

The Party

a short story by
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1. Gate Crashers.

"Of course it is, silly. How could you not know their names." Janice was radiant as usual, and efficiency itself around the kitchen. Dave, on the other hand, was neither. "I tell you I don't know them. They've gate crashed!" The couple in question were busy eating their way along the buffet table. "Sure is a swell party Effie," Eric said. "This food is wonderful." "Hey mom," Simon said as he burst through the kitchen door. "Those people are eating everything!" Janice looked, catching a glimpse of the couple through the open kitchen door. "Well, that's what the food is for dear." She said to her irate son. Simon turned to leave the kitchen mumbling under his breath something about getting a look in. "Like I said, gate crashers." Dave said again. "Don't be so uncharitable Dave, they may be having hard times." Janice was always willing to give folk the benefit of the doubt. That was her nature. Dave was having none of it and went to sort them out. That was his nature.

"Hey, you two!" He said marching across the room. It went very quiet and all eyes turned to the guilty looking couple with the very full plates. As Dave approached, he began to see how shabby their clothes were. This only served to infuriate him more. "Damn tramps." He said under his breath. "Just who are you, and what are you doing in my house?" Most folk in the room had looked away in embarrassment. It was well known that Dave could fly off the handle. Only Simon looked on hoping to see his dad sort them out. Dave caught his son's eye and motioned to him to put some music on. When the sound filled the room, Dave continued his tirade. "Look!" he said, "You're not welcome here. This is a private party. He snatched the plates from the stunned couple and pointed to the door. Effie said, "Come on Eric, we are obviously not wanted here." Dave scowled at them both. They moved slowly away from the table in the direction of the door, Dave right behind them as if to make sure they didn't steal anything as they left.

Janice had stopped what she was doing in the kitchen, and was watching her husband perform the eviction. Her face was full of compassion for the hapless couple who were at the mercy of her husband. Eric turned to her and smiled. "Thank you, for the wonderful food." He said. There was a light in his eyes that seemed to cut right through her to her soul. It lasted just as long as he looked at her, then it faded, and another look came to the fore. "As for you," he said straight to Dave's face. "Your place will be with the Jackals." Dave pushed him roughly, and the couple left the house. The door slammed shut behind them. The freezing draft that had come through it caused everyone to shiver. "Way to go dad," Simon said as Dave came back into the room. "Come on son, let's go and get some of that food."

The party just wasn't the same after that, and folk began to leave early. Janice went to the bedroom and wept quietly. She was worried about Dave, he seemed to be losing it. She came back to the party trying to be a good hostess. Everyone warmed to her efforts, and she did manage to rescue the situation to a degree, but most of the guests were gone by nine.

Dave was sullen afterwards, and sat in the corner with Simon for company. The look on Dave's face was as efficient as a barb wire fence at keeping the few remaining guests away. Only Simon was allowed inside its perimeter.

The last few stragglers were gone by ten, and Janice began to tidy up. There's nothing quite like being left in the house after the party has ended. There's a kind of emptiness that is exacerbated by the mess. Simon jumped up and began to help his mom, but Dave just sat there looking sullen. Janice whispered to her son to quietly remove the bottle from the table near David. He didn't do it quietly enough and Dave snatched it from him. His look at Janice said, "just you dare try to stop me!" Janice took Simon's hand and said, "Come on son, lets' go to bed. We can finish up in the morning." Her grip told Simon that it was useless to argue. "Night dad." He shouted as she dragged him from the room. There was no response to his offering. Dave just looked like thunder.

Once up stairs, Simon said, "What's up mom, why is dad staying down stairs on his own?" Janice couldn't think of a good answer and so said simply, "Good night son, sweet dreams." "Good night mom." Simon went into his room. Janice went into her room, and wept again, bitterly.

2. Bumps in the Night

Some hours had passed. Janice was not sure how many, and she didn't want to look at the clock. The room was dark, and the whole house was deathly quiet. She could only imagine what state Dave would be in by now. The thought frightened her. She tried to sleep, but she kept coming round. No position seemed comfortable. It was as though the bed was full of planks. She tossed constantly, searching for some comfort, but none came.

There was a noise. Normally, she wouldn't have picked up on it. It wasn't a loud noise, but in her present state, she would have heard a pin drop at forty paces. There it was again. Subtle, quiet, and yet, it seemed close, like it was in the room with her. She sat up suddenly. An involuntary action, staring into the darkness. There was nothing there. She scanned the room slowly, making mental notes that what she saw was meant to be there. All was well, except, there it was again. Louder this time, and it came from by the door. She strained her eyes trying to force herself to see in the darkness. She saw nothing except what was supposed to be there. Then, something moved. Janice breathed in sharply. She had seen something move, she was sure of that. She covered her mouth with the covers so as not to cry out. Fear was tangible in the room, her fear. She bit her hand as it held the covers over her mouth.

Moments passed, and Janice's gaze was fixed solidly staring at the bedroom door. Tears were beginning to trickle down her cheeks and she wiped them away as quickly as she could. A creak, over in the corner. Her head snapped to where it came from. The dressing table, it was the dressing table. It moved. She stared at it, as it slowly began to move across the floor towards the door. The carpet ruffled up as the legs slid across it, but it kept moving. Her heart pounded in her chest. So much so, that she could hear it beating. The sound seemed to fill the room, punctuated only by the odd noise that the dressing table made as it slid slowly across the room.

There was a bump as the dressing table hit the door. It slowly turned until it was flat against the door blocking it completely. "I'm trapped," She thought to herself. She didn't dare speak out, or make any noise for that matter. Her thoughts turned to the window. There was no other way of escape. Did she dare get off the bed... Nothing else had happened, and all was quiet now that the door was blocked.

Janice made a super human effort to regain control of herself and slowly began to ease her leg out of bed. Her foot touched the floor. Slowly, she transferred her weight onto it and withdrew the other from the bed. She was out. The covers fell noiselessly to the floor as she backed away from the bed, her eyes fixed on the dressing table. She hit

the wall where the window was, and began to slide along it towards the window. She felt the sudden chill on her back as she reached it. Slowly she turned her head to try and see the catch whilst keeping her body facing the door. Her arm reached up and found it. Slowly, Janice turned the catch to open the window. It opened, and a blast of freezing air filled the room. Taking another few seconds to compose herself, she turned to face the open window.

She sobbed when she saw what was out there. It was not her street. There was no road, no street lights, no cars. A thick mist covered the ground, swirling in the freezing breeze. Trees were everywhere. Which ever way she looked, all she could see were trees with mist hiding the ground between them. Janice sobbed more and more as her desperation grew. The mist swirled, as though something was moving through it. She thought she heard the sound of breathing, but fear caused her to be confused, so she wasn't sure. There was no escape that way. She resigned herself to her fate and went back to bed. At least it was warm under the covers.

Nothing else in the room had changed. The dressing table was fast against the door, and all was silent. Janice pulled the covers around her as she sat up in bed. Her eyes became very heavy, but she didn't dare close them.

3. The Night Mare

A sudden noise woke her up, though she hadn't known that she had been asleep. The ache in her neck confirmed it. The noise was loud, but thankfully, it was not in her room. No, it seemed to be coming from down stairs. "Dave," she said out loud. She had forgotten all about him. He was still down stairs. Some how, that comforted her. At least there was some kind of explanation for this new noise, Dave was drunk and falling about. "Yes, that's it, It's just Dave." Her voice sounded strange in the darkened room. Suddenly, she wondered what would happen if Dave came to bed. He'd think shed blocked the door to stop him getting in. A rush of panic came over her. Things between her and Dave were not great, but she didn't want him to think she'd locked him out. Quite the contrary in fact, she'd give anything to have him close right now. The noise came again, it was louder. "If that was Dave falling," she thought, "It must have hurt."

It came again, only this time she recognised it as being on the stairs. There was another sound with it this time, a low, growling. Surely she must be dreaming this. She pinched herself and it hurt. There was more growling now. It sounded like there were two of them, no, three. The scream came long and loud and shrill. It was Dave, she could tell his voice even though it was a scream. The sound of a scuffle reached her ears along with the sound of tearing. "He's wrecking the house," she thought. "He's drunk and wrecking the house." She shrank back onto the bed, as if for comfort. The sound of dragging, and cries of pain. It was just outside her door. The growling was angry and constant. Another scream came, it sounded like a scream of agony. Her courage returned, and Janice rushed for the door. She grabbed the dressing table and pushed for all she was worth. It wouldn't budge. "Come on, move!" She screamed at it and pushed again. It was no use. The dressing table remained firmly fixed across the door.

The banging made her jump. "Dave, is that you?" The banging on the door was frantic, as were the cries of pain and horror. "Ja... J..." A terrible roar and final scream filled the whole house. "DAVE!" Janice screamed at the top of her voice. She fell to the floor sobbing bitterly, leaning on the dressing table. "Dave... Dave..." The only sound now was her sobbing. All else was still. Deathly still.

The sun was shining when Janice awoke. The window being open was allowing in the sound of the birds singing. A gentle breeze was blowing the curtains, it was a beautiful

day. Janice got out of bed and looked out of the window. Yes it was a beautiful day. Sitting at her dressing table, she brushed her hair and looked at the redness of her eyes. "Another bad night," she said in jest. It was then that it began to come back to her. She sat thinking how ridiculous it was. "Some dream, I must keep off the cheese!" She stood and turned towards the bedroom door. The carpet was all scrunched up, she almost tripped over it. "No, it couldn't be," she said. "It must have been a dream." She opened the door and stopped dead in her tracks. The door was scratched and the carpet was torn. The signs of a struggle were everywhere. Janice ran down the stairs. The house was devastated. All the furniture was ripped to shreds. Cushions were strewn over the floor with their stuffing pulled out.

Simon came down. "Boy did I have a funny dream mom... Wow, what happened here?" Janice didn't know what to say. She certainly didn't want Simon to know that Dave had done it in a drunken rage. "Where's dad mom?" "I don't know son," She answered, "There's no trace of him." "Some party eh?" Simon said. "Look at the mess..." It all came back to her when Simon said. "It looks as though a pack of wild animals has rampaged through here!"

A knock came at the door. Janice opened it. It was Eric and Effie smiling broadly. "Hello dear," Effie said. "We just wanted to thank you for all the wonderful food."

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