

THE EXORCIST, NUIT, AND THE TICK

I don't believe in UFO's, ghosts, poltergeist, fairies, brownies, genies, the Loch Ness Monster, and I sure don't believe in Big Foot. Still, I have had the occasional encounter with the realm of the weird, and I concede the possibility of demonic possession. After all, I raised four children and can assure you that I have witnessed behavior that nothing else can explain.

Anyway, when I was a student, a fellow by the name of William Peter Blatty wrote a bestseller entitled "The Exorcist." It was a fictionalized account of an actual exorcism conducted by the Jesuit Priest Father Halloran in the psychiatric wing of Alexian Brothers Hospital. Father Halloran was one of the three priests in attendance, and he was needed for his muscle as much as his prayers, because the 14 year old boy was out of control, and getting marks of the beast all over his body and even words like hell were appearing in welts. That's no big deal. I've seen my kids do most of that stuff with my own eyes. Father Halloran got his nose broken, but the exorcism seems to have taken because the young lad went on to lead an ordinary life. "The Exorcist" turned out to be a page-turner, and I couldn't put it down. At 2:00 A.M., I'd come to the part where the heroine is cursing like a sailor and screaming like a banshee and projectile puking vile stuff all over the place and spinning her head around and rearranging the furniture without touching it and the priest is making the sign of the cross and praying with the crucifix held high when Bam!, the bookshelf collapsed and books fell all over the place. In the early morning silence it sounded like a bomb went off and my heart beat violently as it tried to squeeze through the gaps in my ribs.

Fifteen minutes passed and nothing else happened. I giggled like a man who's had a close call and then begun to rationalize things away. It was the timing of the coincidence that got to me. That bookshelf had

never collapsed before, never did again, and there was nothing to explain it. Maybe God has a mischievous sense of humor. If so, that was a good one, God. One thing's for sure, it took me awhile to fall asleep that night, and I sure didn't curl up with a good book.

Then there was Nuit. He was an exceptional cat. Nuit was jet black without a spec of any other color, like the kind of cat you don't want crossing your path at night when the moon is full. And Nuit's eyes. Ah, they were lustrous green cat's eyes that were always so calm and self-assured. When you picked him up he would sag and drape around the contours of your arms like a warm fur muffler that vibrated. My wife Nancy and I loved that cat. Some days I wished we'd stuck with cats, but I'm much better now.

We found Nuit on one of those cold, wet, and raw days in early spring, nestled in the jumbled shoots of a lilac bush. Just days old, he was there with his three equally helpless siblings. The mother was a lovely feral calico, but evidently over her head, and no father anywhere. She almost asked for help. The kittens needed it. They had no eyes, just sockets that oozed puss. I couldn't watch when Nancy forced the swollen lids open to see if they had eyeballs. They did, and so began a long relationship with our vet. The kittens just had nasty colds, and with medicine they got better and moved in, more or less, because Mother Cal, as we called the calico, was more comfortable outside than in.

As I said, we loved Nuit. Now feral cats disappear from time to time and you never are quite sure where they've been or what they've done, but when Nuit went missing for a week we sadly concluded he wasn't coming back, or couldn't, or something

I was down in the basement late one night doing laundry and looked out the window and there was Nuit, calmly looking at me with those big, beautiful cat's eyes. Ecstatic, I bounded to the door, went outside, and no Nuit. Anywhere. Now that door is just six feet from the window. I knew then and there that that cat wasn't ever coming back.

I don't know how it is around your home, but 'round here if Nancy wants me I come running and if I want her I go to her. Anyway, I'm in the basement and she's on the second floor and she's calling me, insistent like, so I run up to the bedroom.

"You bellowed?"

"Don't be a jackass. Check my head, right here. I think there's a Tick in my hair." I checked. "Don't see anything, dear."

She parts her hair with her fingers to expose bare scalp. "There, right there." "There's nothing there." "Yes there is. It's right there. Can't you see it?"

Her tone tells me I'd better come up with something. I'm looking. Nothing. Then the hairs stand up on the nape of my neck, and I reach back and feel the same exact spot on my own head and there's the Tick, dug in and getting fat.

Like I said, I believe that most of that stuff is bunk, but I don't know. . .