

dark
by
Steve McDonell

©2010

steve-abbey@hotmail.com

FADE IN:

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Suburban house, neat garden. A small dome tent is pitched near the back fence. The moon is full. Shadows ring the grass.

BEN(O.S)
This is fun, huh, Dad?

WADE(O.S)
(yawns)
Oh, sorry...yeah, it's great.

BEN(O.S)
It's only nine o' clock. You can't go to sleep yet.

WADE(O.S)
I won't, Ben, I promise. Been a long day, that's all. Your mom's a hard chore master!

INT. TENT - NIGHT

A torch CLICKS on. BEN(8)and WADE(32), lie in sleeping bags. Their features are distorted by the light; their shadows stretch across the canvas. Wade keeps his eyes shut.

BEN
I bet she's up there now, taking up all of your bed.

WADE
Yeah. She does it when I'm in it anyway!

BEN
Sally will be snooping around in my room. Checking out my private stuff. Some of it's hers though...

WADE
That worry you? We can go back to the house if you like...

Ben SNORTS.

BEN
As if, Dad! They'll laugh at us!

He pauses, listens.

BEN(CONT'D)
It's quiet outside.

Wade sits up, listens for a moment. He opens his eyes.

WADE
You're right. Very quiet.
Unusual for a weekend.

BEN
(solemn)
We can go back to the house if
you like...

WADE
As if!

They both laugh. Ben turns the torch off.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

The shadows around the lawn deepen. One in particular grows bigger. It's not cast by a person or tree. It's just...a dark patch. Slowly, it moves closer to the tent...

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Ben fidgets in his sleeping bag.

WADE
Ok...we aren't going to sleep
soon, are we?

BEN
No way! Dad, can you tell me a
story. You know, a...

WADE
Bedtime one? Aren't you a
little old for that?

BEN
No! I mean, yes! I mean, a, you
know, spooky one.

WADE
Your mother will skin me if you
have nightmares.

BEN
Well, nothing too spooky then.
Something from when you were a
boy. Something that might've
scared you.

WADE
Such as?

Ben sits up.

BEN
I dunno...were you afraid of
the dark?

WADE
Why? Are you?

He reaches out an unseen hand.

BEN
No! I just__oh, jiminy!

Wade grabs Ben's arm, making him jump. The torch comes on.
Ben looks around.

BEN(CONT'D)
Dad! Aw, come on...

WADE
Sorry. Couldn't resist. I won't
do it again, promise.

Ben looks at him warily.

BEN
I wasn't really scared. I went
along with it.

WADE
Yeah, I know. Alright then.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

The shadow moves across the grass. It's blackness gives
it an eerie depth.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Wade and Ben sit up in their bags.

WADE
Ok, when I was eight, your age,
maybe a bit older, one of my
daily chores was to light the
hot water heater.

BEN
You didn't have electricity?
Or solar?

WADE
We had power, of course, but
no solar. The heater didn't run
on the electricity. It ran on
burning fire blocks, like the
ones for the outdoor grill.

BEN
Ok, so you had to light it
every night.

WADE
Every afternoon, as soon as I
got home from school.

Ben nods slowly.

BEN
So how did you light it?

WADE
Well, I used rolled up
newspaper first. Then I put in
small bits of kindling.

BEN
Kindling?

WADE
Thin pieces of wood. We'd cut
up the bigger stuff from the
forest.

BEN
Cool. So you'd get this fire
going, and put the blocks in?

WADE
Yep. But it was a fine art. If
you didn't set it right, the
blocks would just fall to the
bottom of the heater. They
wouldn't catch alight.

(beat)
If that ol' heater wasn't
producing hot water by the time
my dad came home...ouch.

Ben frowns.

BEN
Hang on, Dad, I'm confused.
What's this got to do with
being scared of the dark?
Sounds like a whipping from
your dad is more scarier!

WADE
Hey, mister impatient! I'm
getting to that. You want the
whole story?

BEN
Aw, sorry, Dad. Keep going. I'm
listening.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

The shadow is only feet away from the tent. Black tendrils reach out, searching...

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Ben hugs his knees, rapt in his father's words.

WADE

Ok, the hot water heater was outside our house.

BEN

Like in a shed?

WADE

No, it was in the laundry, which was off the back porch.

BEN

Ok.

WADE

Our toilet was there too.

BEN

Your second toilet?

WADE

No, the only one.

Ben is silent.

BEN

You had to go outside to use it? What if...what if you had to go in the middle of the night?

He shivers.

WADE

Well...

(beat)

You went out the back door, along the porch. The laundry door was on the right. The washing machine, a big sink, then the heater.

BEN

Then the toilet?

WADE

In it's own little room.

Ben calculates, frowns.

BEN
Three lights?

WADE
Yep. You'd finish in the toilet,
and have three lights to turn
off on the way back inside.

BEN
Not that you ever ran back, huh,
Dad?

WADE
Son, I used to *sprint* as fast
as I could. I had a real vivid
imagination. Like all little
boys...

BEN
(softly)
You thought there were...things,
after you? In the dark? Not
that I do, but...

WADE
Oh, yes. They would be right
behind me. But I got it down
pretty neat, flipping the
lights off as I zoomed past.

BEN
Did you ever miss one?

WADE
Yes. That was the worse. Then
I had to go back...

They are both silent for a moment.

BEN
Hopefully you didn't miss the
toilet one too often.

WADE
You know, I__

He frowns. Looks up at the tent roof.

BEN
(grins)
You won't get me this time, Dad.

The torch goes off. A TEARING sound, a GASP cut off
sharply. The shadow, darker than eternal darkness, engulfs
the tent. Ben SCREAMS, huddles inside his sleeping bag.

Silence.

LATER

Ben emerges, sucking in deep BREATHS. Fumbles the torch on. Wade watches him, grins.

WADE
Hey, sleepy head! My stories
too boring?

Ben looks around, relaxes. Peers up at the roof. It's fine...

BEN
Wow, had a really nasty dream.
You__

The torch goes off again. The TEARING sound, louder. The shadow completely covers Ben and Wade. A WET SLITHERING sound...

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

The lawn is empty. The last traces of the shadow fade into the trees. A small object spits back onto the grass. The torch flicks on, casting feeble light. Flicks off...

BLACK