thank you. I saw those gloves at the hardware store yesterday. That helps a lot." Brian shook his hand then he asked, "Can these things have pink or red eyes?"

The woman behind the counter, who had been listening, said, "Yes, sir, they can. We have a small population of albinos here in Midtown. They are white with pink eyes."

The young man nodded in agreement then said, "And they are real mean. Good luck."

"Thank you, both." Brian said as he got ready to leave. "You've both been very helpful." Brian began to like the soft southern accent and friendly atmosphere of this town.

On the way to the door, a young woman with long, dark stringy hair walked up to him. "There's something more you should know."

Brian stopped and looked at her. "Yes."

"The Choctaw have legends about spirits in animal form that can take over man's places. Only the very brave can hope to win over one of them. Here take this. It may help you." She handed him a crystal of some kind on a leather thong. She turned and walked away into the book stacks.

"Thanks." Brian said tentatively. "I think." He muttered to himself as he put the crystal in his pocket and walked to the door. There was obviously more to this town than met the eye.

The afternoon sun shone in the windows as Brian grimly stood in his living room. A couple of new bags had been thrown on the top of the mess from last night. He began checking himself to make sure he was ready. He retied his athletic shoes and pulled up his socks. Over his blue jeans now resided white kneepads. He adjusted the matching elbow pads before putting on an old leather jacket. Next, he put on a catcher's mask and pulled hard on

the thin straps. He picked up the long leather gloves and broke the plastic tie that held them together. He pulled them on with a determined look on his face. Brian took a deep breath as he looked at the stairs. He picked up the animal carrier in one hand and a baseball bat in the other. He just felt better carrying the bat.

Brian listened intently at the foot of the stairs. He couldn't hear anything. Slowly, he stepped over the useless trap and started up the stairs. Even though he had not seen the malevolent red eyes yet, a line of sweat started down his face. His heart pounded with each step. He reached the landing and peered around. The upstairs had sustained even more damage than the last time he had ventured up here.

"Damn." Brian said softly as he surveyed the damage. As he shook his head from side to side, Brian began to feel the cold sensation of being watched. The hair on the back of his neck stood up again. He shivered in spite of the warmth of the coat and the sultry air. Almost without thought, he set down the carrier and leaned the bat against it. With a gloved hand, he reached into his pocket and pulled out the crystal the strange young woman had given him. He slipped the leather thong over his head and dropped the crystal inside his shirt, better safe than sorry. Right now, he felt like he could use all the help he could get.

He jumped hard as a Christmas bulb hit the hardwood floor and exploded. "All right, enough is enough, you hairball." Brian growled as he tried to calm himself. He gripped the bat hard and picked up the carrier. Something moved in the attic. Brian stopped. The radio wasn't blasting. He could hear it playing, but it wasn't on the station he had left it on and the volume had been turned

down. Brian started to lose his nerve. He could call the exterminator again and let them deal with this. He stood there for a moment longer as he listened to that thing romp back and forth in the attic. It seemed to be mocking him, daring him to come up.

Brian gritted his teeth together and gripped the bat hard. He grew angrier now. Another bulb crashed to the ground. "That's it!" Brian shouted. He strode over to the attic steps that hung down in spite of the latch he had installed yesterday. Brian threw the carrier up into the attic and slammed the bat into the springs on the steps. The ring of metal springs was tremendous. Brian heard it jump and cry out in surprise. Brian smiled in revenge at the sound. He quickly started up the stairs. Just as his head cleared the floor, he was pelted with mothballs. The mask deflected most of the pieces, but they still hurt and stunk. Brian leapt up the last couple of steps and turned in the attic. He looked for the hairy little beast. He held the bat in front of him like a samurai sword. His heart pounded fiercely and sweat rolled down both sides of his face. The heat grew even more oppressive.

A sound; Brian spun around and batted a wad of tangled cords away that had been thrown. Brian breathed heavily now.

"YAH!!!" Brian shouted. "Go on, get outta here!"

Brian saw a flash of movement and heard his own heart skip a beat. He stepped forward, careful to avoid the attic steps. His knees felt shaky, but his eyes blazed. There in the far corner, the glowing eyes appeared. Brian swallowed hard. "It's just an albino, they got pink eyes." He said aloud to himself. Brian lunged forward and yelled, "Yah!" again. The eyes blazed out in a dark red light and a box flew into the air at Brian.

"AH HELL!" He shouted as he punched the box to the floor. It was too late. He saw the animal leaping for his face. Brian fell back throwing his arms up, swinging wildly with the bat. It slammed in to his chest. Brian crashed to the floor with the impact. All he could see were the flaming eyes and flashing white teeth. Brian tried to roll, but it held him down. The long canine teeth locked onto the facemask. A hellish growling filled his ears. He dropped the bat and grabbed with both hands for its throat. He could feel the claws through the jacket. He got a grip on it and started to squeeze. He felt the hot, fetid breath of the beast on his face as it snarled. Its feet and claws were everywhere. He became aware of one sliding down the side of his neck.

Brian recoiled from the sudden shock wave that hit the beast. The creature was thrown off Brian out into the middle of the attic. It lay there stunned. Brian got to his feet and with a gloved hand fished the crystal out of his shirt. It must have touched the talisman and been whammied by it. Brian saw it get to its feet, shaking its head.

He picked up his bat as he looked the creature over. It was easily twice the size of the raccoons he saw this morning. It had thick white fur and blazing red eyes. Brian could feel the malevolent intelligence of its gaze, but he refused to be intimidated. The beast growled low in its throat.

"You didn't like that did you?" Brian asked feeling braver. "You didn't like that at all." It stood up on its hind legs like a human and showed its wicked teeth as if in answer. "So, you're one of those spirit things. It doesn't matter." Brian shook his head for emphasis. "You're leaving. This is my house now."

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It lunged for his legs, but Brian got the bat there in time. They circled each other slowly, both staying just out of range. Brian stared hard into its eyes as they moved. It glared back. Brian could feel it try to intimidate him. It needed to make him afraid. It lunged suddenly to the right and Brian swung at it. It leapt into the air and landed on the bat. The impact and the weight pulled the wooden weapon out of his hands. It didn't give Brian time to recover. The beast leapt into his face. Brian reeled back under the attack. He grabbed its back and pulled with all his might. Brian screamed as loudly as it snarled. As it pulled away from his head, they locked eyes again.

"Bite this," Brian said coldly as he reversed and pulled the beast to his chest. The massive shockwave knocked him down. He fell back over the trunks. He struggled to his feet as fast as he could. The white beast just stood there, dazed. He ran forward and kicked it as hard as he could foot ball style. It bounced off the ceiling and crashed to the floor. The creature made an almost human moan. Brian grabbed it by the hind legs and began spinning.

"I told you this is my house and I want you out, NOW!" Brian let go and flung it through the gable. The thin wood shattered. There was a thunderclap, then quiet. Brian staggered over and looked out the hole. There was nothing, but pieces of his gable on the ground. Brian walked back over to the trunk and sat down heavily. The radio still played softly. Brian slumped back and stated triumphantly, "It's my house now."

Commentary:

More or less, this is the story that that really gave me my start in writing, among other pursuits. This is actually a fictionalized account of a real event. I somehow or another managed to get myself talked into helping to evict a rather malicious raccoon from a friend's attic. The hairy beast turned out to be an albino. Read albino as a savage, throat ripping, ill tempered, gravity defying, cute ball of white fur and teeth. I am convinced that if raccoons ever figure out credit cards, the human race may be in for a bad time.

If you had been there that fateful Saturday afternoon, you would read the story and ask me where is the fiction? It was quite the afternoon's adventure, but in the end, the furious fur ball wound up in the animal carrier. As a side note, the wildlife rehab center that took in the wayward beast named it "The Exorcist".