

Headless Horsemen

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As I look around my room in this practical, unimaginative daylight, I can yet feel the terror and see the awful spirits which peopled it on moonlit nights long ago in my childhood imagination.

The moonlight, which must filter through the broad leaves of the sycamore outside my window and penetrate the draperies before it reached my bedroom, gave only a lukewarm illumination by the time it reached its destination, for each obstacle had captured a part of its strength.

To my eight-year-old eyes in the half-light the familiarity of the room was swallowed by shadows that filled the corners and camouflaged the furniture. I can feel yet the little shivers which tingled up and down my backbone and the reassuring warmth as I pulled my cocoon of covers tighter around me. But my eyes remained wide, filled with images summoned by the dusk of the room and my too vivid imagination.

Instead of being revealing, the light was just dim enough to distort and twist the vague shapes. I could not see the crazy patterns, the browns and yellows and greens in the linoleum; and the begonias and cacti, the ferns and poinsettia at the windows blended into unrecognizable shadows on the wall above my head.

I lay with my back to the wall so

that at all times I might keep my eyes on the formless terrors in the room. I remember that the spread and blankets carelessly arranged over the two tall posts at the foot of my mother's bed were, in reality, horrible Somethings, grotesque and hump-backed, waiting for my slightest movement, ready to pounce upon me ferociously. The bulk of the old-fashioned wardrobe, which still stands in the corner today, was a cave, sheltering sinister, creeping figures; and one corner of the huge mirror in the dresser gleamed eerily as a space in tree and curtains allowed a glimmer of pure moonlight to enter.

I can feel the tenseness of my muscles and the cramp in my legs which came from the effort to lie perfectly quiet, for with only the wiggle of one toe, who knew what manner of Headless Horsemen might come galloping from yonder gap in the wall, which in friendly daylight was only the doorway? The sound of the fire whispering gently in the pot-bellied stove and a subtle reminder of my mother's perfume hanging in the air, strange and anesthetizing at that hour, added to the unreality; and my dread mounted as the curtain, soft and smothering, drifted slowly across the bed, brushing my face and falling limply back at the window. As the moon swam behind a cloud, the room and I were enveloped in an abyss of blackness.