

They Speak To Me At Midnight

by

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FADE IN:

INT. DARK BEDROOM - NIGHT

Asleep diagonally amid twisted sheets: JUSTIN HUFF, 20s.

A VOICE emerges--someone with raw, tumorous vocal cords.

VOICE (O.S.)

Let me in.

Justin stirs. Blinks off sleep.

VOICE (O.S.)

Lemme in.

Out of bed. Justin scans. Leans sideways. Adjusts his boxers.

JUSTIN

Who's there?

The floorboards creak under his weight.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Snapping on the light, Justin investigates.

The voice croaks from behind his back door.

VOICE (O.S.)

Let me in.

One step back. Two. A glance to the window--pure darkness.

VOICE (O.S.)

Cold out. Lemme in.

JUSTIN

No.

He pulls open a kitchen drawer: two soup spoons and a butter knife. He grasps the knife.

JUSTIN

Go away.

He stares at the door. A moment crawls by.

Justin hesitates...moves forward...turns the knob...swings the door open...

Darkness. Nothing.

EXT. YARD - NIGHT

Justin shuffles out, butter knife still in hand.

Night dew on the grass wets his socks.

Justin slogs to the far end of the yard. Tucked in the corner by a withered plant is a garden gnome.

Justin studies the gnome. Lifts it. Takes it inside.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Justin dumps the wet gnome onto his kitchen table.

The gnome's once-cherubic features have been eaten away, blasted by years of wind/rain/snow.

The face is mostly chipped paint and exposed stone resin.

The eyes: beady, washed-out. A smirk. Arched eyebrows.

Justin places his thumb on the gnome's lips.

JUSTIN

Wanna say somethin' else to me,
little man?

A fixed stare from the gnome.

Justin digs his thumb into the gnome's lips.

JUSTIN

You wanna bite?

Thumb presses harder.

JUSTIN

There. You're inside. Now shut up.

Justin snatches his butter knife and saws it against the gnome's neck. An awful scrape of dull metal upon stone.

After a half dozen swipes, Justin drops the knife. Stands.

JUSTIN

I'm sorry. That was...aggressive.

He trudges away, snaps off the light, abandons the gnome in darkness.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

As he lies in bed, Justin grasps a framed photo from his nightstand. A pretty woman smiles in the night shadows.

He whispers to her. Tender. Earnest.

JUSTIN
I'm sorry. I'm trying.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sunshine. Justin sips coffee, frowns at the gnome.

He dials his cell phone. Hears a muffled message. A beep.

JUSTIN
(into phone)
Hey, Doctor Odom. It's Justin. Just
wanted to set up an appointment.
Something's come up.

A quick glance at the gnome.

JUSTIN
No. Wait. I don't really mean that.

Swallows.

JUSTIN
I'll handle this one myself.

A deep breath.

JUSTIN
Pretend you didn't hear this.

He hangs up.

A few cautious steps toward the gnome. He speaks to it.

JUSTIN
You're not the first one to wake me
up in the middle of the night. We
had a painting that used to speak
to me at night. Doctor Odom knows.

He sloshes his coffee.

JUSTIN
Want to know how that turned out?

The gnome stares. Justin swallows his drink.

JUSTIN

Not good.

Agonizing silence. Justin shifts.

JUSTIN

Since you like to talk, maybe you
can give me some advice.

Taps his finger on the table.

JUSTIN

I'm not good at love. What should I
do about it? Why do I suck so much?

The gnome's smirk is fixed. Justin waits for an answer.

JUSTIN

Nothing? No words? C'mon.

Justin puts his nose close to the gnome.

JUSTIN

You jabber all night, but you've
got no advice? No help?

He pulls back, lifts his coffee, pours a small, hot stream
over the gnome's head.

Dark-roasted rivulets flow along the gnome's battered nose,
cheeks, and chin.

The coffee puddles on the table. Justin stares.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Justin slides into bed, groans, buries himself in the covers.

LATER - NIGHT

Justin sleeps, but not much longer. Another VOICE hisses from
only a few feet away. A woman's voice.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Gone forever.

Justin sits up.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Gone forever.

Justin whirls and faces the framed picture of the woman.

JUSTIN
(to picture)
No.

He snatches the picture frame.

JUSTIN
Please don't say that.

He buries the picture under a mound of covers.

A new HIGH-PITCHED VOICE calls out from the kitchen.

HIGH-PITCHED VOICE (O.S.)
Cut, cut, slash.

Justin's on his feet.

HIGH-PITCHED VOICE (O.S.)
Cut, cut, slash.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Justin confronts the smirking, mischievous gnome.

JUSTIN
Shut your mouth!

But the voice resumes from the far end of the kitchen. The gnome isn't the one who's talking.

Justin scans the room for the source.

HIGH-PITCHED VOICE (O.S.)
Cut. Cut. Slash.

Justin searches.

HIGH-PITCHED VOICE (O.S.)
Cut. Cut. Slash.

The cabinet. Justin swings it open. On the highest shelf--almost out of reach--is a knife set.

He slides two knives out of a holder. The blades gleam.

JUSTIN
(to the knives)
What do you want from me?

Justin studies the sharp edges.

JUSTIN
Cut, cut, slash?

Justin looks over to the gnome.

JUSTIN
You want me to do this?

The gnome's eyes bore down on Justin.

Justin puts one of the knives to his own neck.

JUSTIN
Cut and slash? Like that?

The woman's voice cries out from the bedroom.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
No. No. No.

Justin pulls the knife way from his throat.

JUSTIN
Then who? Who gets cut?

No answer. Justin moves close to the gnome, puts his ear near its crumbling lips, listens to its secrets. The words are inaudible, but Justin seems to understand.

He thanks the gnome by kissing its smirking lips.

Clenching the knives, Justin moves to the back door. He swings it open. He casts one sad glance back to the bedroom. He steps into the darkness.

EXT. BACK YARD - NIGHT

Justin squats in the spot once occupied by the gnome. He scrapes the two knives against each other. Metal on metal.

Scrape. Scrape. Scrape. The shrill noise echoes.

JUSTIN
(whispers)
Cut, cut, slash.

He stands, walks to the gate, opens it. Knives held tightly.

Off he goes to find someone...anyone.

The night wind blows.

FADE OUT: