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The Words: ‘Darkness is Cheap’
Are Not Mentioned in This Story...

by Ali Giles

“Well now, one winter it was so cold round here that the ghosties came calling round the village, trying to get people to open their doors so they could slip inside, get in the warm. Nobody dared open their door for days.” The electrician took a sip of tea and smiled at Laura, winking over the rim of his cup.

Laura wrinkled her little nose and turned to her mother. “There’s no such thing as ghosts, is there mummy?”

“No, love. Mr Hobbs is just being silly,” Cassie said, tickling Laura’s nose with the end of her scarf. Laura’s eyes looked huge in her pale little face. “Why don’t you go in and help daddy start the fire?”

Laura nodded, glancing quickly at Hobbs as she ran inside.

“She’s quite the skinny little thing,” Hobbs said, “one puff of wind and she’ll blow away, I reckon.”

“She’s been very poorly actually,” Cassie told him, more than a little annoyed, “it’s why we moved here, so I wish you hadn’t told her the ghost story. She doesn’t sleep much as it is.”

Hobbs put his cup on the porch step and carefully rolled himself a cigarette. “Well it ain’t no story. Just so’s you know.”

Cassie stared at him, waiting for him to laugh then, or at least smile. “*Ghosties?* Oh, come on...”

“They like you strangers; easier to lure out. So don’t open the door to nobody you’re not expecting. Just in case.”

“Especially if they’re wearing a sheet and rattling chains, right?”

“You’ll think you know ’em. Very clever they are. Some of ’em bites the cables through so all your lights go out, so you get some candles or torches in there.” Hobbs blew out smoke and looked at her, “but they’ll probably already be in by then.”

“Sounds like an excuse for poor workmanship,” Cassie said sourly, “you must be making a killing.”

“How much did he charge us?” Richard asked.

“He wouldn’t take anything, funnily enough.”

“Why ‘funnily enough’?”

“Well, he told me this story...” Laura looked up then, and Cassie smiled wanly. “Oh, never mind.”

Richard returned his attention to the fire, spitting weakly in the grate. “Bloody wood’s wet,” he grumbled, “I’m going to need to chop some more.”

The tree tapping on her window woke her. Witches fingers. Laura wormed her way deeper under the quilt and tried to blot out the sound and not look at the creepy silhouettes they cast on her bedroom wall.

Then she realised it wasn’t the tree, but somebody at the door.

She knelt on her bed and looked out, and it was really dark, but the porchlight was on and it was daddy tapping at the door. He looked up at her window and waved: ‘let me in!’

In his other hand he carried the axe; he must have chopped lots of wood.

Laura climbed off the bed and went quickly downstairs to let him in.

And when she opened the door the porchlight flickered, then went out.