

It Was Just A Door

I've never told this story before. I've thought about it day and night yet never said it aloud. So forgive me if I'm not quite as eloquent as you would like.

I didn't take note of the date as I didn't believe the day would be any different from the one before. But I remember that it was raining. It was definitely raining because I remember how my coat clung tight to my body and how my head was drowned by the sound of the rain hitting my hood, the thing that offered the only protection I had. I had gone for my daily walk; it wasn't raining so heavily when I had set off. I walked the same route every day; across the road and through the forest. I knew every inch of that forest, I lived across from it my whole life, so I would notice if there was something different. And this day there was. It was large enough to notice from a reasonable distance. It sat on the forest floor but extended up roughly two meters in height. As I got closer, I noticed that it shared other similarities with the trees around it, as it was made of wood. It was old wood that splintered off, and not like the bark on the trees. I saw very clearly that this was a door. Obviously, I thought it odd, a door that doesn't lead anywhere, in the middle of a forest. So, here's the question, there's a mysterious door in a forest, do you go through it, or around it?

As I said, it was raining that day, so I didn't want to spend too long debating this with myself. A decision had to be made and so it was. Just like you did, I went through. I

figured it couldn't do any harm and only an exceptionally boring person would go around it. It's good to know neither of us are boring isn't it?

I pulled my hand out from its warm, dry sanctuary and gripped the spherical golden door knob. I gripped tightly as I thought the rain would make turning it much more of a challenge, but as I turned the handle the thick, heavy door inched open at once. Now that I really think about it, and say it out loud, it almost seems like the door wanted me to open it. Did it seem that way to you? I should've stopped there. I should have turned back, gone home and forgotten all about it. But I had opened the door, so I had to go through it.

I stepped through the door and allowed my feet to drop heavily onto the soft ground beneath me. At first, I assumed nothing had changed. Why would it? It was still raining, it was still a forest, the ground was still covered in leaves, and it was just a door. But something had changed. As I looked around, I noticed a large, crumbling rock, about the height of my hip. Something about it seemed familiar so I edged towards it and knelt down for a closer look. The door behind me swung shut, I turned my head to see what had caused such a slamming and chalked it up to wind. On the stone I noticed lettering carved into it. I brushed away the moss and squinted through the rain. Using my fingers, despite being practically numb, to help trace out the letter I was able to make out the words 'Beverly Blankenship'. I looked up, past the stone, and saw more just alike. 'William Whitmore', 'Charlton Cummings'. As I moved along, the forest dispersed out

and the graveyard took over. Headstones replacing trees. The names became more clear and the stones more whole.

I suddenly noticed that the rain had stopped. Funny how that happens, you always notice when it starts but never when it stops. I pulled my hood down releasing myself to the open air. As the last remaining raindrops escaped from my blurred eyes, I thought it best to take this opportunity to properly survey my surroundings. Around me I could see hundreds of these stones, all with names somewhat amateurishly carved into them. Other than that, all I could see was the forest behind me and between the trees, the door. It was the same door I stepped through but that wasn't the same forest. I know that for sure.

Before I had a moment to think I was interrupted by a deafening crack of thunder, and the rain fell down once more but harder than I had ever known before. I knew I couldn't stand here examining headstones forever, so I began to scout the area for a particularly overgrown tree to shelter under. But there was no need. For as my gaze covered the area, this time with the rain blocking most of my vision, I noticed something I'm sure wasn't there before. A house.

While entombing myself back into my raincoat I quickly marched through the graveyard, avoiding what I could tell to be the deeper puddles, and halted sharply at the front door. Despite all the strange goings on I had not forgotten my manners, so I knocked. Three

times as hard as I could so that it would be heard over the atrocious song nature had decided to sing that day. I waited a moment. I'm afraid the front of this house was not so efficiently designed as my own as there was no porch sheltering visitors at the front door. So, as you can imagine, I was rather impatient. Once again, I released my hand from its pocket and raised it to knock on the black wooden door for a second time. But before my hand made contact with the wood, I heard three knocks. This time from the inside. Admittedly the rain was loud, but I'm sure I heard three knocks. You probably think I'm making something out of nothing, that it was just an echo. But in my experience, echoes don't wait so long to make themselves heard. I was unsure of what to do here, but still I was so desperate to get out of the rain that I'm sorry to say I left my manners behind and let myself in.

Somehow the house seemed much larger on the inside than what had suddenly appeared before me outside in the rain. To my left I noticed a coat rack already piled high with various colours. All bone dry. Just beneath the coats was an equally large pile of shoes. I took this as a silent request from the occupant to remove my shoes, which I did, placing them just to the side of the existing pile as to be able to find them again easily. I felt much more comfortable having removed my rain-soaked items and I took a look at the magnificent building I had found myself in.

I was still relatively close to the front door but could see a large portion of the house from where I stood. Straight ahead was a large staircase with intricately designed

wooden banisters that curved and coiled their way up accompanying the stairs, which were draped with a bright red carpet. Above, was a huge chandelier with crystals dripping down from the ceiling. The light at the centre of it was on, illuminating all surroundings. Around the rest of the grand hallway there were entrances to a number of rooms, but you've seen all that. None of the rooms piqued my interest so I proceeded up the staircase. I ran my hand along the banister, this time, not shivering from the cold rain, I was able to feel every little detail. Though mostly smooth and varnished, every so often there was a small notch carved out, and the red carpet, which looked so bright and beautiful from the doorway, I noticed was slightly faded, with stains in some areas. Half way up, the staircase forked off to the left and right. I was already stood to the right-hand side so proceeded up that way. Before I got much further, I saw something laying on the stairs. It reflected the light from the chandelier so from a distance I couldn't quite make out what it was. As I leaned closer towards it, I saw clearly that it was a dagger.

The dagger was just as elegant as the staircase it sat upon. The handle was completely black with raised detailing that mimicked vines entwining it. The vines extended up onto the blade which appeared just as sharp as it was bright. Tied round the handle was a piece of string, with a note. "For my visitor". I looked back to the staircase on the left to see if there was something similar, but nothing. Did they know I'd go to the right? Was it a lucky guess? Have they been watching me? Who are they? A million questions ran through my mind, but I picked up the dagger anyway. Something told me I might need it. I removed the string and proceeded up to the top of the staircase where the red carpet flooded out onto the landing. Straight ahead on the landing was a large stain glass

window that stretched from the floor to the ceiling. The colourful glass pieced together made a simple abstract pattern, I stepped forward to look out the window. Below me I saw the graveyard that merged in with the forest. Just barely, between the trees, I could make out the door. I wondered whether stepping back through it would send me back home, whether I should turn back and try now. But I had gotten this far, and curiosity was leading me the rest of the way. I stepped back from the window and what was before a collection of random shapes and colours had now become a picture. A picture of a person, standing, holding a dagger similar to my own, and below them a pool of blood. Suddenly the dagger I held didn't seem so elegant, the red carpet on the staircase felt more ominous, and the chandelier dripping with crystals was sharper and more dangerous than before.

"You're not going to stand out there all day, are you?" came a voice softly from the doorway to my right.

I turned to the figure standing in the doorway, conscious that my breathe had become deeper and more panicked.

"Come in," he said, knocking on the floor three times with a walking stick.

At this point it was a battle within myself, common sense versus curiosity. Once again curiosity won. I followed the man into the room where he had sat down in a large, plush armchair. Opposite was another chair identical. He gestured for me to sit, and I did.

Though I made sure not to let myself get too comfortable.

"I see you found my dagger," he looked down at what I still had firmly grasped in my hand.

I didn't respond. I studied his face and yet I could not tell you what he looked like. Only that he was old, and tired. I'm sure you're looking at me the same way now. We sat for a moment in silence. Until finally he began to speak. He told me his story of how he arrived here, just like I am to you. His story was very similar to my own, much like, I'm sure, yours is to mine. He told me how he had arrived through the door and found this grand house. Though it wasn't so grand then. Covered in ivy, he said, bricks crumbling from the walls. He recounted his last few years to me and how he had been hoping for a visitor, how he had been preparing for one, how he was so happy when I arrived. I smiled graciously but still said nothing. I looked down at the dagger I held, noticing again the ivy that didn't move yet seemed to grow around it. I was still unsure of why he had given it to me. He noticed this and explained ever so calmly, that it is what I must use to kill him.

Everything went silent. I could no longer hear the rain outside. Silence. The wind through the house that had accompanied me my whole journey. Silence. I dropped the dagger to the floor. Silence. I stood up so unsteadily I knocked the chair over behind me. Silence. Everything seemed to slow down. I tried to run but could barely stand. Using the wall to steady myself I went as quickly as I could. I had to get out of here. Curiosity wouldn't win this time. I'm no murderer and I don't want anyone to think that I am. Back down the staircase leaning all my weight on the banister, this time not appreciating any of the fixtures. I left my coat and shoes behind, despite my previous

efforts to prepare for a quick exit, I didn't have time. I just had to get out. The rain hadn't stopped, and each cold droplet stung me more than the last, but I didn't care. Through the graveyard, into the forest, to the door. I gripped the doorknob and twisted. Nothing. I tried again. Nothing. Desperate, I tried to break it down, pushing on it with all my weight. But it wouldn't budge. I turned back and through the rain saw the man in the window. I yelled to him, I screamed, I pleaded.

"Let me out! Let me out!"

But he just stood there. I ran back inside the house and up to his room. I couldn't hold it any longer, I fell to the floor, my tears joining the rain dripping down my face. The man knelt down next to me, struggling and using his cane for support.

"It's okay," he said. "There's nothing you can do."

He held the dagger out in front of me. He remained calm but his eyes revealed his secret, he was scared. I looked at the dagger and back at him. He nodded. Suddenly, like I had never felt before, I was filled with rage. I was stuck here. My life was ruined. My life was over. And it was his fault! I looked him once more in the eyes, he was really scared now, and not so calm. He stood up and I followed. Both of us standing in the centre of this room on top of the red carpet. He started to scream, in agony. I looked down and saw that I had plunged the dagger deep into his stomach. I didn't even notice I had done it. He slouched over and slumped towards the doorway. I followed him. I was much younger, much stronger, and much fitter than him. It wasn't really a fair fight. He reached the landing and I grabbed him by the shoulders and threw him over to the top of the staircase. He lay on the floor whining, clutching his stomach. I stood over him.

Still angry, I felt no remorse. I could see how much pain he was in, but I didn't care. I wanted to care, I wanted to help him. But I just stood there. Watching the blood flood through his fingers and drip down the staircase. He looked straight at me. The fear had gone, this was peace.

Hoarsely he whispered "Oliver Owens."

I just stood there. Looking down on him. What was once a person just like you or I was now a corpse lying breathless at my feet.

I spent the rest of that day exploring the downstairs. I didn't dare go back up. I couldn't face it. I found a workshop, and in it a large number of blank headstones. I set to work and spent the night chiselling the man's name as neatly as I could.

By the next morning it had stopped raining. I ventured out and found a nice spot underneath his window. I hope he would have like it. It took me almost an hour to dig a grave deep enough. I was slowed down by my tendency to gaze off and glance at the door in the forest, wondering if anyone would come through it just like I did. They didn't. I buried Mr Owens, erected his headstone and returned back inside.

I waited.

I've lost track of the years, but it's raining again. And you made the same mistake I did. You went through the door. Why didn't we just go around it? I'm sure people with more common sense would. I've told you my story just as Mr Owens did to me. I suppose now you didn't really need to hear it; you at least knew the beginning already. But it's nice to have someone to talk to. You'll miss that. I hope I made that dagger sharp enough for you. Mr Owens' did it with one blow and I don't want to suffer any more than I already have. I'm sorry I can't give you any more answers but I just don't have them. You'll tell the same thing to the next person.

We both know what has to happen now. But first, let me tell you my name.