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SMALL TOWN MURDER

Luke Stasi

It was a hot night; that sticky, humid, heavy heat. The kind where you break into a sweat as soon as you leave the comforts of air conditioning. The heat where your clothes stick to your body and your hair plasters damply to your head. I was in sixth grade so my only way of transportation was to walk where I needed to go. Consequently, I was forced to deal with the humidity. The physical irritation had already made me uncomfortable, and the sight of the factory in the distance made me even more uneasy. I could see the building silhouetted by the setting sun, outlined by a veil of radiating red flames. As I drew nearer I wished I had taken a different route, but this path was the quickest way to get across town. Every time I passed the factory I felt uneasy. Even though I would never admit it, I was afraid of the factory. The general rumors were that it was haunted, a meeting place for cults, and in general filled to the brim with lurking evil. I was always nervous when I was around the factory. The combination of seeing it set ablaze by the sun into a flaming castle from hell and my physical unease from the humidity made me quite anxious to get beyond this lurking shadow of fear.

I sped up my stride as I overcame the factory, restlessly glancing back over my shoulder. I felt it looming over me, evaluating my every move as I passed. I sped up again. I could hear the evils that resided within the factory coming to life, awakening from their evil slumber to come after me. I could hear them following me, hiding in the shadows. I knew they were peering through the shattered holes in the windows left by rock-throwing delinquents, waiting for their chance to grab me. I sped up to a jog, causing beads of sweat to form on my brow. One of the droplets rolled down my forehead and stung my eye. I slowed down to wipe the discomfort away and heard leaves rustling behind me. With that I bolted like a hunted animal, full force, sprinting. I made it across the street and slowed down to look behind me. Nothing there, just an empty pathway next to an old, abandoned building.

“Pansy,” I thought to myself, “That was just the wind.” I wanted to think it was just the wind, but I wasn’t totally sure. I pushed the idea to the back of my mind, and continued on my way.

Shortly after that I arrived at my friend Marty’s house. The walk usually took me around twenty minutes. He lived on the other side of our village, but the village was small so I didn’t mind the walk. I strolled up the cracked blacktop driveway to his front porch.

Every time I went to Marty’s the place seemed to look more like a dump. His house was shaped like a barn, which by itself made an unusual sight. The aged, white paint was peeling and chipping off the entire surface. The paint was
so old and fractured that it looked like the skin of an old man, wrinkled and loose, cracks increasing around all the windows and frames like crows feet from ninety-five years of smiling and laughing. The bushes in the front were overgrown and out of control, resembling a scraggily, mutt dog that needed a trim and a bath. I let myself into the decaying suburban farmhouse.

Marty was a friend of mine who was a year older than me, in seventh grade. I walked into the living room where he was sitting on the couch watching television. He was busy devouring a bag of chips, stuffing handfuls into his mouth. He chomped the chips noisily, disregarding the crumbs spilling down his chest and all over the already dirty and stained couch. Marty needed to lay off that junk food. He was a fat kid. Fat face, fat ears, fat everything. He was too lazy to go get a haircut, and his mother never made him get one. His hair was so long it was falling down below his ears and always hung over his eyes. He was wearing the same pants he always wore, the ripped up, five times too large jeans, with holes in both knees and frayed bottoms. Fused to his feet were his worn out, decrepit loafers. He had been wearing them for so many years that there was a hole in the right shoe where his big toe stuck out, and the soles had been dilapidated down to paper thin. Marty was the main contender for the laziest person I had ever met in my life, but he was a goof-off funny person, both in humor and in looks.

I sat down on the couch next to him. Suddenly, Dave came running into the room at a full sprint. He dove across the wide, glass coffee table and tackled me into the couch. I threw him off me, asking what his problem was in a profane, sarcastic manner. Dave was insano. He never stopped going and was completely crazy all the time. He was a short, skinny kid with way too much energy. His head was a huge mop of curly brown hair that bounced whenever he laughed. The kid never stopped making jokes and was the type that always laughed at his own comedic material, regardless of how funny it actually was. Dave had some sort of screw loose, but he was always fun to be around.

After watching television for a while, Dave suggested that we go out and do something exciting. There weren’t many exciting things to do in our small town, but I agreed that we should find something to do. Marty reluctantly agreed to leave his post at the couch, and we all headed out.

Dave thought if we went to the skate park we might find something interesting. I knew that to get there we would have to head towards my side of town. That meant passing by the factory again. I convinced myself that it wouldn’t be too bad, especially since I wasn’t alone. We rounded the corner at the end of the block and got onto the pathway towards my house. In the distance I could see the smokestacks jolting menacingly into the skyline. As we neared the factory I got an eerie sense that something was following us again. When we reached the factory, we all stared up at its weathered, brick walls and cracked windowpanes.

Dave suddenly shouted, “I have an idea!”
That scared the life out of me, and Marty actually jumped a little.
“Well, what is this incredible idea?” Marty inquired.
“We should break into the factory and see if there is actually anything in there! If we make it out alive we will have bragging rights for the rest of eternity!” Dave said.
“I don’t think that’s the best idea,” I said hesitantly.
“What, are you SCARED? Luke is a pansy, Luke is a pansy!” Dave mocked as he danced around me, pointing and giggling, hair bouncing around.

“I am not! Fine, we are going into that damn factory.” I declared.

We decided that in order to enter, we would need flashlights and probably a weapon of some sort. Dave lived in between Marty and me, so we decided to stop back at his house to pick up supplies. We quickly and anxiously walked the two blocks to his house. Marty and I waited outside as Dave went in to get the equipment. He returned with three small pocketknives and two flashlights.

“I’m so sure that those dinky little knives are going to protect us from the ghosts inside that factory,” Marty said sarcastically.

“There aren’t any ghosts in there, that’s just a myth. I bet the only thing we will come across is a crazy bum or a dead body.” Dave responded. That wasn’t anywhere near being a reassuring thought, although I knew he was joking.

We marched back towards the factory, an army of three equipped with the deadly blades of imitation Swiss army pocketknives. Upon arrival we started to look for the easiest way to enter the factory. There was an old, tall, chain link fence around the entire site. We found that the only way to get inside would be to climb over it. We followed the fence until we were past the building itself and in a wooded area that was away from the street, so no one could see us. Dave was the first to attempt the climb. He easily ascended up and hopped over the top. Marty tried next and it was quite an amusing sight. He was too fat and out of shape to be able to just pull himself up to the top. Consequently, he had to try to find footholes to brace himself in so he could scramble up the fence to the top. The problem was that his loafers were too old and beat up, so his feet kept slipping out of the chains. He continued trying to get to the top, but was getting nowhere. He finally made it three fourths of the way, but his super baggy pants caught on one of the chains. He lost his balance and fell about five feet to the ground, landing with a thud. With that he declared that he would wait for us out front, and that this was the stupidest idea he had ever heard of. I easily climbed the fence, and met Dave on the other side.

We both laughed quietly once Marty was out of sight. What a scene. We turned on our flashlights and headed across a small field toward the factory. I took hold of the knife in my pocket, turning it over in my fingers. I chuckled to myself at the idea that this nearly toy blade would protect me. As we neared the factory, I could see that it was built in a “U” shape with a courtyard in the center. If there ever was a living thing there, it ceased to exist. The ground was dry and cracked, supporting no plants or even weeds. Approaching closer, it seemed as if all signs of life drifted away. There were no crickets chirping, no birds whistling, or even a breeze blowing. We slowly approached the court in the center of the U shaped structure. Most of the windows within this inner realm were entirely broken out, unlike the rock holes in the outer windows. A part of one of the brick walls had been smashed down, bricks scattered throughout the nearby space.

Dave whispered to me, “Pretty spooky isn’t it?” The fact that he whispered to me despite that we were all alone sent a chill down my spine. As we got close to the building we slowly approached one of the large, ground level windows.

“So are we going in or what?” Dave asked. He marched toward the window and stepped through into the darkness. I felt my stomach drop as I watched
the beam from his flashlight illuminate a gargantuan, empty room. My heart was a derby horse, thumping and pounding at a blurred speed. I wished at that moment that I had stayed outside with Marty, wondering what exactly I was getting myself into. Reluctantly I stepped through the broken glass windowpane while I prayed, “God please don’t let me die today, I’m too young...”

Once I was inside, the long forgotten factory seemed to come alive. It had a rancid, musty, weighted smell to it. Every step we took boomed through the entire structure, drumming off hundreds of deserted walls. Again I felt as if something was following us. It was as if I could actually hear footsteps, a quiet pitter-patter somewhere in the darkness. I followed Dave as we journeyed to the end of the room and passed through a doorway into the next, smaller room.

We wandered around this room for a while, and my fears started to diminish. The room was also deserted, occupied solely by cobwebs and dust bunnies. This factory wasn’t really bursting of evil or demons; it was just an old empty building. I started to picture how it was when it was up and running. It used to be a chocolate factory and hundreds of people once occupied it to work for their living. I remembered my father telling me that when it was running the entire town would smell like chocolate. With these thoughts my fears continued to disappear. In fact, I wasn’t afraid at all anymore. There wasn’t anything bad in this place. I smiled to myself in the darkness, and an incredible idea came to me. I called Dave over and shared it with him, and he agreed that we should do it. We started heading back towards the exit. Suddenly we heard a noise in the corner of the last room. We both shined our flashlights towards the noise. I couldn’t believe what I saw.

Dave and I bolted through the courtyard of the complex, across the small field and to the chain link fence. We hopped over the fence as if it didn’t exist and started running down the path like the Devil himself was chasing us. I saw Marty sitting against a tree down the path.

“Let’s get the hell out of here!” Dave screamed while streaking past Marty. Confused, he sprung to his feet as we ran by. He attempted to catch up to us as we raced down the street. Two blocks down we finally stopped. Marty reached us, heaving and wheezing heavily. All three of us were sucking air, and our faces were moistened with sweat.

“What is going on? What happened? What did you see? Why are we running? What is wrong? ANSWER ME!” Marty yelled in one breath.

“I can’t believe what was in there!” I gasped. “I can’t believe we saw that! What should we do? What should we do?”

“Saw what? Saw WHAT?!”

“In there,” Dave said, “That was sick! What is it from?”

“What??”

“In the corner, there was,”

“Was what?”

“A dead woman!” I shouted at Marty. “There was a woman lying dead in the corner of one of the rooms!”

“What?”

“She was dead, and naked!” Dave yelled. “She had cuts all over her body. That was so sick! I’m going to throw up!”

“You’re kidding! Tell me you guys are kidding! I don’t want to believe it!”
“Does it look like we are kidding?” I said. “Is this really something we would joke about?”

“What should we do? What should we do?” Dave said frantically. “Let’s get to my house and call the police! We need to do something! A dead woman! I can’t believe it, I can’t believe it!”

“Are you serious? What did she look like?” Marty questioned.

“She had brown hair, was covered in knife slices and propped up in the corner of one of the rooms!” Dave cried.

“Jeez, why was she propped up? Who killed her? We need to call the police!” Marty stammered.

“We can’t call the police; there is nothing they can do. She is coming for us.” Dave fearfully whispered.

“What are you talking about?” Marty said, quite confused.

“When we shined the light on her, all of a sudden her eyes popped open, and they were glowing green! She started to get up and come towards us! She is going to kill us! She is probably coming for us right now!” I shouted.

“What? I don’t believe it...”

“We need to go right now! We need to run! She is coming for us!” Dave yelled.

Marty stared at us with uncertainty. He looked like he wanted to cry. At first there was doubt in his eyes, but quickly he brushed it aside.

“Well let’s go! Let’s get out of here! I don’t want to get killed by that thing!”

Marty believed everything we had said, and he was near hysterics. Dave and I looked at each other and couldn’t take it any longer. We burst into laughter. We were laughing so hard that we fell on the ground, and I started to cry. Marty looked at us in disbelief, totally confused. He still looked like he was ready to take off running from some dead zombie woman.

“We got you man! That was all a joke! We got you so bad!” I said between my laughter. Dave looked as if he would pass out, he was laughing so hard. Marty continued to look bewildered, and quite angry. The only thing we had seen in the corner of that room was a rat running across the floor. No spooky ghost of any kind. While lying there in the grass of some stranger’s front lawn, I realized the factory wasn’t scary at all. In fact it was quite interesting. It told of a heritage of our small village and how it helped boost the population when it came into town. I realized there was nothing to fear at all, and I began to feel a sense of growth and certainty.

After Dave and I finished laughing, and Marty finished sulking, we all went home. That was quite an entertaining evening. I will never forget that night when I forced myself to enter the “evil” factory, and found that it was just an empty building with nothing to fear.

Two years later, a developer turned the factory into an apartment complex and now it is quite pleasant looking. No more broken glass windows, no more menacing feelings of evil. It provides a home for people, and I am sure that they cleared the rats out. The apartments look quite nice from the outside, and the developer even added a huge, in-ground pool. Ironic how the factory is again boosting the population and turning my small village into a town.