

The Willies

Ethan Crownberry



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To Sofia. May you never know fear.

On Halloween night, if you hear someone scream,
like they've just woken up from a nightmarish dream,
it might be a goblin, or a ghoul, or a ghost,
or a big hairy monster that's scared them the most...





But take it from me, out of all we can list,
there are scarier things in the world that exist.
There are things we can't see but can certainly hear,
and the sounds that they make fill our hearts up with fear.
There are things we can feel but we just can not touch,
and the thought of such things makes our heart beat too much.
There are things we hear lurking behind closet doors,
in our attics, our basements, our walls, and our floors.
There are things that go "bump" in the darkness of night,
and sometimes they even go "bump" in the light.
Yes, of all of the monsters, the big and the small,
the Willies, I'd say, are the worst of them all...

And one night it had happened, some time around eight.
I was on my way home and was running quite late.
I was out on the street; I was not yet a teen,
just a lad barely twelve out on ol' Halloween.
I had just left a friend's, where his dad told a story,
a Halloween tale quite macabre and quite gory.
Now, the story he told had no meaning or plot,
it was just a grim tale meant to scare us a lot.
But what scared me the most, and what stuck in my head,
was the last thing of all, out of all he had said.
He said,





“On your way home there are things you might hear,
but there’s no need to worry—there’s nothing to fear.

For it’s only the Willies out traipsing about,
and on Halloween night they just love to come out.
They’ll be out there for sure; there’s one way you can check;
all the hair will stand up on the back of your neck.
Now, there’s no need to panic—no cause for alarm;
they just mean to scare you; they mean you no harm.
But the Willies won’t rest ‘til their job is quite done;
they will not rest at all ‘til you cry, scream, or run.
No, the Willies won’t stop ‘til they give you a fright,
if it takes them all day, or it takes them all night.”

And so there I was on Ol' Hollow Oak Lane,
a wrong turn or two down from Elm Street and Main,
a road that at nighttime was so dimly lit
even cats holding flashlights could not see one bit.
Yes, Ol' Hollow Oak Lane was a lane hardly traveled,
an endless dirt road with some parts slightly graveled,
a long winding path through a deep darkened wood,
where no one ever goes, and no one ever should.
And the full moon above had an odd, eerie glow,
with a cloud or two passing below it quite low.
And the air was as still as a statue of stone,
with a dampness that chilled me right down to the bone.





It was growing quite dark. I could feel my heart race.
I could barely see my hand right in front of my face.
I should have turned back—should have turned right around.

I was all by myself—not a soul to be found.
And then came a noise, like the snap of a stick.
I turned around fast. Boy, I turned around quick.
“Who’s out there?” I asked, but no one answered back,
just another twig snapped with a much louder crack.
Yes, something was out there, a man or a beast,
but which one did not matter, at all, in the least.

No, whatever it was, I did not need to know.
And one thing was quite clear, it was time I should go.

It was time to move on. There was no need to stay.
So I turned right around and went right on my way.
I tiptoed off slowly, then quickened my pace,
then I found myself caught in an odd sort of chase.
For the noises, as hoped, did not linger behind.
And these noises were not simply things in my mind.
No, these noises were real, and kept right on my tail
with each step that I took down that long darkened trail.





Was it goblins, or ghouls, or some new fangled curse?
Or were all of these noises from something much worse?

Then a chill that I felt, just a small tiny speck,
grew and grew up my spine, then grew right up my neck.
Then the hair on my neck rose with each inch I walked
(a feeling one gets when they're now being stalked).

And I knew at that moment my friend's dad was right.
Yes, the Willies would come for me all through the night.
They would not rest one bit 'til their job was quite done.

They would not rest at all 'til I cry, scream, or run.

And at first, I was frightened, and angered a tad.
Then the thought of these things chasing me made me mad.
So I turned and put both of my hands on my hips,
and I shouted so loudly I hurt both my lips.
I said, "You'll never scare me, though try as you may.
I won't scream! I won't cry! I will not run away!
I will not run from noises—not one single inch!
I will not bat an eye! I will not even flinch!
You Willies are mean! You are not at all nice!
And I'll tell you this once! I will not tell you twice!
I will not be afraid! I will not play your game!
And you're not welcome here, so go back where you came!"





And quite quickly the noises all came to a stop,
and the road fell so calm you could hear a pin drop.
And so proudly I huffed, and just turned without care,
and walked off with my nose held up high in the air.

But a few minutes later, not far 'round the bend,
my troubles, it seemed, were quite far from their end.

Something was wrong; I was not quite sure what.

But something was not sitting well in my gut.

I felt as though someone was looking at me—
a deep endless stare that would not leave me be.





Then the hair on my forearms now started to rise,
and the hair on my neck stood up taller in size.
Something was haunting me—chilling me so,
making goosebumps rise up on my skin head to toe.
So I stopped, and I turned, and looked deep in the trees,
and saw something so scary it buckled my knees.
Something was there in the darkness of night,
just lurking around like a lurking thing might.

And there in the forest, a shadow appeared.
It was just as I thought. It was just as I feared.
And this shadow alone would have been quite a sight,
but what's scarier still were its eyes big and white.
Not once ever blinking, these eyes kept on glaring,
just staring me down with a long endless staring.
Then up came two more on its left and right side;
two shadows popped up, and four eyes opened wide.





And now there were three—it was three against one.

I wanted to leave, but my legs wouldn't run.

I wanted to scream and I wanted to cry,
yet boldly I stood with my chin held up high.

"Just go on and stare! Take a good look!" I said.

"Just stare all you want with those eyes in your head!

I won't scream! I won't cry! I will not run away!

I will not run from shadows! Not now! Not today!

And I'll tell you again, like I've told you before!

I will say it again! One more time, and no more!

I will not be afraid! I will not play your game!

And you're not welcome here, so go back where you came!"

And as quick as a blink, all six eyes closed up tight.
In a snap, all three shadows disappeared from my sight.
And quite certain I'd shooed off those Willies for good,
I just turned and walked off just as fast as I could.





Then onward I went for at least one more mile,
no noises, no shadows, at least, for a while.
Quite cold and still lost, I was loosing all hope.
I was tired—warn out—at the end of my rope.
Then down from the sky shined a moonbeam so bright;
through the clouds that had parted the moon shined its light.
And there, up ahead, on the side of the road,
in a small patch of grass that had never been mowed,
was a sign on a post 'bout as high as my head.
“Welcome to Ol’ Johnson’s Farm,” the sign read.

Now, the good news was this: I was no longer lost.
The bad news: to get home would come at great cost.
For I'd been out to Ol' Johnson's Farm quite a lot,
but just not out this far, and nowhere near this spot.
And this farm of Ol' Johnson's was three miles wide,
and the road where I lived was nowhere near this side.
No, the road where I lived was three miles at best
through the corn fields of Ol' Johnson's farm heading west.





Well, the first thing I wanted to do was turn back,
but Ol' Hollow Oak Lane had grown far too pitch black.

There was no other choice—only one thing to do—
march up to that corn field and shove my way through.

So I sighed and I walked past the sign and the post
wondering what things inside would now scare *me* the most.
And I pushed. And I shoved. And I carved out a trail.

Through that corn field I went, over hill, over dale.

And for minutes, it seemed, I moved onward quite well,
but how far I had gone, I could not rightly tell.
For the field was quite dim, and the corn was too tall,
and beyond where I was, I could not see at all.
I was wandering around like a mouse in a maze,
my thoughts running wild, my mind in a daze.
I was hopelessly lost; there was simply no doubt;
I was trapped in this field and would never get out.





Then all of a sudden, from the corner of my eye,
a figure rose up from the corn field quite high.
Though it looked like a man, I could not rightly say.
But whatever it was, it was looking my way.
On its head was a hat tilted down to one side.
From its neck hung a scarf that was not tightly tied.
On its back was a jacket quite tattered and torn.
On its legs were some pants that in spots were quite worn.
And there it just stood like a fiend in the night,
its arms spread out wide like a bird taking flight,
just waiting for someone like me to walk past
where its long arms could reach down and snatch me up fast.

My heart went a-flutter, then started to pound.
I could not speak a word; I could not make a sound.
I was gasping for air; I could not find my breath.
I could not move at all; I was quite scared to death.





Then up from the small of my back came a chill,
which went right up my spine, like a chill often will.
Then the hair on the back of my neck stood up straight
(a feeling, I'd say, I had quite grown to hate).
And I knew, then and there, that this man was no man;
it was only the Willies doing all that they can.
Who else would it be but the Willies? Of course!
Yes, the Willies had come back again in full force.

And by now, I had had about all I could take.
I was angry, annoyed, and in need of a break.
“Now listen, you Willies,” I said with a sneer.
“You will not scare me off! Not this month! Not this year!
I will not run away! I won’t scream! I won’t cry!
You will not have your way, no matter how hard you try!
And I really must add, you are not all that bright,
‘cause I’ve told you this two times already tonight!
I will not be afraid! I will not play your game!
And you’re not welcome here, so go back were you came!”





And for what happened next, I was not quite prepared.
For the man did not move, he just stood there and stared.
Just standing there staring, quite still he just stood.
And he stared and he stared like a scary man would.
No, the Willies, it seemed, had not heard what I said.
Or perhaps they just chose to ignore me instead.
For the man had stayed put; he did not go away.
Yes, the Willies, it seemed, were now quite here to stay.

I was scared, you could tell by the look on my face.
So backwards I tiptoed away from that place.
But to cry, scream, or run, I just simply would not.
I, instead, calmly inched my way far from that spot.
And for quite some time after, I pressed on and on;
the Willies still out there, the chills not quite gone.
They were out there for sure watching each step I took,
quite determined to scare me by hook or by crook.
And then lo and behold, where the corn stalks had parted,
the cornfield had stopped where some blacktop had started.
And there to my right, perhaps two to three feet,
was a sign on a post that said, "Ol' Maple Street".





Then my heart leapt with joy. I could not help but smile.

I knew I had made it; I'd be home in a while.

For this street called "Ol' Maple" was one I knew well,
and the house at its end was the house where I dwell.

And in five or six minutes, maybe less, maybe more,
I was on my front stoop, heading through my front door.

But inside, in the hall, good ol' mom stopped me cold,
asking why I'd come home passed the time I'd been told.

So I told her 'bout all of the things I had seen,
'bout the way I got lost, 'bout the places I'd been.
I told her the truth, though it sounded like lies,
'bout the man in the field, 'bout the shadows, the eyes.
And I told her the story my friend's dad told me
while she stood there and listened quite curiously.
But the more I went on, the further fetched it all sounded;
and by the look on her face, I was sure I'd be grounded.
But, instead, mom just laughed, then she patted my head,
then she said a few things as she walked me to bed.
She said,





“Though you might think that the Willies are real,
they’re, in fact, only something that sometimes we feel.
They are not made of flesh. They are not made of bone.
They’re just something our minds conjure up on their own.
Now, the noises, I’d say, were just raccoons at play,
for they seem to come out more at night than by day.
And the shadows and eyes were perhaps only deer,
for they come out in droves this same time every year.
And the man that you saw in the field, I suppose,
had been put there on purpose to scare off the crows.
So you see, my young son, you are being quite silly;
there is nothing to fear, and no such thing as a Willie.”

But later that night, in my bed tucked in tight,
I stirred at the thought that not all was quite right.
I had just heard a noise, like a low sounding squeak.
Then soon after that came a loud drawn-out creak.
Then upright I sat and looked right straight ahead.
To the closet I looked near the foot of my bed.
For these noises I'd heard, I had heard once before;
it was noise from the hinge of my ol' closet door.
But what's worse was the door opening all by itself,
and two eyes staring down from the third or fourth shelf.





Now, outside I could see how these eyes could be deer.

But inside? Why on earth would a deer be in here?

No, these eyes were the Willies. Who else would it be?

They were at it again with their tomfoolery.

I could tell it was them; they had come back for more;

for the hair on my neck stood up just like before.

So I yelled to my mom, who was right down the hall.

And quite quickly she came in response to my call.

Then she flicked on the light, and she asked me, "What's wrong?"

To the closet I pointed, my arm stretched out long.

But the eyes were now gone, and I looked like a fool.
“Go to sleep,” said my mom. “In the morning you have school.”
“But I saw them!” I said. “I’m quite sure they were there.
There were eyes staring back from the closet. I swear!”
But again mom just laughed, and then gave me a pat,
then she bent down and picked up our ol’ family cat.
“Did the eyes look like his?” she asked, curious to know.
Then she laughed once again as she let the cat go.
“The Willies,” she said, “are just all in your mind.
There has never been any such thing of the kind.”
Then she walked to the door, and she flicked off the light,
and she stopped, and she turned, and she whispered, “Goodnight.”





Good ol' Mom knew her stuff, and most likely knew best.

On that note, I stretched out for a long needed rest.

Then she pulled the door closed, and I fell fast asleep.

And the room fell quite calm ...

not a sound..

not a peep...

Just remember,
there's no such thing as monsters.



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