

THE BESIEGED



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The Besieged

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The Monster in the Window

An hour passed and it was dark now. The only light came from the fire's glowing embers. The man had slipped off into a whiskey-induced half-drunken slumber. He was slouched back in his chair clutching the near-empty bottle. The wind and snow had picked up as the gathering storm drew closer. The man slowly opened his eyes as his ears alerted him to a peculiar noise coming from outside. Curiosity overcame his natural tendency to fall back asleep, so he rose up and staggered toward the back window.

The man looked outside into the darkness and saw nothing. He could hear the wind whooshing and quickly dismissed the odd sound as nothing more than that. He took a step toward his bed, longing for sleep, when suddenly the eerie sound returned. He listened close as his ears struggled to distinguish between the sound of the hissing wind and what seemed to be a long, drawn-out howl. With a bit of forced concentration spurred by an uneasy chill down his spine, the man was able to determine what he was hearing—a sound he had heard before, and dreaded.

"Wolves," he uttered. The man's thoughts immediately turned to the meat shack. He'd had problems in the past with wildlife raiding his food supply, and few things angered him more than being robbed by a critter. Wolves and bears were the biggest threat as the wooden shack was not very large or sturdy. Grizzlies had ripped through the walls with ease numerous times while wolves had dug around the rotten foundation like burrowing gophers to gain entry. The man cursed the day he'd decided

against building a floor in the structure.

“Strange for wolves to be roamin’ at night in such horrible weather,” he said to himself. He hadn’t seen a wolf in weeks and was in no hurry to confront one now. Nevertheless he knew he had to be on guard whether he liked it or not. His pitiful supply of hanging meat was all he had and he couldn’t afford to lose it no matter how many supplies he was able to bring back from Tanana.

He tossed some birch bark and three logs onto the fire, bringing it back to full blaze. The concentrated scent of cooked venison lingered in the air, which he knew wasn’t a good thing. He yearned to go back to his rocker, pretend he’d heard nothing, and fall away into a deep sleep. As appealing as that was, the man couldn’t allow himself to do it. He sat on the edge of his bed watching the fire and listening intently to the sounds outside his walls. He went so far as to close his eyes so they didn’t distract or interfere with the work of his ears. After a short time passed, he heard it again. Apart from the wind was the distinct sound of a howling wolf. Then he heard another—and then another!

Just then a scratching sound startled him. It was faint but unnerving. He turned to face the rear window. His eyes caught sight of a frighteningly dark silhouette, barely visible, seemingly reflecting off the glass in the firelight! The man leapt to his feet and backed away from the window. He grabbed for his kerosene lantern, fumbling with his matches before successfully lighting it. He thrust the brightness of the lantern at the window, revealing the terrifying sight of a wolf’s upper torso! Standing on its hind legs, the animal peered inside with a fierce glare and bared teeth. Its front legs pressed against the frame while his claws slowly scratched and scraped down the glass.

The man recoiled in horror as his adrenaline-filled heart pounded madly at the sight of the brazen beast. The creature showed no fear and displayed signs of boldness unlike anything the man had ever witnessed in a wolf’s behavior. He kept the animal in full view, never taking his eyes off it as he slowly backed away toward the wall where his holstered revolver was hanging. As the man retrieved his gun the wolf darted away out of sight amidst the noise of many distinct howls that seemed to surround the cabin.

Suddenly the man heard the sound of claws raking against cracking wood! He raced to get his socks and moccasins on before throwing open the front door and stepping out into the night. In one hand was his revolver while the other carried the kerosene lantern. The falling snow, caught up in the blowing wind, flew into his eyes while the glacial air hit him like a hammer, stopping him as if he had run into an invisible barrier of thick ice. Nevertheless, the man shined his lantern in the direction of the meat shack. He couldn't see much. The lantern wasn't powerful enough to cut through the stormy darkness and the shack was just too far away to see anything. However, it was no mystery what was happening. A pack of ravenous wolves was assaulting the rickety little structure, determined to devour every scrap of meat therein.

The man cocked his handgun and fired a shot into the air. He belted loud obscenities hoping to intimidate and scare off the predators. He lurched forward several steps until the shack was in range of his light. The wolves scattered in all directions but didn't leave. Instead they retreated into the darkness and encircled the man. Like shadowy ghosts, they slipped in and out of the light, affording the man only a short, uneasy glimpse of their movements. The man turned in sharp circles like a corkscrew with each growl he heard and every four-legged motion he saw. These animals were acting unnaturally aggressive and zeroing in on their next meal—a human victim! The man quickly realized he was surrounded and in imminent danger of being ripped apart and devoured by the vicious pack of hunters. As he thought this, his lungs and throat let out a fierce cry of anger followed by three more random bullet blasts from the revolver. He heard several animal footsteps scampering off into the distance. His last effort had managed to drive them away—for the moment at least.

Seemingly free of danger, the man hurried over to the meat shack. He shined his lantern and surveyed the damage. At first glance there didn't appear to be any serious problems until the man looked at the base of the door and saw what he was dreading. The bottom right side of the entrance had been rotting away for months and was the structure's Achilles heel. The wolves had apparently discovered this, and a cavity of broken wood large enough for one to squeeze through had been created.

As the man examined the hole, he felt his hands, feet, and face rapidly numbing. In fact, his whole body was beginning to shiver uncontrollably. In his haste to protect his meat stores from the wolves, he had not had time to put on his thick fur coverings, hat, or mittens.

The adrenaline from the confrontation was quickly wearing off and the man realized he would most assuredly lose the battle with the cold if he didn't get indoors instantly. He decided he would warm up inside first, then properly dress himself before returning to the meat shack with all his empty traps. He'd then deploy every one around the perimeter, creating an impenetrable defensive line bound to discourage or mortally ensnare any marauding wolf foolish enough to come back. If the whole pack returned, his Winchester rifle would sort them out.

Before returning to the safety of the cabin, the man looked down at the hole again and noticed a chunk of deer carcass barely protruding outward. He reached down and into the opening. As his right hand grasped the frozen hunk of meat he cried out in tormenting pain as a powerful set of jaws clamped down on his forearm! The man fell backwards and as he did, the jaws released him. Lying on his back in the snow with his right forearm badly bleeding, the man looked up as his attacker poked its head out of the hole and into the light of the lantern.

"Jesus Christ!" exclaimed the man as he locked eyes with the same wolf that had first appeared and terrorized him at his window. The beast growled and snarled, exposing its long, sharp fangs. The man saw the fur on its back stand up and he knew it was about to pounce! Desperately he groped for his fallen revolver only to come up with frigid handfuls of snow and ice. The man's hands were almost totally numb and without any sense of feeling. If he didn't find the gun in a matter of seconds his frozen fingers wouldn't be able to either grasp or fire the weapon.

The wolf squirmed its way out of the small hole in the door and leapt to the man's feet. It growled even louder and readied itself to leap onto the man's chest and plunge its teeth into his jugular! Just then the man's left hand passed over an irregular shape in the snow. He turned his head fast and saw his wrist resting on his gun. Unable to feel where the stock was, the man had to use his eyes to guide his fingers. With great effort he picked up the gun and pointed it at the wolf. His thumb, nearly dead with numb-

ness, barely managed to pull back the hammer just as the beast sprang forward! With a flash and a mighty bang the wolf's chest imploded under the blunt force of the discharged Colt cartridge. The animal let out a whimper and its lifeless body crashed harmlessly to the ground.

The man got to his feet dazed and disoriented. He staggered a few steps in a circle before his mind began working clearly enough to force him to stop moving. Just then the pain of his wound hit him. He looked at his injured forearm covered in blood and snow and realized he had to get inside fast or risk bleeding to death, before he froze to death. He only looked once at the beast that had attacked him. Its black fur was already thinly coated white from the falling snow, and soon it would be entombed under several more inches—something the man did not want to see happen to himself. He briefly thought about trying to drag the carcass inside. He needed the meat and the animal's hide, but there was nothing he could do at the moment. He was too dazed, too cold, and far too weak.

With great struggle, the man cupped his frigid hands and managed to scoop up the lantern and revolver. He squeezed both hard to his chest and stumbled back to the cabin. Once inside he dropped his possessions on the table and rushed to the fire. His whole body shivered uncontrollably to the point where he felt his chattering teeth would shatter inside his mouth. He drew as close to the fire as he could. He tried to feed it more wood, but couldn't feel his fingers grasp the logs. His hands felt dead and he feared frostbite of the severity that would require amputation. The thought struck fear in his heart, triggering him to lie on his stomach and blow desperately on the red coals to produce hotter flames. Eventually the fire burned more impressively, giving him renewed hope.

He curled up on the floor in a tight ball. The snow and ice that had accumulated on his cheeks and beard gradually melted away, and he soon felt a stinging sensation return to his face. As his body's core warmed, the blood in his veins began to circulate more freely to his stricken limbs. With the aid of the fire, the man's hands and feet began to thaw. Soon they too began to sting and ache. The man happily welcomed the pain, as it was a sign of life in his precious extremities. Soon he was able to flex his fingers and wiggle his toes. As soon as his hands functioned again, he grabbed several logs and rejuvenated the fire until it was a roaring blaze.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



CHRISTOPHER MORIN was born, raised, and currently resides in Portland, Maine. He received a B.A. in Journalism from the University of Maine at Orono. He is a history enthusiast and has enjoyed creative writing since penning his first short story back in second grade.