

The Singing Peddler

“So yeah, that was totally epic. My pet goat is a hero!” Sharon concluded, a broad smile spread across her face, fully aware her story had swept the others away.

Crap. My eyes cautiously darted around the room as I shied away from the eerie, flickering light that Dad would ‘eventually’ get around to replacing, hoping no one would notice my sneaky departure. There was no way I could go after that. How could I possibly top Sharon’s blockbuster worthy tale!?

“Clyde, honey. Everything all right down there?” Gee thanks, Mom. Perfect timing, as usual. With all attention now focused on me, I played off my failed escape with a casual stretch, grabbed a snickers bar (my favorite) from the snack table, and sat right back down.

“No Mom. Everything is not alright. We’ve been kidnapped and are being held at gunpoint. Lucy and Jake were buried alive. The TV exploded. All in the five minutes since you last asked,” I replied, with a sarcastic roll of my eyes.

“All right, sweetie. You four be good down there,” Mom replied. A tired sigh and the familiar creaking of age-old stairs signaled her departure, and the room erupted with laughter that could be contained no longer.

Upset at the abrupt end to her moment of fame, Sharon spoke up, confidence seeping through her words, “So, Clyde. You’re up. I can’t wait to hear the wonderful story you have for us. I’m sure it’ll put my silly pet goat tale to shame.”

Damn her. I can’t stand that conceited tone of hers. It drives me nuts. Well, guess there’s no way out of this. Here goes nothing. “Oh yeah. Totally. You guys aren’t gonna believe this one.”

In the minute or so it took everyone to settle down, I gathered my thoughts, made a silent prayer to a God I didn't believe in (except when it was convenient), took a deep breath, and began. "This all happened over summer three years ago. I was ten and my parents wanted me to spend more time with them, or something, so I was pretty much at home all day long. To keep me entertained, Dad got me a new Segway to mess around with. I absolutely adored that thing. I would ride it around the house all day, entirely content doing nothing but leaning forwards and backwards. I taught myself a few neat tricks too, even learned how to ride on one leg, it was great."

I could tell my audience was growing impatient as heads not-so-subtly turned down to peek at their phone screens, everyone fully aware that they wouldn't see anything due to the lack of signal in my basement. I needed to do something to draw them in, and it had to be now. Desperation fueled my creativity, and I took a huge gamble. "Have any of you heard of the Singing Peddler?"

With no response from the crowd, I was terrified I bet on the wrong hand. Nervously cracking my knuckles to end the suffocating silence, I continued. "The Singing Peddler was a poor, 12-year-old paperboy who was killed in an accident when a bus sped out of control, more than twenty-five years ago. Rumor has it he still rides around on his cycle at night, singing, "Get your papers, 50 cents apiece. Come on folks, daily papers. Get your daily papers here!"

What happened next, I still cannot explain. As if by some unseen mystical force, perfectly on cue, the faulty light flickered off and the room was thrown into sudden darkness. Distorted shapes seemed to spring out of the colorless void. Different shades of black coming to life, eyes straining to make sense of the chaos. Everyone froze, and for those few seconds all that could be heard was the whisper of strained breath, and the barely audible humming of what

sounded like a young boy, twelve, maybe thirteen, out in the distance, just out of reach. And then, almost as if it was taunting us, the light clicked back on, and the world was a palette of color once more. What remained, however, was the silence. No one dared open their mouth, all equally stunned by the happenings of the last few seconds. Well, all but one.

“Hmph. What a load of rubbish.” Sharon said, easily shrugging off our apparent encounter with the unknown. Vanity had her utterly convinced nothing extraordinary had occurred, she refused to accept things she could not comprehend. “Ghosts aren’t real. Plus, the Singing Peddler, really? That isn’t even scary. Who’d ever believe that?”

As much as I hate to admit it, she was right. Or at least, she should have been. My story was bland and not the least bit scary. I had been grasping at straws. But what just occurred changed things, it added depth to my shallow plot, fact to my obvious fiction. An insane stroke of luck? Magic? I didn’t know, but seeing the frightened look on my friends’ faces, the fear in their eyes, I didn’t even care. I saw my chance, I pounced.

“Ah, but Sharon, I wasn’t done yet. That summer, the one where I first rode my brand-new Segway, was the same summer my parents got rid of it. You see, the first time I heard about the Singing Peddler, I was skeptical too. I didn’t believe in ghosts, I thought they were silly childish fantasies, nothing to be taken seriously. But that summer, that all changed.”

“What happened, Clyde?” Jake squeaked.

Pleased that my story was finally getting the attention it demanded, and hiding a smile as I saw Sharon scowling, I kept going. “One Monday morning I woke up early. Still sleepy, I decided to grab a cup of coffee. As I entered the kitchen, I heard the front door open, and close once more. Eyes half closed from exhaustion, I assumed it was Dad heading out for work and didn’t bother checking.

“For the next hour or so, I followed my usual morning routine. Had a bowl of Cinnamon Toast Crunch, brushed my teeth, played some video games, the likes. At around noon, I decided I wanted to go out for a ride on the Segway; I was hungry, so I might’ve grabbed lunch. But when I wanted to leave, it wasn’t in the garage, where I had always left it. I started to look around the house. Maybe I had left it somewhere, but no luck there either.

“The last place I thought to check was my parents’ bedroom, but when I entered, I noticed something strange. Dad was still in bed, fast asleep. He’d run a temperature and called in sick at work. But if both him and Mom were asleep in the morning, then who was it who opened the door? Was it a thief? But why would they only steal my Segway, there were things way more valuable lying all around the house, and way easier to hide too.

“Confused, I shrugged it off and assumed I left it somewhere and wouldn’t get it back. My parents freaked out, for good reason, and they grounded me for a month. Later that night, I went back to the garage one last time, not expecting to find anything. To my utter surprise, there it was, right where I left it. Brand new, albeit a few scratches from me messing around. Weird, I thought. I could’ve sworn that was the first place I checked. But it was late, and I was tired, so I headed to bed.

“Still, something wasn’t sitting right with me. I was sure I’d left my Segway in the garage in the first place, so where did it go? I woke up early the next morning, drank a cup of coffee _”

“Wow, Clyde. You drink coffee?” Lucy butted in, twirling her hair.

“Yep, really helps me focus in the mornings,” I continued, slightly bothered by the interruption. “So yeah, anyways, I woke up early and stood by the front door, watching out the window. Surely enough, at 6:30 am, to the second, I heard the front door open and close, and saw my brand-new gift rolling down the street. The weirdest part? There was no one

riding it. No one I could see, at least. It drove itself up and down the street, passing by each house in the neighborhood, and then I heard it. Barely audible over the singsong chirping of birds and the whirring of the Segway wheels, someone was humming. It sounded like a young boy, twelve, maybe thirteen. He was out in the distance, just out of reach. Needless to say, my parents got rid of the Segway after that”

As I heard a wave of gasps emanate from my audience, I fought back a smile. I had done it, and to my utmost pleasure and amusement, even Sharon had nothing to say about it.

“Honey, your friends’ parents called, I think they ought to get going now,” Mom called out.

Honestly, I was pretty glad they had to leave, being the center of attention gets tiring, you know?

“Bye guys. I’ll see you next Saturday, then?” I asked as Jake and Sharon headed upstairs.

“Sure thing.” Sharon replied. I rolled my eyes as she reached the top step. I really only wanted Jake over, but being his obnoxious twin sister, Sharon always tagged along.

“So, Clyde. You really drink coffee, huh?” Lucy asked, the top of her head more resembling a bowl of spaghetti than hair with the amount of twirling she had done.

“Yeah, uh, every day. Don’t you have to get going? I think your moms waiting for you,” I replied. Sheesh, coffee? That’s all it took? Teenagers, right?

“Oh, yeah. Sorry about that,” She giggled, climbing up the stairs. “I’ll see you Saturday, then.”

“Cool, sounds good,” I replied. I sank to the sofa, exhausted after a tiring days work.

Two seconds of quiet later, Clyde heard the CREAK he so deeply resented.

“Hi munchkin. Dinner’s ready, you can come upstairs anytime now,” his mom said. “Oh, and...” she added, hesitantly. “I was wondering. Was my humming any better today? I know we haven’t practiced it as much as The Drooling Tomato or The Eternal Sticky Keys, but I thought I was getting a lot better.”

“MOM! What have I told you about giving omniscient third person narrators too much information? God, you never listen to me!” Clyde yelled in response.

“Oh, I’m sorry baby,” his mom said. “I just wanted to know -”

“Forget it,” Clyde interrupted, pressing a button on his phone to turn the lights off in the basement before stomping his way to the dining table.

Gotcha.