

THE HADLEY WITCH LEGEND

by
H. David Whalen

The witch was screeching as she dove upon us. The hideous noise penetrated our eardrums. Her long flowing hair flamed like a torch. Boney knurled hands threw fiery thunderbolts bolts at us as she flew through the night sky, her gossamer black robes flapping uncontrollably. The full harvest moon highlighted our path as we ran helter-skelter as fast as our skinny legs could move.

It was All Hallows Eve. Al, Gene, and I were twelve years old and looking for adventure. I don't know whose idea it was, but the three of us agreed to investigate the dilapidated, ancient two-story haunted house where the witch lived.

Tall fir trees shrouded the front yard. A light fog blanketed the ground. We stood hidden in the shadows for the longest time, watching the house. Only a single dim candle flickered behind a sheer curtained window. Gene prodded us forward. Our little gang silently sneaked from tree to tree.

As we peered around our last safe spot, one eye flicked open. The witch was sitting on the porch watching, waiting. Her fiery gaze pierced us like a flamethrower. In an instant, her body was a human torch, racing toward our position. The three of us, without a word, sprinted for safety. Al fell to the cold ground screaming through the fog for help. I looked back, but couldn't save him.

I'll never know how Al caught up with us, but he did. As we ran, the witch swooped and wailed. We only had one more house to pass before reaching home and ran faster than humanly possible. Our eyes were popping from their sockets, tears streaming down our faces. Finally, the three of us jumped into the safety of my basement, bolting the door behind us. I tell you, I've never been so scared in my life.

We huddled together in a damp corner while the witch rattled the door and peered through windows. Her hideous face covered with warts and dominated by a giant hooked nose. Blood seeped from her eyes and dripped from her lips. We crouched in terror until she disappeared.

"Da...Dad, I...I had an accident," my son stammers, eyes wet, peering over his blanket.

"It's alright, Joe. I'll get your mother." I walk into the kitchen, "Dear, Joe wet the bed. Could you get me some clean sheets?"

"He hasn't done that for a while." Pondering, "What were you guys talking about in there?"

"Not much. Tomorrow is Halloween, so I told him about the Hadley Witch."

"Oh, Robert, you know he's too young."

After Anna changed Joe's sheets and sat with him for the longest time, she returned to join me in our kitchen. "Honey, I think he's calmed down and asleep for the night. Did you tell him the real story or your childhood fantasy?"

"It's not a fantasy! It happened just the way I told you." I can't imagine Anna, of all people, not believing me. "You know Al had to go into therapy. And they moved out of town a few months later!"

"Don't forget, I grew up here too. Al's dad got transferred, and that's why they moved!"

"That's was the excuse," I remind her.

"I'm going to bed! Don't ever tell that story to anyone *ever* again! Nobody believes you anyway, and you just look crazy."

I laid awake shivering and sweating for the longest time that night, the truth replaying endlessly through my mind.

The following morning, I slept late. When I finally rolled out of bed, I made to way toward the kitchen for much-needed coffee. I stood silently in the hall listening to Anna talking to our five-year-old son. She was trying to explain to him the town's official version of what happened that dreadful night of my childhood.

Juliana Hadley moved back to town in nineteen fifty-three and into her mother's old two-story home on Lindel Street to take care of the elderly invalid. A couple of months later on Halloween night, the spinsters, sat, bundled up in blankets on the front porch to watch the trick-or-treaters parade by. Juliana went inside to fix a couple of mugs of hot chocolate. The older woman had a penchant for cigars. She lit up and apparently dozed off. They figured the cigar dropped into her lap, catching the fleece blanket on fire. Waking up ablaze, the confused old woman ran down the porch stairs and through the yard. Her daughter heard the shrieking and ran in search of her mother. As the elderly, Hadley dropped dead, smoldering in the dirt. Juliana came upon her too later to save her.

I wondered how Anna was going to explain the Hadley home burning to the ground a month after her mother had, *with* Juliana inside. Her body reduced to a pile of ash and bone by the heat. Everyone knows witches have to burn. Anna conveniently missed this important fact!

After that Halloween, Gene and I spoke less and less frequently the remainder of the eighth grade and not at all after entering high school the following Fall semester.

Neither one of us ever mentioned the Hadley Witch again, at least not until I told Anna the story long after we were married many years later.