“Skully”

By T.D. Smith



Benjamin Knoggle lay wide awake in his new apartment face up on his back with the covers drawn up around his jaw to conceal his teeth’s involuntary chattering. He shook all over, uncontrollably.

He was not cold; he was *terrified.*

Each night in his new home, as soon as the one-bedroom flat grew dark, he could swear he was being watched. By someone or some*thing.* It was a most unsettling, uncomfortable feeling. Tonight, Wednesday night, was no different. It was only the fourth night sleeping in his new place that was nearer his job. He enjoyed the coziness of the living space and its proximity to work, as well as being able to sleep a little later due to its closeness to his work, but strange things were happening here that he could not explain and did not like at all.

The first night, Sunday night, there was a loud “CRASH!” in the kitchen downstairs shortly before midnight.

Awaking with a jolt, Ben cursed his dog.

“Dammit, Femur!”

But Femur, too, had started awake, and to his sudden dismay, Ben realized that Femur, being curled up on the bed at his feet, his cold, white body gleaming in the moonlight that trickled through the blinds of his bedroom window, was a most unlikely culprit behind the clatter.

Shaking and his skull beginning to fill with dreadful thoughts of who or what might have entered his home and caused this, spectral, physical, or otherwise, Ben tiptoed downstairs, baseball bat in hand.

He found nothing out of place, except his favorite coffee mug, which had inexplicably moved from its esteemed place on the top shelf in the kitchen cupboard (which he was *certain* had been closed) and fallen, evidently of its own accord, shattering into dozens of porcelain fragments on the linoleum tiled floor.

Examining the kitchen, the man found no signs of any perceivable agent or force that could have caused this. Shaken and shaking, both inside and out, he tiptoed back through the small living space, flipping on every light switch contained therein as he went.

He slept with the lights on that night.

On his second night, Monday night, an unexplainable coldness filled Ben’s bedroom, chilling him and causing his spine to rattle. Looking all around, his dark, deeply set eyes finally glanced over to the corner of the bedroom and landed on the closet.

Its door was ajar.

It had *definitely* been closed a moment ago.

The young man took several minutes of hiding under his blankets and whispering to himself that it was fine and nothing to worry about, ghosts and spooks aren’t real and it was probably just the wind or old hinges or something that caused the closet to open, before he worked up enough courage to rise from his bed and move over to the closet to close the door.

Clickety-clack, his pale, white feet went as we gingerly walked over to the place where he housed his clothes. His toes scraped lightly on the wooden floorboards as he moved step by step, and after several strides, he stood before the ominous open door and its pitch-black, obscured contents. An eerie, chilly wind was emanating from the closet’s threshold.

Ben gasped. In an instant, he could have sworn he saw an eye, round, with an evil, bright blue iris glinting in the streaming moonlight, surrounded by milky white, peering out from behind a hanging sweater. As it met his eye, its black pupil swiftly shrank. And what was worse, immediately after this he could have sworn he saw a flap of *skin* close tightly over the eye, obscuring it. Shaking his head furiously then peering closer, and the young man saw nothing. A slight thumping sound, and the coldness stopped, abruptly.

Promptly slamming his closet door, the young man clickety-clacked his way back to bed, pulled the covers over his head tight, rocking back and forth and trying his darndest to forget the events that had just unfolded.

On his third night, nothing odd happened physically, but Ben had nightmares of strange and evil-looking creatures, covered in *flesh,* who would lie lazily on the shore of some golden, warm, sandy beach. He could feel his ribs rattle in discomfort as he watched the smiling monstrosities' skin gradually brown with the constant kiss of the oppressive sun.

Lurching awake with a shout, Ben jumped out of bed, ran to the bathroom, and was sick.

Tonight, Wednesday night, he lay shaking beneath his covers as Femur, entirely undaunted, lay at the foot of the bed, his tail wagging with a rattling, consuming a long, thin cylinder of meat. The dog was unafraid of the bumping and thumping that Ben heard behind the closed closet door.

A sudden thud, and with a long, awful creaking, the door slid slightly ajar.

Ben covered his head.

Femur jumped up excitedly, wagging his tail. Leaping down onto the floor he trotted over with a clickety-clack of white, boney paws on floorboards, and looked up eagerly to greet whoever or whatever was now just behind the closet door. Femur stuck his snoot inside the crack in the door, and look a quick whiff and look.

Then the poor dog whimpered, turned, and fled, out of the bedroom, down the stairs, and into the living room, where it hid underneath Ben’s couch. He was tailed closely by his master, who flipped on every light in the house as they went, and, wrapped in a blanket that covered his bones from his skull to his metatarsals and phalanges, joined the dog under the couch. They both shuddered, cowering together until the wee hours of the morn when they finally fell asleep beneath the couch for the remainder of the night.



The next morning, Ben struggled to stay awake at work. He had delivered the introductory lesson to his students on the white board, using different colored dry-erase markers to illustrate elaborate notes for them. As they scribbled them down jauntily and then moved into their independent research activities, Ben slumped into the dilapidating brown faux-leather chair, whose arms were shabby and peeling, and typed a query into Boogle on his browser.

All kinds of theories and stories and obviously doctored photographs emerged in front of the man’s face, floating about on the digital screen. His dark, deep-set eyes took in all of this information, processing it, analyzing it, dissecting it. Scroll and search painstakingly as he might, he could find no relevant, credible source on the intricately woven web documenting any of the fleshy monsters for whom he searched relentlessly, and was not only certain existed, but were also intruding in his house!

Looking up, he witnessed his see of students all silently, studiously laboring away with various computer keys clacking and pens scribbling on paper. He decided to disturb their fixated concentration.

“Does anybody believe in monsters?” Ben the Teacher asked aloud, “or know anything about them?”

The class all turned their boney heads to face him at once, their attention all disrupted by their instructor en masse.

Confused, stunned looks, both at him and one another, as if to ask “is he being serious?”

“What kind of monsters?” asked one student, finally, who was braver than the rest, after a profoundly awkward silence.

“Ones with flesh, you know skin...that covers their entire bodies?”

“You mean like all their bones?”

“Yeah, that’s it! Are there monsters or animals out there that have their entire bones covered with fleshy skin?”

Silence again. Some students exchanged amused smirks. Others sat legitimately confused, or perhaps even a bit scared or put-off. Had their teacher lost it?

“You mean, like fish?” inquired the same student with an ever-so-slightly tougher mental constitution.

“Kind of, but no.”

Another pause.

“Why do you ask?” the student interrogated.

“Well, and this is going to sound crazy,” Mr. Knoggle explained, “I think there’s at least one infesting my closet at home.”

An eruption of laughter exploded from the class. What an *absurd* thing to say! What a silly joke! That Mr. Knoggle was such a kidder! And fleshy monsters, what a crazy, imbecilic, and rather random thing to bring up!

Another man from another town’s face, somewhere else far, far away might have turned a deep red at this reaction. Ben Knoggle’s stayed the same pale, porcelain white as always. He did, however, hide his head behind his computer screen, tucking as much of himself behind it as he could fit to avoid the gaze of his students, who shot a mixture of bemused and cheeky glances at their teacher at odd intervals. When class eventually settled again, Ben poured himself back into his search, which still remained an altogether fruitless endeavor.

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“Skully, what did you *expect* a bunch of bone-headed teenagers’ reactions to be?”  Mr. Ostosis, a History teacher roughly two years away from retirement asked Ben later during his planning period. He always congregated around the water cooler in the teacher’s lounge with this and one other male teacher during this time, when he could afford to.

“Asking about flesh-covered monsters? Of *course* they’re gonna laugh!”

“Good point…” mumbled Ben “Skully” Knoggle, sulkily.

“And I really wouldn’t fret, Skully,” Gary Gaunt, a P.E. teacher, offered consolingly, “all that stuff is probably just bad dreams. You’ve had some tough shit happen to you lately, and you’re not used to living alone in a new space. Besides, there’s no such thing as hauntings.”

“But-” Skully started, then abruptly thought better of. It was no use trying to explain to his coworkers how all too real and vivid his encounters were, and how persistent and frequent. His recent divorce had nothing to do with anything he was experiencing.

Instead, he just let out an exasperated sigh and changed the subject. They talked about calcium-powered cars for the remaining 2 minutes before the bell. When it sounded, Skully had to rush off to his next class. Must be nice to be senior faculty and have a double planning block!

“See you guys,” said the young teacher.

“Later, Skully!” the two coworkers called.

Skully exited the faculty lounge, and the door swung closed behind him. Before it had latched, however, he heard chortles as his coworkers speaking to one another.

“Skin covered monsters! In his closet!” Mr. Ostosis snorted.

“I know! He’s so bonehead sometimes!” Mr. Gaunt replied with a giggle.

“Takes a real numbskull to believe that kind of stuff.”

“It’s really no wonder she…”

Skully stamped away at this final comment, not wanting to hear its conclusion. He made his way indignantly down the hallway upon overhearing this exchange, rocking his mandible left and right on its hinges, gritting and grinding his teeth in sneering frustration as he went. Positively seething, he felt his bones growing hotter and hotter.

He’d show them! He’d show them all! He would ***not*** be mastered by the mayhem of some macabre monster!



That night, a bellowing wind howled outside, buffeting the apartment building. A shutter banged out of place outside and swung about, slamming against Skully’s bedroom window, then flapping in the breeze and repeatedly rattling against glass. At midnight, his bedroom grew bitterly cold again and once more, the closet creaked open in its unsettling way, evidently of its own accord.

This time, Skully sat up, waiting with his arms folded, his ulnas and radii intertwined in a disapproving manner, impatiently, for the haunting to occur. He had no idea what his plan was. Could he bring himself to grab the monster? Grapple it? Wrestle it to the ground?

He had this absurd vision of himself parading it through town once it was apprehended, through school, past his ex-wife’s house. (That’d show ‘em!) But could be find the courage to do it? Then, the closet door had opened. He was still plenty angry. If he could have done so, his dark, black sockets would have rolled when the door finally opened. Filled with a simmering rage fueled by his colleagues’ disbelief and dismissal, he rose and quickly clacked his way over to the closet.

He grabbed the edge of the door, which was slightly ajar, and wrenched it open in one fell swoop. Bending forward slightly, Skully leaned his head defiantly inward and peered into the dark space.

He let out a sudden shriek: he had come face to face with the monster. It let out a hideous howl and then disappeared. Leaping back and slamming the door shut, Skully fell backwards onto his bed, panting. His quivering legs descended into a strained sit on the corner of his mattress.

Horrified, he recounted what he saw, a mental image seared into his brain.

The man had been roughly as tall as him. Coming face to face with him, or it, he was even more horrified by its appearance than anything in his wildest imaginings, or nastiest nightmares. Its face had, indeed, been covered in flesh. It had eyes, round white balls, in the sockets and their irises glowed blue. How horrid!

Worse, though, was the hair! Stringy, covering its fleshy scalp, and jutting out at all sorts of odd angles! It even had hair on its *face,* a scraggly carpet of wiry, messy, intertwined follicles all about its head, above its red, fleshy lips and down on its chubby chin and cheeks.

And what was wrong with its *nose?* Rather than being an indentation, a socket with various nasal bones and passages exposed, like a *normal* nose, instead the creature had a protruding, long, bulbous wad of meat sticking outward from its face with two gross holes, presumably for breathing! (Had he seen hair sticking out from those holes, too?!?)

Skully shuddered at the thought.

And that scream, that blood-curdling, chilling shriek, like that of a banshee! It was loud, it was shrill, ear-piercing, it was…

...almost as if the man was afraid of him.

Yes… now that he thought of it, all the man’s body motion and facial expressions, his whole behavior and demeanor indicated that the scream had been one of fear, not one trying to roar at or intimidate Skully. He had seen it in his monstrous, weirdly shaped eyes.

Wow. That thing was afraid. Of *me.*

As the idea sunk in, Skully’s fear diminished. The thought occurred to him that the man had not, after all, pursued him into his home. Rather, he had turned and fled. (Had he seen another door at the back of the closet that disappeared when the man slammed it behind him? Maybe, he wasn’t sure. It was a blur now.)

The significance of the situation slowly dawned on Skully. Was it possible that the man was *more* afraid of him, little old Benjamin “Skully” Knoggle, than he was of it? He thought some more, long and hard. His mind flashed to his students, his work, his coworkers, their jeers and mockery, his general dissatisfaction with his current life predicament, the aftermath of the preceding months regarding his personal life. Then he thought of the possibility. He began to smile a toothy grin.

In moments, his mind was made up. Skully rose from his bed, walked across the bedroom, and opened the closet door one last time. He disappeared into the blackness inside.

Femur remained outside the closet, sitting on his boney haunches peering inward after his master through the door, which he had left ajar. After a few minutes a clatter arose from somewhere deep inside, too deep to just be in the closet (Femur cocked his head in confusion, maybe it was on the other side of the closet wall? The dog could not tell.) Shrieks of fear, sounds of glass breaking, furniture falling over, heavy footsteps running away and doors to a house opening and closing and slamming. And above it all, the high cackle of Skully, laughing and having the time of his life for the first time in his life.

A little while longer, and there was a whistle. The dog stood up excitedly and wagged his rattling tail. He followed Skully into the darkness, and the closet door swung closed.

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“Hey Gary, did you hear the news about Skully?”

“Sure did, everyone’s buzzing about it, Ostosis. Spooky, ain’t it?”

“Yeah, a bit. Disappeared. Not a trace of him. Police searched for days but turned up squat. Poof! Gone, no signs of where or when or how.”

“Weird. You don’t think…”

“What?”

“Well, you know, you remember all that talk of something in his closet stirring. Puts spooky thoughts in your head, like what if, maybe he was-”

“Spirited away? Nah…. couldn’t be. Load of nonsense. Probably just lost his nerve and will to hold down a job and went off the grid. Who knows. He was always a bit weird.” Mr. Ostosis concluded, his bony phalanges drumming against his Styrofoam cup.

“He was, indeed. Still, makes you wonder…” said Mr. Gaunt. “Spooky, spooky, spooky.”

And it did make Mr. Ostosis wonder. He wondered as his final history class of the day watched their movie and he sat doodling at his desk, his mind adrift. He wondered all through dinner, zoning in and out of his wife’s description of her day at work and afternoon spent shopping with her friends, and he sat wondering in bed, staring up at the ceiling that night.

At length, Ostosis arose and went out to his window. He looked out at the dark horizon. The mountains were black, rugged, jutting silhouettes against a velvet purple night sky peppered here and there with stars. The bright, full moon loomed brilliant and pale in the sky. As he gazed outward, a strange image danced into his mind from far across the evening landscape. He felt a vague notion that Skully was out there, somewhere, in some distant corner of the globe, in a land filled with fleshy men whose skin and hair covered all their bones, chasing them, terrorizing them.

Yes, he could almost see him now: hiding in closets and popping out suddenly in the night screaming at, then chasing various unsuspecting victims. The thought brought a smile to the skull of the old skeleton. Skully’d chase them all through their houses screaming and rattling his long, white bones, then exit through a back door, or a window, or something, to rejoin his dog, who would be eagerly waiting for him behind a bush or on a sidewalk, the vertebrae on his little tail wagging with a rattle. They’d spend a couple minutes howling at the moon or the stars together, him and Femur, then set off at a trot, together, onto the next scare, into the deep, dark night.

