

Ghost Stories, Humorous Stories, Stories with a Moral

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GHOST STORIES

HE WHO FOLLOWS ME

This is a ghost story I taped from an old-time radio program. I didn't tape the credits, but I know the name of it is He Who Follows Me, adapted for radio by Richard Thorn. I find an old diary at a flea market for about fifty cents, and copied the story down into it. I then take it to camp with my troop and tell them it is the diary of my late great Uncle Bill. Then, I simply start reading it to them. Granted, much of this is too detailed to be part of someone's REAL diary, but the Scouts are wrapped up in the story too much to notice.

March 3, 1938

Today, Helen and I came across one of the delightful old southern mansions. We decided to stop and make a study of the place. Helen was especially interested in taking some color pictures to illustrate our lecture series in the fall.

Although no one was home, we felt that no one would mind us taking a look around the place. We both felt it a shame that the owners let the place rundown. It was probably beautiful in its day. It could still be renovated, but not without a lot of money being spent.

After some shots of the house from the front and side, I noticed a building in back of the house. No one was to stop us, so we moved back there to take a look. The grounds of the back was more shabby than the front, but seeing how much needed done, it would be impossible without major construction work. Part of the mansion was still livable, though not very secure.

The building we were nearing didn't seem so worn down. It was in remarkably fine condition. It was built a lot later than the house was, I estimated it as no more than twenty years old. It was made of stone, gray stone. Somebody probably had lived in the old house not too long ago, and during that time constructed this building. But we both still felt it a shame that they let what must have been a wonderful place rundown like this.

We both stopped in front of the stone building. Helen made the observation that it didn't have any windows, something I had noticed too. I told her it was probably used for storage. It was then that Helen pointed to the broken padlock on the door. Our curiosity getting the best of us, we decided to check inside, to make sure everything was all right.

The massive heavy iron door swung open reluctantly. We stepped inside. Although there were no windows, light entered the structure through a skylight in the ceiling. The cold, damp, musty air chilled our bones. Helen looked around the room, and laid her eyes on a large stone block in the middle of the floor, right where the light was coming down from the skylight. This was not a storehouse by any stretch of the imagination. This was a mausoleum, and the stone

case on the floor was a sarcophagus, a stone coffin. There was nothing else in there, but Helen, and I to an extent, felt crowded.

Helen wanted to get a picture of the sarcophagus, with the light laying over. We didn't think there was enough light for our camera, but we decided to try.

After the first shot, we heard movement outside and a man yell to us. I explained that we saw that the lock was broken and decided to explore. He told us that he wasn't mad, but that we still shouldn't of came in here, because "he" wouldn't like it. When I pressed the man to tell me who "he" was, he answered "the thing that sleeps in that stone coffin."

"This man must be crazy," I thought. He asked us why we didn't pay attention to the warning. Not knowing what he meant, he took us outside and showed us the writing above the door. "IF YOU ENTER HERE, INTO THE REALM OF DEATH, I SHALL FOLLOW YOU, AND BRING HIM WITH ME." He said it was a shame that we didn't see it, because we didn't know what we were getting ourselves into.

I once again apologized and told him we didn't want any legal trouble. He said we were already in enough trouble, none of it being legal, because it didn't matter to "him." This time, Helen asked about "him," and the man went into his story. "They called him Mr. Thomas when he was livin'. They call him The Dead that Walks now that he's dead. He cam to get that name because people around he 'as seen 'em, at night. He is dead, but they did see him walkin'. I know, cause I seen him myself." "I know you ain't believin' what I'm tellin' ya. I don't care what you believe. But you listen to what I'm sayin' now. If I was you I'd get as far away from this place as I could. Not just this place, but this town, this part of the country."

I didn't understand the urgency, so the man continued with the story, hoping to convince us.

"Old Thomas came from some place in Europe. I say "Old," but he really wasn't old. Just seemed that way. He bought the house and grounds here and had them cleaned up, till the place looked like it was brand new. Then he started buildin' this here buildin'."

"There was something funny 'bout Thomas; somethin' in his eyes. Made ya frightened of him. His eyes, they looked like the eyes of a dead man."

"He never acted like anyone I ever knew. He was always talking about death, always tellin' me how he could come back after death. I was the caretaker then, just like I am now."

"After this building was completed, I use to watch him at night. He'd come out here. It seemed as though he was in some sort of trance. He'd stay out here for hours. And when he'd come back to the house his eyes would glisten and shine, so you couldn't hardly look at him."

"A week before he died, he told me that as long as I live, I was to take care of this place. 'Cause if I didn't he'd come back an kill me. Then he died. Just like that. He was put in here, in that coffin."

"One night, about two months later when the moon was full, I heard a noise. And when I had come out to look I saw the door to this place open, and him come out. I could hear his footsteps, something queer and draggin'-like. Then he turned around, and I could see his face in the moonlight: pale and pasty. Sick lookin'. Those eyes of his seemed like to burning coals of fire."

"He seemed to be lookin' at me. I heard him say, 'They have disturbed me, and the moon has awakened me. I shall follow them.' That's what he said. I heard him just as straight as your hearin' me. And then, he vanished into the night."

"Towards morning, I heard his footsteps again. I heard that big iron door closin'. And I knew he was back."

"The next day I heard Ralph Cummins died the night before, screaming something about not meanin' to go into the mausoleum. I knew who killed him."

"This has happened again and again for the last ten years since he's been dead. Folks around hear say he'll follow you around wherever you go if you come inside here."

"Why haven't you been killed?" I asked, thinking I have caught him in his lie.

"Cause he needs me, Hee hee. He ain't gonna kill me. But if I was you, I get out of this part of the country."

March 3, Later.

I sit here and write these words. It is late and the moon has risen full in the sky. Helen is standing by the window looking out.

For some reason, I am frightened. Yet I know that a few months from now I will laugh at the memory of my fright. However, in the morning, I do believe that we will leave this place. Helen is glad. She doesn't not believe the caretaker's story, but she is concerned, just as I.

March 3, Still Later.

When I joined Helen at the window, a husky man appeared on the street below. He looked up at us.

The thing I noticed first was his face. Pale and pasty looking. Helen was startled by his eyes -- two bright coals of fire, just as the caretaker had described.

The man down in the street, whomever he was, left after about ten minutes. He has given us quite a fright. If I had felt any doubts as to whether we should leave this place they have all been dispelled now. I don't know what to believe.

Helen has just gone to bed. I think I shall do the same.

March 4, 1938.

Upon settling down to sleep last night, we heard footsteps coming from the room above us. I called down to the desk clerk, who only told us that the room above ours was unoccupied.

We left the hotel a short time after hearing the steps. We went immediately to our car and drove all night and all day.

We are stopping now in a motel almost one-thousand miles away. It is reassuring to know that he cannot possibly follow us.

I am very tired. I will go to bed and get an early start in the morning.

March 5, 1938.

Last night was not very comforting either. We heard the same footsteps outside our room, and Helen saw the man's face at the window.

This morning when I went into pay the bill, the man who owns the motel said that a strange pasty-faced man had been in earlier and told him to tell me that he would follow me.

March 11, 1938.

It is impossible to get any material together that will help me in my work. Everywhere we go, he's there also.

March 16, 1938.

The clerk told us this guy had said it was Ok for us to go ahead because he was going to follow us.

March 22, 1938.

He left a message with the lady at the desk lady telling us that he would be in touch.

April 7, 1938.

He left another message at the desk. The manager had the nerve to ask me if he was a friend of ours.

April 18, 1938.

Another disturbing night without sleep. More footsteps from the hall outside.

April 29, 1938.

Expecting it when we went to check out this morning, I asked the clerk if there were any messages. The clerk said a husky man in a white suit came by and said he'd follow us.

May 15, 1938.

I don't know what to do anymore. We cannot stop for the night without him showing up. The only sleep we get anymore is in the car while on the road.

May 30, 1938.

Helen and I argued again today. Since we've been on the run, that seems to be all that we can do. She suggested we go home. I fear that he will stalk us there, too. She felt it was the only place left to turn. I didn't know what to do or say, so we left for home.

June 23, 1938.

We arrived home this evening. I called Gary as soon as we got home. He said he'd be out within the hour to see us.

June 24, 1938.

Gary wasn't able to help us in any way. I did not really expecting any help. I was hoping he would be able to offer some concrete suggestion as to what to do. However, last night was the first night in months that we haven't been aware of his presence.

Maybe Helen is right. Perhaps he won't follow us here.

July 3, 1938.

We have not seen, nor heard, anything unusual since we first came home. I feel as a man might feel who has been given a new lease on life.

July 10, 1938.

Still nothing.

August 19, 1938.

For the past two months, a feeling of peace and security has enveloped the house. Helen and I have been able to go around with no sense of danger or dread. But last night that feeling was shattered...

[At this point I tell them a clipping from the newspaper was inserted into the diary. It was a clipping of a funeral notice for my Great Aunt Helen. It was, of course, too old and fragile to bring on the camp out. (WINK WINK.)]

According to one of their family friends (Gary?) my Great Uncle Bill went upstairs to investigate some footsteps, leaving my Great Aunt Helen downstairs alone.

When he got to the room that the noise came from, he found it empty. Going back downstairs, he found Helen, dead, with her eyes wide open.]

August 23, 1938.

I sit here in the empty house, writing this. I know that Thomas will come for me too. I write this in the hope that someone will find it. Read it. And maybe understand my death.

It is lonely here. Yet, suddenly I feel as if I am not alone. Someone is hear with me.

He is here, in this room with me. I am afraid to turn to meet him. Those eyes of his burning in to me. Yet, I must. I pray that someone reads this. Perhaps he will

[The August 23 entry was the last he ever made. I simply close the diary and let the scouts wonder. I simply tell them that my Uncle Bill was found just like my aunt. The coroner could not determine a cause of death, but our family knows what killed him -- The Dead that Walks. --

THE CREMATION OF SAM MCGEE

by Robert Service

There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who toil for gold,
And the Arctic trails have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold.
The northern lights have seen queer sights,
But the queerest they ever did see
Was the night on the marge of Lake LaBarge
I cremated Sam McGee.

Now, Sam McGee was from Tennessee
Where the cotton blooms and blows.
Why he left his home in the south to roam
'Round the pole, God only knows.
He was always cold, but the land of gold

Seemed to hold him like a spell,
Though he'd often say, in his homely way,
He'd sooner live in hell.

On a Christmas day we were mushing our way
Over the Dawson Trail.
Talk of your cold--through the parka's fold
It stabbed like a driven nail.
If our eyes we'd close, then the lashes froze
'Till sometimes we couldn't see.
It wasn't much fun, but the only one
To whimper was Sam McGee.

And that very night as we lay packed tight
In our robes beneath the snow,
And the dogs were fed, and the stars o'erhead
Were dancing heel and toe,
He turned to me, and "Cap", says he,
"I'll cash in this trip, I guess,
And if I do, I'm asking that you
Won't refuse my last request."

Well, he seemed so low I couldn't say no,
And he says with a sort of moan,
"It's the cursed cold, and it's got right hold
'Till I'm chilled clean through to the bone.
Yet 'ta'int being dead, it's my awful dread
Of the icy grave that pains,
So I want you to swear that, foul or fair,
You'll cremate my last remains."

A pal's last need is a thing to heed,
And I swore that I would not fail.
We started on at the streak of dawn,
But, God, he looked ghastly pale.
He crouched on the sleigh, and he raved all day
Of his home in Tennessee,
And before nightfall, a corpse was all
That was left of Sam McGee.

There wasn't a breath in that land of death
As I hurried, horror driven,
With a corpse half hid that I couldn't get rid
Because of a promise given.
It was lashed to the sleigh, and it seemed to say,
"You may tax your brawn and brains,
But you promised true, and it's up to you
To cremate those last remains."

Now, a promise made is a debt unpaid,
And the trail has its own stern code.
In the days to come, 'though my lips were dumb,

In my heart, how I cursed the load.
In the long, long night by the lone firelight
While the huskies 'round in a ring
Howled out their woes to the homeless snows
Oh, God, how I loathed the thing.

And every day that quiet clay
Seemed to heavy and heavier grow.
And on I went, though the dogs were spent
And the grub was getting low.
The trail was bad, and I felt half mad,
But I swore I would not give in,
And often I'd sing to the hateful thing,
And it hearkened with a grin.

'Till I came to the marge of Lake LaBarge,
And a derelict there lay.
It was jammed in the ice, and I saw in a trice
It was called the "Alice May".
I looked at it, and I thought a bit,
And I looked at my frozen chum,
Then, "Here", said I, with a sudden cry,
"Is my crematorium."
Some planks I tore from the cabin floor
And lit the boiler fire.

Some coal I found that was lying around
And heaped the fuel higher.
The flames just soared, and the furnace roared,
Such a blaze you seldom see.
Then I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal
And I stuffed in Sam McGee.
Then I made a hike, for I didn't like
To hear him sizzle so.

And the heavens scowled, and the huskies howled,
And the wind began to blow.
It was icy cold, but the hot sweat rolled
Down my cheek, and I don't know why,
And the greasy smoke in an inky cloak
Went streaking down the sky.
I do not know how long in the snow
I wrestled with gristly fear.

But the stars came out, and they danced about
'Ere again I ventured near.
I was sick with dread, but I bravely said,
"I'll just take a peek inside.
I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked",
And the door I opened wide.
And there sat Sam, looking calm and cool
In the heart of the furnace roar.

He wore a smile you could see a mile,
And he said, "Please close that door.
It's fine in here, but I greatly fear
You'll let in the cold and storm.
Since I left Plumbtree down in Tennessee
It's the first time I've been warm."

There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who toil for gold,
And the Arctic trails have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold.
The northern lights have seen queer sights,
But the queerest they ever did see
Was the night on the marge of Lake LaBarge
I cremated Sam McGee.

THE WITCH OF COOS

Robert Frost

I staid the night for shelter at a farm Behind the mountain, with a mother and son, Two old-believers. They did all the talking.

MOTHER. Folks think a witch who has familiar spirits She could call up to pass a winter evening, But won't, should be burned at the stake or something. Summoning spirits isn't "Button, button, Who's got the button," I would have them know.

SON. Mother can make a common table rear And kick with two legs like an army mule.

MOTHER. And when I've done it, what good have I done? Rather than tip a table for you, let me Tell you what Ralle the Sioux Control once told me. He said the dead had souls, but when I asked him How could that be--I thought the dead were souls, He broke my trance. Don't that make you suspicious That there's something the dead are keeping back? Yes, there's something the dead are keeping back.

SON. You wouldn't want to tell him what we have UP attic, mother?

MOTHER. Bones--a skeleton.

SON. But the headboard of mother's bed is pushed Against the attic door: the door is nailed. It's harmless. Mother hears it in the night Halting perplexed behind the barrier Of door and headboard. Where it wants to get is back into the cellar where it came from.

MOTHER. We'll never let them, will we, son! We'll never!

SON. It left the cellar forty years ago And carried itself like a pile of dishes Up one flight from the cellar to the kitchen, Another from the kitchen to the bedroom, Another from the bedroom to the attic, Right past both father and mother, and neither stopped it. Father had gone upstairs; mother was downstairs. I was a baby: I don't know where I was.

MOTHER. The only fault my husband found with me-- I went to sleep before I went to bed, Especially in winter when the bed Might just as well be ice and the clothes snow. The night the bones came up the cellar-stairs Toffile had gone to bed alone and left me, But left an open door to cool the room off So as to sort of turn me out of it. I was just coming to myself enough To wonder where the cold was coming from, When I heard Toffile upstairs in the bedroom And thought I heard him downstairs in the cellar. The board we had laid down to walk dry-shod on When there was water in the cellar in spring Struck the hard cellar bottom. And then someone Began the stairs, tow footsteps for each step, The way a man with one leg and a crutch, Or a little child, comes up. It wasn't Toffile: It wasn't anyone who could be there. The bulkhead

double-doors were double-locked And swollen tight and buried under snow. The cellar windows were banked up with sawdust And swollen tight and buried under snow. It was the bones. I knew them--and good reason. My first impulse was to get to the knob And hold the door. But the bones didn't try The door; they halted helpless on the landing, Waiting for things to happen in their favor. The faintest restless rustling ran all through them. I never could have done the thing I did If the wish hadn't been too strong in me To see how they were mounted for this walk. I had a vision of them put together Not like a man, but like a chandelier. So suddenly I flung the door wide on him. A moment he stood balancing with emotion, And all but lost himself. (A tongue of fire Flashed out and licked along his upper teeth. Smoke rolled inside the sockets of his eyes.) Then he came at me with one hand outstretched, The way he did in life once; but this time I struck the hand off brittle on the floor, And fell back from him on the floor myself. The finger-pieces slid in all directions. (Where did I see one of those pieces lately? Hand me my button-box-it must be there.) I sat up on the floor and shouted, "Toffile, It's coming up to you." It had its choice Of the door to the cellar or the hall. It took the hall door for the novelty, And set off briskly for so slow a thing, Still going every which way in the joints, though, So that it looked like lightning or a scribble, From the slap I had just now given its hand. I listened till it almost climbed the stairs From the hall to the only finished bedroom, Before I got up to do anything; Then ran and shouted, "Shut the bedroom door, Toffile, for my sake!" "Company?" he said, "Don't make me get up; I'm too warm in bed." So lying forward weakly on the handrail I pushed myself upstairs, and in the light (The kitchen had been dark) I had to own I could see nothing. "Toffile, I don't see it. It's with us in the room though. It's the bones." "What bones?" "The cellar bones--out of the grave." That made him throw his bare legs out of bed And sit up by me and take hold of me. I wanted to put out the light and see If I could see it, or else mow the room, With our arms at the level of our knees, And bring the chalk-pile down. "I'll tell you what-- It's looking for another door to try. The uncommonly deep snow has made him think Of his old song, The Wild Colonial Boy, He always used to sing along the tote-road. He's after an open door to get out- doors. Let's trap him with an open door up attic." Toffile agreed to that, and sure enough, Almost the moment he was given an opening, The steps began to climb the attic stairs. I heard them. Toffile didn't seem to hear them. "Quick!" I slammed to the door and held the knob. "Toffile, get nails." I made him nail the door shut, And push the headboard of the bed against it. Then we asked was there anything Up attic that we'd ever want again. The attic was less to us than the cellar. If the bones liked the attic, let them have it. Let them stay in the attic. When they sometimes Come down the stairs at night and stand perplexed Behind the door and headboard of the bed, Brushing their chalky skull with chalky fingers, With sounds like the dry rattling of a shutter, That's what I sit up in the dark to say-- To no one any more since Toffile died. Let them stay in the attic since they went there. I promised Toffile to be cruel to them For helping them to be cruel once to him.

SON. We think they had a grave down in the cellar.

MOTHER. We know they had a grave down in the cellar.

SON. We never could find out whose bones they were.

MOTHER. Yes, we could too, son. Tell the truth for once. They were a man's his father killed for me. I mean a man he killed instead of me. The least I could do was to help dig their grave. We were about it one night in the cellar. Son knows the story: but 'twas not for him To tell the truth, suppose the time had come. Son looks surprised to see me end a lie We'd kept all these years between ourselves So as to have it ready for outsiders. But tonight I don't care enough to lie-- I don't remember why I ever cared. Toffile, if he were here, I don't believe Could tell you why he ever cared himself. . .

She hadn't found the finger-bone she wanted Among the buttons poured out in her lap. I verified the name next morning: Toffile. The rural letter-box said Toffile Lajway.

WHITE EYES

In fact, there's a Boy Scout camp not far from where this occurred.

The San Bernardino Mountains contains a lot of wilderness regions which saw substantial activity about 100 years ago. Here, miners and loggers worked to bring materials down to the Los Angeles basin. But, like most industries of that time, there was a high profit motive, and workers lives were not as important as they were now.

One day, a mine tunnel collapsed, trapping a number of men within. They were able to survive, after a fashion, by drinking water which seeped into the tunnels, eating rats, mushrooms, and their dead co-workers. They worked from within to dig themselves out, confident that on the other side, others were digging from the outside in. Well, maybe not that confident, since the mining company was not known for its compassion.

Well, it took them a while, but they finally managed to dig themselves out. Then, the formerly trapped miners found two surprises. First, since they had lived in darkness for a long period of time, they could no longer stand the sunlight, and their eyes were pure white---no color except for their pupils, which were dilated. Second, not one man had lifted a shovel to dig them out.

They then made a pact, these men, to take revenge on those who had abandoned them. Soon after, mysterious instances of men being killed in the mountains occurred. These men were usually found mauled, bloody and torn. Close examination showed the teeth marks on them were from human teeth. One man was even beaten by his arm which had been torn off at the shoulder.

Soon thereafter, the mining company went out of business: No one was willing to work in those mountains, and even groups of men at night were at risk. Rumor had it that the White-Eyes were out for blood.

Now, since this happened about 100 years ago, and since only men were working in the mines, there should be no more White-Eyes around. So, we're safe---or are we? Several years ago, a hiker was found mauled on the trail, with human teeth marks.

Embellish the story as you wish! You may even want to adapt it to your locale. But beware---when I told this story to a group of campers at summer camp once, some boys (in my troop, first timers, and other troops there) were scared out of their wits, especially since it occurred so close to where they were at.

-- Thanks to Mas Sayano Assistant Scoutmaster, Los Angeles Area Council

WRAP WRAP WRAP

Like many of you, I was brought up with the ghost story by the campfire. We waited anxiously to hear another _good one_. (I must say that this was before such movies as Freddie came on -- Movies weren't that bold yet.)

Being on the other end of the campfire, I find myself mixed. When a SM must stay up all night with a new scout because the story was _too real_ puts it in a different light. Now, don't get me wrong. Out of the two troops that I've been associated with, both _love_ the ghost stories. However, we have adopted a philosophy in telling the stories. When the audience is populated with young scouts, we add parts to the story that break the mood somewhat, yet still give the thrill that the scouts seek. Then as the Scouts mature, work them into the good wall hangers.

As an example, I've enclosed a story that I've had good results with in many groups. I'll just hit the highlights here, then expand a little at the end.

----- story -----

A Troop sets camp in a secluded area by a lake in the mountains. Just at the edge of the clearing stands an old trapper's cabin. As all SM's do at the campfire, this SM tells the following tale:

Many years ago this land was sacred hunting ground for the (pick your tribe) Indians in this area. The game in this field was always plentiful -- until the white man came and built that cabin. The tribe elders were enraged at this encroachment, and sent their best warriors to oust the intruder.

The leader of the raiding party had seen this intruder, and knew him to be an old man with little spirit, so instead of harming him, they decided to scare him out. The Indian crept up to the house and gently _wrapped_ on the wall.

This attracted the attention of the home owner, but finding nothing there, he went back to his work. Again the Indian _wrapped_ on the wall. This cat and mouse game went on for the majority of the night. The white man was becoming afraid of this mystery noise, so he reached for the shotgun he kept over the mantle. The next time the Indian _wrapped_, the man was prepared and decapitated the Indian with a single shot. The tribe elders, on seeing how easily the white man conquered their best, banned all people from setting foot in their sacred hunting ground. To insure this, the medicine man called on the spirit of the be-headed warrior to guard the land. It is said that on dark rainy nights, the warrior can still be heard prowling around the old home.

Once the story was told, the SM bade the boys good night and all turned in.

As can happen on spring nights, a thunder cloud began to build and soon the campers found themselves in a wind that was taking the tents away, and drenching them with cold ice water. The leaders decided that the safest thing would be to seek shelter in the old house. The boys eagerly moved into the old house, except for the troop cook -- he was thinking of that old Indian and really didn't want any part of the house. So, just in case he took two of his biggest pans with him for protection.

The storm raged on, but the boys had settled down inside the cabin. Suddenly, a faint noise could be heard, _wrap, wrap, wrap_. Most of the boys didn't hear it, but the cook heard it well. Soon all the scouts were up listening to the _wrap, wrap, wrap_. The SM went over to the side where it appeared to be coming from and the noise stopped. (A number of cycles here to build up the suspense. However, the cook was given pans for a reason -- he's the skittish one of the group and is liable to swing at anything.) The noise has grown in volume and intensity, and the SM has realized that he must go outside and fix whatever is loose on the house. He takes the senior scouts with him, which unfortunately is the cook. (Suspenseful) they walk around the house and find that the _wrapping_ noise is coming from a hole in the stone fireplace. The SM carefully inserts his hand into the hole and removes a roll of wrapping paper going _wrap, wrap, wrap_.

-end of story-

Now to expand on the concept. 1. The corny ending will take the stress off of the story, helping reinforce the thought that it is not real. Besides a laugh is a good thing to create at a campfire. 2. The whole story can be spiced up to make it as thrilling as you want. It won't take too much imagination and a little acting to keep them on the edge of their seats. 3. The cook is a pressure release in the story. He is very high strung and can swing at anything from his own shadow to the scoutmaster. Use him in humorous ways to take the edge off of the story as you go. 4. Taylor the story to your group. If your group is young and gullible, use the cook a little more. If they are seasoned campers, pour on the suspense. We usually find a good mix works wonders. Keep in mind that young boys/girls can fix their minds on something like this very easily and they will not sleep in the wood, especially new Scouts.

You'll know you did well when you hear that catch phrase _wrap, wrap, wrap_ echo around the camp for the next few days.

HUMOUROUS STORIES

A NIGHT NEAR THE TOOTH

I didn't EXACTLY stay on the Tooth of Time. We were running late when we stopped Shafer's Peak and the danger of walking fast down the narrow trail with sheer drops on each side in the falling darkness finally overcame us. We set up a dining fly in a wide spot and placed our packs (with little food) away from us. Some settled under the fly, and some under the stars. Our scoutmaster and a couple of the boys took a miniature radio out to an overlook for a bit of news. It was to be an eventful night! One of the boys was prone to nose bleeding but had not had problems ... until now. In a fainting sway he nearly pitched over the side. Instead he body checked our small scoutmaster. With a yell that summoned two of us by name but in a tone that revealed the emergency, we jumped from our sleeping bags and (almost) streaked over to carry the boy back to his bag. He was fine.

As we slept, a deer or two came silently through our "camp" pausing astride one camper who awoke and missed seeing the stars! The sure footed animal moved on without incident (unlike burros near water!). We were sleeping peacefully despite a rising wind in the early morning darkness.

The wind had loosened a corner of our fly and it was flapping in the breeze. About that time, two hikers bound for sunrise on the tooth, heard the flapping and thought the shadows contained a hungry bear. As is procedure, they drew out their mess kits and clanged the pieces in a horrible racket to scare the bear! Our scoutmaster came out of his MUMMY bag without unzipping it! It scared US silly! We all thought we had a bear in our midst!

We were all a bit anxious about not making our designated camp but it simply was unsafe. Still, this story is repeated around our campfire with each new batch of scouts in our troop. OH, and we did get to see sunrise over the tooth!

-- Thanks to Andy Webb

CAMPFIRES

From A Fine And Pleasant Misery
by Patrick F. McManus

The campfire was of two basic kinds: the Smudge and the Inferno.

The Smudge was what you used when you were desperately in need of heat. By hovering over the Smudge the camper could usually manage to thaw ice from his hands before being kippered to death. The Inferno was what you always used for cooking. Experts on camp cooking claimed you were supposed to cook over something called "a bed of glowing coals." The "bed of glowing coals" was a fiction concocted by experts on camp cooking. As a result, the camp cook was frequently pictured, by artists who should have known better, as a tranquil man hunkered down by a bed of glowing coals, turning plump trout in the frying pan with the blade of his knife. In reality, the camp cook is a wildly distraught individual who charged though waves of heat and speared savagely with a long sharp stick a burning hunk of meat he had tossed on the grill from twenty feet away. Meat roasted over an Inferno was either raw or extra well done. The cook, if he was lucky, came out medium rare.

SECURITY GUYS

Two summers ago, when I was deputy director of the CIA, a friend and I traversed the Olympic Mountain Range in Washington State, hiking 70 miles north to south. Snow in August, ice

axes in hand, fording rivers with ropes and in the swift current nearly being carried downstream pack and all; watching with middle-aged sadistic pleasure as my much younger security escorts struggle up the trail.

Or the summer before, canoeing 50 mile long Ross Lake in Washington near the Canadian border in over-loaded canoes in a driving wind and rainstorm, foot high swells threatening to capsize us, wondering if we'd escape with our lives.

Then having the security guys, also struggling, paddle up alongside to report that they had a radio call from Washington ... and "?could I get to a secure telephone?" This when I thought I might never even see the shore again.

But this message gave me a determination to survive ... if only to get pack to Washington and find out who had placed that call.

-- Part of a story by Robert Gates, in Scouting Magazine

WESTERN STORIES

THE BALLAD OF JOHNNY O'DELL

Wild are the tales of the Pony Express
And most of them are true if I don't miss my guess.
But wildest of all tales that they tell
Is that of fearless young Johnny O'Dell.
Johnny was little, but he was a man
Whom none could outride, outshoot or outplan.
Ride, he could ride anything that could run
And could outdo any man with a gun.
Back in those days there were men in the West
And Johnny O'Dell was as good as the best.
Only the bravest could carry the mail
Through terrible dangers that haunted the trail.
Dangers there were on the night I describe,
For Johnny encountered an Indian tribe.
Blackie, his horse, gave a new burst of speed.
No Indian pinto could equal that steed.
Bullets and arrows whizzed over his head
As into the foe and right through them he sped.
Outlaws had raided the station ahead
The horses were stolen, his partner was dead.
Onward went Johnny over the trail.
For such was the life when you carry the mail
Rivers they forded for bridges there were none
While crossing one stream he was stopped by a gun.
"Halt!" cried a man on the bank of the creek-
As together they fired by the light of the sun.
Still lay the stranger whom Johnny had met,
For all that I know he is lying there yet.
Onward went Johnny into the West,
As a spot of crimson appeared on his vest.
Together they continued their hazardous ride,
The powerful horse with the brave man astride.

Into the town of Red Gulch did they go,
As blotches of blood marked their way through the snow.
This was the end of the perilous trail
Through bullets, and arrows; through blizzards and hail.
Johnny dismounted and cried with a wail,
"Oh, Darn it all, I've forgotten the mail!"