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The Broom Town Curse Adapted from campfirestories.com

Telling time: Approx. 15 - 20 minutes

The set-up:

You know, there is a lot of history surrounding this campsite. Even some old legends. They say there was some Civil War fighting just a few miles down the road. And there are some old rumors that there used to be a little settlement hidden back in the deep woods - just on the other side of this camp. Of course back then -- we're talking over a hundred and fifty years ago -- that area *would have been deep woods*, not just the backside of a campground like it is now.

Not many folks around here even remember there was another settlement, but when I was up here scouting out this campsite I did meet *one* old-timer that remembers. I never did get his name, everyone just called him "Pop." But he told me some of the history of this area. He even told me the legend about this little settlement. Said his grandfather told him about it. Claimed his grandpop used to hike into the woods where it was supposed to be, but all he ever found was some rotten logs and pieces of old black cast iron kettles. Said its name was *Haven*, but back then everyone called it "Broom Town."

Now, according to Pop, it was around 1850 when this little settlement got started. Matter of fact, it was so long ago that the roads into it are all overgrown with trees and underbrush now - the forest just ate it up, and no mention of *Haven* or *Broom Town* shows on any map. But Pop said the main road to it ran right through this campsite we're in now.

He's pretty sure he could guide us there, if we wanted, but he tells me that beside himself, there are few folks who even remember the settlement, much less where it was, or anything else about it.

Now back then -- remember, this was over a hundred and fifty years ago -- when people picked a place for a settlement, they often picked it for defensive reasons, for protection. A lot of times they would even build log walls around it, almost like a fort. And this settlement had plenty reason to worry about protection.

You see, all the folks who lived there had been suspected of witchcraft, of being witches and warlocks, and had fled their homes and villages to keep from being persecuted - or worse, burned at the stake.

That is the reason the settlement was so far off the beaten path, hidden away from the main roads and other towns.

Like I said, its real name was 'Haven', but because of all the witches, I mean settlers, that lived there, everyone called it *Broom Town*. For hundreds of miles around people knew of *Broom Town*, but not exactly where it was.

In fact, they used to have some old sayings about how bad it was to be in Broom Town. Like if a fellow got in trouble with his wife, they'd say ' *He better head to Broom Town*', or if a young lady wasn't acting so lady-like they'd say; *"If she's not careful she'll end up in Broom Town."* In fact some parents even used Broom Town like a bogie man - they would tell their kids that if they were not good they would end up in Broom Town.

Yep, Broom Town had quite a reputation and mystique. That means it was all mysterious and scary, and stuff.

In fact, many folks who knew about Broom Town thought that it *was* full of magic, and curses, and witch stuff, but of course we will never really know. It's gone now, and there isn't any written record of it anywhere. Except for the diary of course, but it didn't mention Broom Town by name.

What we do know, however, is that not everyone who went looking for Broom Town found it, and those who did find it never talked about it. Like I said, there is no written record of life there, but there is a written record of death – in the dairy.

Didn't I tell you about the dairy?

Well, according to Pop, there was an old leather-bound battle diary found on the turnpike, not far from here.

It seems that during the Civil War a troop of soldiers attacked and destroyed Broom Town, and killed everyone there. Now here's the weird thing, there is no record of which side did it. No one knows if it was the North or the South.

The dairy did have a name in it, a Captain's name, Captain John Bell. But the problem is, that name, Captain John Bell, was shared by two men. One was a captain for the South and one was a captain for the North. And both were in the area during that period of time. And both died around the same time. No one could ever tell which one the battle diary belonged to. And no one from their army units could be found to clear things up either.

So all that we are left with is an entry in a battle diary.

This is what it said:

Saturday - *While on reconnaissance discovered small fortified position in small valley. Unable to tell if friend of foe. From tall tree my spotter can see people moving behind walls. The response to my questions shouted at the people behind the walls is one of rebuke. We are told to go away.*

In desperate need of food and supplies. Have determined activities suspicious and possibly hostile, will attack at dawn tomorrow. Will use last of dynamite to blow main gates.

Sunday Noon - *Action successful. Battle was short, all fought against us but our training proved out in the end. 2 dead 3 wounded from unit, wounded able to move. Must move out soon. Men restless, superstitions running wild in unit. Many defenders yelled curses as they fought, and spoke in unknown language.*

Sunday Night - *Camp set up 8 miles south of previous position.*

Monday morning - *Our position harassed by assassins, 2 dead, wailing and screams occur just before attack. Our cook claims must be banshees.*

Tuesday morning - *Harassed again over night, 4 dead. Am starting to believe in banshees.*

And that was the last entry in the book.

Now that was a pretty interesting story, but what happens next is even more interesting. You see, the story of Broom Town had been forgotten until a fellow named Alfred Bell, and his brother Thomas, came visiting the area, somewhere around 1910.

You know that last town we passed coming into camp? Well, it used to be a frontier town around the time of Broom Town, and that's where the brothers stayed.

They stayed in a hotel called the Manor House. It was a pretty fancy place for those times, and it's what happened in that fancy hotel that started the real legend of the *Broom Town Curse*.

What happened was, that on the very first night the Bell brothers stayed there, the other guests of the hotel were awakened in the middle of the night by a terrible commotion. They reported that in the wee hours of the morning, around 2:00 am, they heard wailing and screams coming from somewhere in the hotel. It lasted for about 20 minutes.

And during that time, the winds howled outside, (some said it sounded like demons howling), and the lights went out, and some people even reported that the doors to their rooms shook real hard - like someone trying to get in.

By the time everything settled down, and someone thought to check the brother's rooms, hours had passed, but when they opened the door - both men were unquestionably dead. But no wounds could be found. The only blood came from where one brother had bitten his own tongue off, and it lay on the floor beside him.

Their faces were frozen in horror, eyes opened wide in shock, the pupils rolled back out of sight so that only the white of the eye could be seen. Their hands were raised in front of them as though they were trying to protect themselves, or ward off something.

Well, back then there were still people who remembered the Broom Town massacre, but they did not put two and two together until Alfred and Thomas's cousin came to get the bodies.

You see, his last name was Bell too, and the same thing happened to him.

It was about 11:00 at night. Most of the hotel guests had already gone to bed, and Cousin Bell was one of them. In the room with him was a traveling salesman. They had met on the stage ride to town, and decided to share a room and split the cost. They flipped a coin for the bed, and the cousin lost.

So there he was, on the floor, sleeping on some quilts he had placed near the fireplace.

According to the salesman, it was just about midnight when Cousin Bell started crying out in his sleep. This woke the salesman, and from the bed he watched as Cousin Bell tossed and turned. He could see him fairly clearly in the glow from the coals of the fire.

Suddenly Cousin Bell yelled and sat straight up. The salesman was about to say something when an awful screech sounded in the room. Outside the window, the winds rose to storm pitch, howling, like, well like banshees. And the shutters rocked on their hinges, banging against the windows.

The salesman said he was so scared he covered his head, and just peeked out from under the covers. He saw this huge black shadow in the center of the room. Cousin Bell had crawled to a corner, and was half standing half crouched, his back supported by two walls where they came together.

He was yelling NO!! NO!! and seemed to be trying to bat something away from his face with his hands, but the salesman couldn't see anything there. The shadow moved closer to the cousin, and as it did the salesman could see the other side of the shadow reflected in the dresser mirror.

It was horrible. It looked as though hundreds of heads hung attached to the big black shape of that shadow.

There were adult heads, both young and old, there were the heads of children, boys and girls.

And, as the salesman watched one of the heads would open its mouth and wail, then the others would join in. Then the eyes would open, but there were no eyes -- just a hot red glow, much like the coals in the fireplace. With all the eyes open, a reddish glow brightened the room, and in the mirror the salesman saw that some of the heads still had what looked like blood on them.

One head in particular had been split almost in half, and the brain oozed out it, all globbish and ugly. Several heads had only one eye, and one even had its nose cut off.

The salesman was afraid he was going to be sick, but he was more afraid of those screaming heads – so he just watched from under the covers, terrified, as that black shadow and those wailing heads loomed in the center of the room.

The heads wailed and screeched again, then moved closer to the corner where Cousin Bell was crouching in fear. He said he heard him yell and scream in terror, but he could not see him because the shadow covered him completely.

Then all of a sudden, everything got quiet. The screaming and screeching stopped. The wind stopped howling and the shutters stopped flapping. The salesman stayed hid under the blanket, and it was many minutes before he peeked out again. When he did, the shadow was gone, the wind had stopped, and Cousin Bell was dead in the corner of the room. Face frozen in horror, eyes rolled back – just like Alfred and Thomas. The salesman jumped from the bed, ran to the door, and flung it open - screaming.

Well, the story of the salesman traveled fast, and soon few people would come to the small town or stay at the hotel.

Then one day, a few years later, an old woman showed up at the hotel.

When people on the street asked her if she planned to stay there she replied, “*Sure, I ain’t related to them that be cursed.*”

When asked what she meant, she told them the story of Broom Town. The real story. That is when they remembered the rumor of curses and so forth.

But, the old woman told them more than just rumors, she *knew* what really happened that day.

You see, when the massacre was over that day, after every one of the settlers was dead, the soldiers had time to look around, and what they saw scared them. Big iron cauldrons, (big black pots), on the fires, brooms leaning on every house step, and a black cape in almost every closet. The soldiers became really afraid when they found out the people they just killed might have been witches.

To solve the fears of his men, Captain Bell told them that if they cut off the heads of the witches and buried them separate from the bodies, then the dead souls of the witches could never find them, - - so that is what they did, to every last one of them.

Unfortunately for Captain Bell - and his relatives, he was wrong. Dead wrong.

Now, if anyone who took part in that raid, or even any of their relatives ever comes within 10 miles of Broom Town, the witches come to take their revenge. But, because the heads are not attached to the bodies, they can only move in the magic black shadow of the curse. And their angry headless spirits follow, separately, wildly, frantically trying to find their cut off heads, and that is what causes the sound of a howling wind, the screaming banshees.

Through the years, many people have been visited by the specter of that dark black shadow and those screaming wailing heads of the witches.

In fact, part of the old legend says that is why both Captain John Bell's disappeared at the same time. They were related somehow, and the screaming banshees took their revenge on both of them, and their unsuspecting relatives.

Of course that was a long time ago, and it may just be an old story somebody made up, but I hope there are no distance relatives of Captain Bell, or the other attackers, camping here tonight. But... if the winds start to blow real hard, well.....

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