

# ANGEL SNATCHER

by  
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The year was nineteen-fifty. It was not so long ago. In a community just like yours. Normal folks. Hard working men and women raising families. Small children laughing and playing from one yard to the next. Boys teasing girls. The girls ignoring boys. Though loving every minute of their attention. The yards were large, and few featured fencing between them. Everyone knew everyone in the neighborhood. Men helped each other fix their automobiles on Saturdays. Women would bake cakes and pies to share with friends. Sunday was church day, and no one missed. The country towns and cities filled with people just like you and me.

Early one warm summer Sunday morning, in a small Bible-belt town, Mrs. Johnson went to wake her two children, eleven-year-old Martin, and five-year-old Martha. They had time to make their beds, take baths and eat a hot bowl of oatmeal, sweetened with brown sugar, and served with milk for breakfast before getting ready for the first service. Every Sunday morning, Mr. Johnson was allowed an extra hour of sleep while the rest of the household scurried around.

Marty, as they called the boy, was the hardest to wake and get moving in the morning. Harder than Mr. Johnson, who was hard enough. Young Martin was a reader and hid under the covers with a flashlight and book, most nights for hours after the rest of the family was fast asleep. He dreamed of being a famous author. After school, Marty did not play outside with the other neighborhood kids and holed up in his room writing stories in his journal.

On the other hand, Martha, or as everyone knew her, Angel, was eager to jump from her covers and take on the day. It mattered not if it was a warm summer morning or a bitter January daybreak. She so loved going to school or church and seeing her friends.

This Sunday morning, Marty, was particularly hard to wake. His mother shook and pushed the lad while calling his name. He would groan, beg for five more minutes, and roll over trying his hardest not to get up. Mrs. Johnson went to her daughter's room, resigning to return for Marty. It shocked the women that her Angel's bed already made and the room empty. She had not heard the girl moving throughout the home. Curiously, Angel's favorite rag doll, stripped of its clothing, laid on top of her grandmother's homemade quilt.

A slight warm breeze came through the open window. The fluttering the curtains caught her attention. Mrs. Johnson stepped to the sill and peered out the second story window. Her shrieks, breaking the calm sunrise, woke any nearby neighbors were not already up.

A man, more a shadowy figure, in the dawning day's dim light, appeared crippled, dragging his left leg behind and bent over. Mrs. Johnson thought he had a hunched back. The sun was not up high enough for a definitive look, though she swears he was wearing a black cape that flapped behind him. With Angel in his arms, wrapped tightly in a small baby-blue blanket, the pair scurried across their tall, uncut yard grass. The woman fixated on her daughter's long blond hair flowing from her cocoon as they disappeared around a corner of the neighbor's workshed.

Mr. Johnson sprang from his bed at the ear-splitting screams. He ran into his terrified wife running down the upstairs hallway. She was screaming nonsense. Something about her little Angel gone. And a monster carrying her away.

Angel's father sprinted from the house. He ran across their yard to the shed where his wife had yelled they had gone. Mr. Johnson was desperate to rescue his little Angel before his worst nightmare came to fruition behind the shed door. He was overweight and had to lean against the

outer wall of the small slat building gasping for oxygen. Two full minutes later, Mr. Johnson flung open the unlocked door. The room was dark. He could not see more than the handles of an old push mower and shovels and a broom hanging next to the doorframe. He hopelessly tried holding his breath to listen for movement. He pushed forward, tripping over the lawn mower, gashing his head on the uncovered blades. Mr. Johnson laid crying on the blood soaking dirt floor.

While her husband pursued, Mrs. Johnson dashed to the phone to call the police. On the party line, reporting the abduction of Angel, others heard the panicked woman's pleas. In a matter of minutes, phone lines crisscrossed all over town spreading the news.

Within the hour most of the town was searching for little Angel. Friends, relatives, neighbors, and strangers. Everyone had their own theory about who was responsible though not one person was familiar with anyone resembling Mrs. Johnson's description. And by the end of the first day, no two stories of what had taken place were alike.

The Johnson's little Angel was gone and never found neither dead nor alive. Likewise, the mysterious man-monster was not caught. That was the last time the Johnsons ever saw their little Angel.

Not long after, kids all over town could be heard singing new words to an old children's rhythm:

Sleeping in cozies  
In and out abodies  
Catch her, Snatcher  
We all get caught

Four years later, at the age of fifteen, Martin Johnson penned the true story of Angel Snatcher, as he knew it. The Texarkana Gazette published his story on the front page the Sunday edition on the anniversary of Angel's kidnapping, but it was too late, the town's prevalent rendition became today's urban legend, Angel Snatcher. The myth has been recounted for decades around campfires and at slumber parties.

The story mostly told goes like this: "You know that old house with the overgrown yard, just down the street from you? A hunched-back man lives there with your neighbors. I think he was kidnapped as a young boy. They keep him chained in up in the garage day and night, and nobody has ever seen him. And lived to tell! Well, except for me and Billy. My big brother told me about him, and last Saturday, at midnight, we snuck out and went down there, and peeked through the window. The guy was filthy. And naked under a tattered black cape. His long hair matted and a disgusting beard, full of lice and bugs, hung down to his knees. He eats dog food out of a metal bowl and shits and pees everywhere. The place stinks."

"When I shined my flashlight on him, his eyes popped open. They were bright red and exploded like firecrackers. He stared straight into Billy's eyes. Billy froze and couldn't move. The hunchback charged at us like a locomotive. He was bellowing steam out of his ears. His chains broke, and he was coming right for us. I had to slap Billy as hard as I could to break the monster's trance, and we ran like racehorses all the way to my house. We were real lucky and won't ever go there again. They call him the Angel Snatcher because he steals kids from their beds at night and leaves a small porcelain figurine in their place. Most of the time the children are never found, but one little girl's body was. She had been burnt alive and charred beyond recognition. And they also found a boy with his balls cut off. He was laying in some seedy motel bathroom in a pool of his own blood. Dead!" Or, mutilated, hacked to pieces, heart cutout or whatever the current storyteller's worst nightmare is.

“All I’m saying is be very careful. And do not go to sleep tonight. The Angel Snatcher is real and coming for YOU!”