

BIGHANDS

By Daniel Jubb

CHAPTER ONE

Katie awoke with a violent shudder. She had a cold sweat as her eyes darted around her darkened bedroom, as though to find the culprit interrupting her slumber. Everything in her room was as she had left it the night before. Her desk lay littered with the previous night's homework and her schoolbag was resting against her undisturbed dollhouse. She exhaled in relief at the normality that surrounded her. Then she heard the noise; that loud, uncomfortable scratching against the front door of her house. It wasn't a noise that occurred by accident but a deliberate blood-curdling grate that proceeded to get louder.

She threw her favorite pink blanket over her head and cuddled her pillow tight, listening intently for any noise. But the scratches would not desist and were growing louder and louder, as though moving closer to her bedroom.

'Why can't Mum and Dad hear this? Please go away. Please stop.' She thought to herself in exasperation.

And just like that, it stopped. Katie held her breath and listened as hard as she could for another sound, but it was dead silent. Her heart was beating faster than what seemed humanly possible but had started to slow at the idea of a finale to her torment. She slowly began to lift the blanket from her head and peered out across her white bed sheets illuminated by the pale moonlight.

One drop. Two drops. Then three and four drops. A dark substance was slowly trickling onto her pristine linen.

Her gaze followed the trail of the substance up to the windowsill that was perched right above her bed, where a pool of dark crimson liquid had formed.

Katie stared at the droplets seeping into her mattress mortified. Although she knew deep down what the substance was, she had to be sure. She slowly extended her hand from beneath her blanket enclosure, inching toward the stains. Beads of sweat had begun to form in as she dipped her index finger into the warm drops of blood.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

Katie froze and her heart stopped. A chilling noise had broken the dead air with a loud tapping against her glass window. She pulled the blanket back further to allow her to see the window more clearly. Above the blood-soaked windowsill was night sky outside, the peaks of the trees lining her backyard illuminated by the full moon's gaze. She knelt before the window and unknowingly placed her hands on the blood-soaked sill. She was fixated on the sight of her backyard; everything about the familiar sight now seemed odd and distorted. Out of the darkness an object hit her window with an earth-shattering thud. Katie let out a deafening scream and flew back from where she'd been kneeling, spraying blood across her bed sheets. She lay sprawled on the floor, her eyes now engrossed on the large hand that was plastered on the cold glass. It was grotesque; scorched, veiny and discoloured with very long cylindrical fingers stretched out along the pane. Its nails could be seen protruding further, as black as the velvet night.

Katie scampered backwards to her bedroom door, never taking her eyes off the bedroom window. In a flash the claw had disappeared.

Katie shot up and tore open her bedroom door.

"Muuum! Daaaaaad!" she screamed in desperation.

She sprinted down the long dark passage to her parent's bedroom and switched the light on. Her mum and dad were not there. The large bed was not made, their clothes from when they had kissed her goodnight lay on the floor. Everything was eerily normal except for their presence. Katie glanced at the television facing the bed, which appeared to be stuck on a 3-second loop of a young boy laughing. He looked familiar, as though she had seen him before.

Katie was shaken from her thoughts by the loud bang of the front door slamming. She panicked and ran to the ensuite door, which was locked. Her mind was racing, she didn't know what to do.

Slow methodical steps and a lone continuous scratch filled the silence.

A slow drawling laugh began to emanate from just outside her parents door. Katie, with tears streaming down her face in pure horror, dived under her parent's bed, never taking her eyes off the door. The silhouettes of two feet were stood on the other side as a slow trickle of blood began to creep forward along the oak floorboards into the room. Katie instinctively shuffled back before unexpectedly hitting something cold.

She slowly turned her head to see what was obstructing her advances. Though vacant, those eyes were unmistakable, her mother's lifeless face forever frozen in pure terror. Katie could not breathe, an exasperated gasp escaped from her mouth as she lay next to her mother's motionless body. She raised a hand to the open flesh wound that spanned her mother's neck, conspicuous by its cleanliness without a drop of blood.

The man's cackle grew louder as the door creaked open. Katie made sure not to move or make a sound, all the while still looking into her mother's eyes. The man's steps grew closer to the bed as Katie moved her head to watch. His shoes were old brown leather but tattered, dirty and scorched; his pants were brown suit slacks that were covered in grime, rips and dirt. It was as though he'd walked straight out of a swamp. The steps he took seemed disjointed, as though he was undecided on where to go, yet methodical at the same time. His feet came to rest facing the bed; right in front of where Katie lay hidden. The smell that emanated from him was putrid. Her heart was beating fast and in the silence, she was sure he could hear it. She silently moved her hand to cover her mouth.

Suddenly a cold large hand grasped her ankles together on the other side of the bed, she screamed with every ounce of life she had left whilst being dragged out from under the bed. Katie was hanging upside-down, looking at the feet she had seen only seconds ago. She was being raised up slowly, looking over his stained brown pants and then his dirty white business shirt covered in blood. Katie wanted with everything in her being to close her eyes to what she was seeing but she couldn't. There was no escape. She helplessly came face to face with her tormentor; he was missing half of his scalp and the rest of his head was mutilated. He had disgusting black holes where his eyes should have been, and black stained mucus was drooling from his lips. His head seemed to tilt. In the face of Katie's sheer frozen terror, the man with the big hands started to smile a wide sickly grin.

CHAPTER TWO

“And Katie Johnson was never seen again.” Abbey sneered, her hands outspread in dramatic fashion.

“Muuuuuuuum!” her little brother screamed, clearly terrified.

“Oh Sam, you’re such a baby! Never tell me you want a bedtime story again. Ever.”

Sam’s eyes were full of tears and their mother burst into Abbey’s room.

“What on Earth is going on in here?” she asked, her eyes darting from Abbey perched in her bed to Sam curled up in a bean bag on the floor.

“Is Bighands real?” Sam interjected desperately.

“No, of course not honey. Just a scary story.”

Dianne moved to the beanbag to console her whimpering son, while giving a stern look to her eldest daughter Abbey.

“Now head to bed and I’ll be in to tell you a proper bedtime story soon.” She reassured.

Sam shuffled off, wiping his red eyes with the back of his hands.

Dianne turned her attention to her daughter, who was now sitting up in bed with her arms crossed. She had preempted her oncoming scolding.

“What makes you think it’s appropriate to tell your 8-year-old brother that story? Bighands, really? You’ve scared him half to death.” Dianne asked pointedly.

“He wanted me to tell him a bedtime story. Dad told me that story when I was younger.”

“Yes, when you were fifteen! There is no excuse here. You’re seventeen now so it’s time to grow up.” Dianne stormed out,

slamming the door behind her. She walked down the hall to check on Sam, who was now perched in the lounge room on their big black leather sofa watching cartoons. Dianne decided to leave him be for a while, which would hopefully take some of the edge off of his fears. Dianne began to make a coffee for herself in the kitchen, overlooking her pristine backyard pressed against the moonlit glow of the night sky. Something about it seemed odd and distorted to her, however she just presumed she was tired.

“What was all the commotion? And why is Sam not in bed?” enquired Dianne’s husband, walking into the kitchen.

“Glen, you would not believe what your daughter just told your son.”

“Not this Santa stuff again. Every year we worry but eight years old is old enough,” Glen presumed. “I was six when I found out.”

“Yes but that’s tragic and would explain a lot. No, Abbey was telling him the story about ‘Bighands’. You know, that old wives tale from years ago?”

“Bighands? That’s no wives tale.” Glen proclaimed.

“What are you talking about?”

“Sometimes I forget you’re not from St. Cloud. Bighands. That’s a true story. It’s a story that grew from a real-life serial killer, from about, the sixties? Yeah it was huge at the time apparently. This guy Gerald Watkins, he used to run a candy shop on Main Street. Over the course of about eight years he raped and murdered twenty-two children or something like that. He was caught after one little boy escaped from his store room.”

Dianne was taken aback, stood there in stunned silence. Every so often glancing from the kitchen into the lounge room to check that Sam wasn’t listening.

“It was a gruesome discovery apparently.” Glen continued. “Skins, drained bodies, crushed skulls, you name it. They said he had hands like dustbin lids and the kids used to call him Mr. Bighands. He was arrested at St. Andrew’s Church and sentenced to hang but he didn’t make it that far. He hung himself the very next day in his prison cell, still dressed in his Sunday best. Some say the police chief at the time caved his skull in and then set him on fire. Others say he escaped, but I don’t believe that. Every few years the old candy store goes up in flames. They say you can hear him laughing on Main Street every now and then, you know, usual ghost story stuff.”

“What utter nonsense!” cried Dianne.

Abbey couldn’t believe what she was hearing. She had to know the truth.