

# FABULOUS FICTION STORIES

## Fright Night

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(Illustration by Arturo Escorza Pedraza, MSPE)

“Good evening, Sir. I’m Officer Hastings, and this is my colleague, Briggs.”

“Thank you for coming. I’m White ... George White.”

That meeting in my front yard was the first interaction I had with the officers investigating my daughter’s disappearance.

“To get relevant information that can take us to the missing person, we need to ask you some questions.”

“All right.”

“What’s your age?”

“I’m 39.”

“What’s your relationship to the missing person?”

“She’s my daughter.”

“Please describe her.”

“My daughter’s name is Mary Anne. She’s 8.”

“Complexion?”

“Caucasian, with long, ginger hair. She has freckles on her cheeks and bright blue eyes.”

“Her height and weight?”

“She’s 51 inches tall and weighs 57 pounds.”

“How many people live in the house?”

“Only she and I, Sir.”

“Where is the girl’s mother?”

“She died a long time ago, Sir. I’m a widower, never remarried.”

“I understand. Mr. White, tell us, please, when was the last time you saw her?”

“I don’t know about the time. Everything occurred so suddenly. I didn’t even check the hour. Maybe three hours ago ... No, no! About four hours ago.”

“I see. Are we talking around 20:00 hrs?”

“Approximately.”

“What were the conditions of her disappearance?”

“Well, my daughter and I were playing a game called ‘Fright Night.’”

“Fright Night?”

“Yes. One night a week, we usually read horror stories together that we write during the week. Whoever scares the other the most wins.”

“I see ...”

Hastings muttered as he gave Briggs an incredulous look.

“Mary Anne enjoys being scared?”

“Oh, no! She doesn’t scare easily. She’s a very brave girl.”

“How long have you been playing that game?”

“We started a few months ago. It began as a hobby for Halloween, and we continued.”

“Please, tell me about the last moment you saw her.”

“Okay. I began with the night’s first story. After finishing, she began to laugh, which completely broke the atmosphere, as if she had heard a joke from me and not a scary ghost tale. ‘Fine! Your turn,’ I told her. She looked at me with her bright eyes and, smiling, said, ‘Tonight, I will beat you!’ ‘You wish!’ I replied.”

“Then she walked over and whispered in my ear, ‘Do you want to see something really scary?’ ‘I do!’ I replied, incredulously. ‘Scare me!’ I challenged her. She nodded, then with a quick wink of her eye, she ran up the stairs, without saying anything. I could only hear her laughing and her small footsteps climbing up to the second floor in the darkness. After several minutes without any noise, I assumed that I needed to go find her. ‘I understand, Mary Anne. I’m coming,’ I yelled. I slowly climbed the steps, ready for a low-budget ’80s-movie jump-scare anytime. I entered her room, turned on the light, and started looking for her in the corners, under the bed, in the closet. *Not here; then she’s in my room*, I thought. My heart began to beat harder when I couldn’t find her in my room, either. I removed sheets, curtains, checked the closets, the boxes, and still nothing. I called out, ‘This is not funny anymore, Mary Anne. Where are you?’ I checked the attic, but opening the hatch and lowering the ladder is difficult. She wasn’t there, either. I began to despair and descended to the ground floor where I knocked over sofas and tables. The television fell from its stand. I was losing my mind. I couldn’t find her inside the house, so I assumed she was hiding in the garage or the backyard. I was wrong. I wondered if she escaped to the street. I drove my car through the neighborhood streets looking for her, but I also had no luck there—not a single trace. So, I decided to call 911.”

“Do you have any relatives, Mr. White?”

“No, Sir. My daughter is the only living relative I have.”

“Do you have any friends with whom Mary Anne could be?”

“I don’t have any friends, Sir. And all the neighbors are very strange people.”

“Do you know any of your daughter’s schoolmates?”

“She’s home-schooled, Sir.”

Officer Hastings looked over my shoulder, past Briggs, and through the window at the mess I had created inside. Hastings gave Briggs a knowing look and said, “Do you mind if we take a look inside?”

“Not at all. Please.”

Both officers entered to check the entire house, the attic, and the garden in search of some clue, but they had the same result.

Officer Hastings picked up a photo of my daughter from the floor, which must have fallen when I panicked.

“Is this Mary Anne?”

“Yes, Sir. That’s her.”

“She’s a beautiful angel. We need to take this picture with us.”

“Please, take it, Sir.”

After a few more minutes answering all pertinent questions, I walked them to the door. They said they would be in touch to give me any information or ask me if they needed to know something.

They said goodbye very kindly. But before entering the police car, Officer Hastings nodded to his colleague, walked over to me, and said, “Mr. White, please don’t leave town. Good night.”

Confused, I nodded and replied, “Good night.”

What? The officers believed that I could be responsible for the disappearance of my own daughter? She is my treasure ... I would never hurt her.

The next hours passed painfully slowly. I remained completely silent without turning on any light, radio, or mobile phone. I was waiting—hoping at any second to hear her laugh and her small voice screaming, “I beat you!” At that moment, even an ’80s jump-scare would be fine. But ... nothing. I could not sleep.

The next day didn’t bring my daughter back, either. By that time, I was certain someone had kidnapped Mary Anne, and I was only waiting for a ransom call. From my window, the sky seemed to be filled with fire. The doorbell rang insistently. I immediately walked to open it, but before reaching the door, I saw something being slid underneath it from the outside. I wanted to meet the messenger, so I flung the door open—but nobody was there. I picked up what had been mysteriously left: an old black-and-white postcard of a small and remote mountain hollow called Fairview. On the reverse side was handwritten text: “Do you want some answers? It’s time to get them ...”

My blood ran cold. Fairview was my hometown, the little village in which my wife and I had spent much of our lives. It was the place where we had met and married, and it was also my daughter’s birthplace. I felt I had to leave the village when my wife died. Who could be the sadist behind this message?

Obviously, whoever had taken Mary Anne provided me a precious clue, and I had no time

to lose. Immediately, I grabbed my car keys and jumped into my Ford Mustang. I was about to start it when the officers from the day before arrived.

“Good evening, Mr. White,” Officer Hastings greeted.

“Good evening, Sir,” I answered back, wanting to leave as soon as possible, unconsciously revealing my nervousness.

“Are you going somewhere, Mr. White?”

“I need to breathe some fresh air.”

“I see ... We checked the footage of all the available street cameras in this zone, without any luck yet.”

“Oh, ok.”

“And we have interviewed several of your neighbors to find out if anyone saw your daughter leave, alone or with someone.”

“And someone saw her?”

“Nobody. But a few neighbors saw you driving anxiously through the streets.”

“That’s correct, Sir. As I told you, I was looking for her.”

“Not only that, Mr. White, but all the neighbors interviewed so far agree that they have never seen you accompanied by a young girl. They said every time you leave your house, you’re always alone.”

“I don’t know what to tell you, Officer. As I said, the neighbors are very strange people. I don’t go out very often, but she’s always with me. I’d never leave her alone.”

“I see ...”

At that moment, the officer approached my car window, and, leaning towards me, he said, “Mr. White, is there anything you need to tell me?”

“I’m not sure what you’re implying, Officer.”

“Let me reiterate: Mr. White, don’t leave town.”

“I won’t, Officer. I only need to buy cigarettes. Good evening,” I said, and I drove away, seeing the officers disappear in the rearview mirror.

I drove to the nearest service station, filled up my tank, and then bought some cigarettes. I planned to drive to Fairview, which was about 150 miles from my home, lost among the rugged Allegheny Mountains of West Virginia, a journey that would take approximately three hours.

When I realized that Hastings wasn’t following me, I started to drive towards the town’s exit, and then I accelerated more and more. I was so immersed in my thoughts that I didn’t notice a police car creeping up on me. A couple of minutes later, in the rearview mirror, I saw its flashing lights. I don’t know what happened in my mind, but instead of pulling over, I accelerated even more towards the interstate.

The police car turned on its siren and started chasing me. I sped up even more, recklessly driving the dangerous road. I drove down the highway into the mountains, which were covered by dense fog and thick forests. Gradually, the police car’s siren chasing me became quieter and quieter until it disappeared completely. I had finally lost the officer.

I drove for a few more minutes—no more than half an hour—without finding a single car on the road, in either direction. Then, suddenly, I saw an old, rusty road sign: “Welcome to Fairview. Peace, Progress, Prosperity.”

*It couldn’t be true! No way had I driven 150 miles in 30 minutes!*

But then I saw the full moon's light reflecting in the calm waters of Long Lake, close to the old hollow. *It's true then; I have arrived*, I thought. I drove up the main street, parked near the old church, and exited my car.

The spectacle of desolation left me speechless. The town was a sad shadow of its prosperous past, a ghost town in ruins. Only the moon and some oil lampposts on the main road allowed me to guess at some silhouettes.

I started looking for some clue to Mary Anne's whereabouts when I noticed that some of the windows of the old houses were illumined by dim candle flames.

*People are still living here*, I thought to myself.

I noticed certain curtains moving and silhouettes of people looking through them. The candle flames were being extinguished as I walked past the houses, until it was completely dark.

*They don't like outsiders*, I thought.

In the distance, out of the shadows, I could see the silhouette of a man heading towards me. When he was close enough, I dared to address him, "Good evening. Excuse me—"

"Mrs. Miller is waiting for you," interrupted the strange man, in a very quiet and hoarse voice. His hand was pointing toward the old house of Mrs. Eva Miller, a strange woman who had always given me the impression that she had never been young. During my childhood, at the religious services, our mothers rumored that she was a witch, as she never entered the church. The children, infected by fear and ignorance, sometimes threw stones at her house. Apparently, the poor woman was just crazy.

But it couldn't be possible that Mrs. Miller, "The Witch," could be waiting for me. Surely, she had passed away years ago. This Mrs. Miller must be

a relative. "Excuse me, how do you know me?" I asked him.

Instead of answering my question, he asked me, "Do you have a cigarette? It has been a long time without cigarettes around here."

"Sure ..." I took out the pack of cigarettes from my jacket pocket and offered it to him. He took a cigarette and put it between his lips. I grabbed my lighter to light it for him.

The flame clearly showed me the man's face for a moment. He looked familiar—so familiar, actually, that the sight of his face shook my insides.

I felt a shiver go down my spine as I recognized *my own face* staring straight into my eyes while I lit the cigarette. "Thank you," he replied again with a very faint voice as he turned and walked away from me.

Puzzled and scared, I ran—terrified—to the old Witch Miller's house, without daring to look back. Soon, in complete darkness, I arrived in front of the decaying two-story house with its moldy wooden planks and broken glass. I was climbing the front-porch steps when, suddenly, an old woman opened the door to meet me.

"Come in, George. Sorry to receive you like this, but she notified me of your coming just now," the old woman told me, with her head covered by a headscarf and a candle in her hand.

Immediately, I recognized her. It *was* her—Eva "The Witch" Miller, herself.

"Get in. The street is not a good place to chat. It is better to be inside," she said to me while turning her back to me and leading me through a narrow corridor.

"Surely, you want to rest. But since she just told me about your arrival, I didn't have time

to prepare your room. You'll have to wait," the woman said, reproaching the tardy notification.

"Who ... Who told you about my visit?"

"Clarice."

"Clarice who?"

"Clarice White, Son. Your wife."

"It couldn't be, Ma'am. She passed away many years ago," I replied, somehow annoyed.

"Oh, I see. Her voice *was* very distant. That's why," the old woman answered, while preparing a teapot.

That convinced me she was a crazy woman, after all. So, I decided to leave. "Mrs. Miller, I can't stay. I'm looking for my daughter," I said, standing up to leave.

"I know, Son. Don't worry; she's fine."

"Do you know where I can find her?!" I impetuously asked.

At that precise moment, Mrs. Miller sat down and placed her left hand on her forehead while saying what seemed like a prayer in a language unknown to me. Then she stopped suddenly and, still in the same pose, pointed to the street's end with her bony right hand.

"Walk up that path. Go straight. Don't stop nor walk an inch out of the way. You must not turn back, despite any sounds, and don't stop until you reach the path's end, right at the crossroads. I will continue to pray."

Although I didn't understand anything, I left the house and started walking in the direction she had told me.

The only sounds I heard were my own footsteps. The path crossed a small stream and headed into

the forest and slightly up the mountain. After crossing the small bridge over the creek, I began to hear very strange noises, first in the distance and then closer and closer.

I heard a large pack of dogs panting and grunting. Every moment I walked on, the path seemed to grow longer. I heard the sounds of babies crying, which gradually became the sobs of adult women. Then, I heard crying men and women directly in my ears.

I heard the hooves of horses galloping straight towards me. My irrational reaction to the invisible herd was to jump out of the way, almost off the path—exactly the opposite action of what the old woman had warned me to take. I lay on the ground for a few moments as I tried to catch my breath before continuing.

I covered my ears to stop hearing those nightmarish sounds, and I started running. Finally, I reached the crossroads, and the infernal noises stopped. I found myself in front of a decrepit cemetery with small gravestones covered in weeds.

A small light—like the flame of a burning match but in the shape of a sphere—appeared in front of me and began to float away very slowly. Instinctively, I followed it. Hovering between the gravestones, it stopped for a while above one of them and then disappeared. I quickly removed the weeds covering it, and, with the help of my lighter, I read the eroded letters with little difficulty:

*In loving memory of Clarice White,  
1890-1918*

*Her husband - George White,  
1879-1918*

*Their daughter - Mary Anne White,  
1910-1918*

*Forever in our hearts.*



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At that moment, I fell to my knees, almost losing consciousness. What was this? What was happening?

I heard a child's giggle, and from behind the gravestone, my daughter jumped out.

"Mary Anne, you are okay!" I cried out as I hugged her.

"I beat you! I beat you!" she said to me, cheerfully.

"That's true, you beat me!" I answered, crying and laughing at the same time, remembering our "Fright Night" challenge.

Mary Anne was jumping with excitement and laughing heartily. "Mommy is waiting for us!"

"What?"

At that moment, I saw Mrs. Miller standing next to me, grabbing Mary Anne's hand. "That's correct, Son. The Spanish flu killed everyone in this town 1918, in a very brief period of time. Our small village has been our home for more than a century, as nobody ever came from the other side to take us," she said ironically.

"Everyone died? Me, too?"

"You, too, Son. You have just been in denial."

"How? And nobody here is afraid?"

"We only fear the solitude of our graves. We were deeply rooted in this village. Staying here was easier," said the old woman. "But enough talk, your wife is waiting."

"Is she here?"

"No, she's in the next station, but you can't go to her in this condition. I need to prepare you. Come with me to my house. Everything is ready."

"Is that next station to be feared?"

"Not at all."

I carried my daughter in my arms. "Let's go," I said.

And we walked back to the old woman's house.

*The End.* Ω

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*"The pain of parting is nothing  
to the joy of meeting again."*

*—Charles Dickens*