

HAUNTED BOOKS by James Dawson

Someone is supposed to have said once regarding spooks “I don’t believe in ghosts, but I’m afraid of them.” I’ve never seen one and I don’t believe in them, but who knows. I did have one odd experience in my 30 odd years of buying books (emphasis on the odd). Last year, I was called to buy books from an estate of someone I will call Kerr Mudgeon who was deceased, and it was some distance away, way out in the country.

I met the lawyer and followed him out to the nearly empty house. Looking over the shelves, I thought it would take an hour or so for me to pick out what I wanted and we agreed he would come back later as he had something to do in the meantime. Now that I think back on it, that lawyer was awfully anxious to get out of there.

It was a sturdy old farmhouse that needed a coat of paint, but otherwise seemed innocent enough. The 50 year old Studebaker pickup parked in the drive way had been the late owners only transportation. It was 11 AM on a sultry, hot day and I opened some of the doors to take advantage of the feeble breeze outside. Occasionally the door from the library to the front porch would slam shut with surprising force. I mean slamming like you’d take both hands and really heave on it. The sound echoed through the deserted house like a cannon shot. I just propped open the door again and thought nothing of it.

After this happened a few times, my subconscious must have noticed that there wasn’t enough of a wind to slam a door like that, but I didn’t pay any attention because I was too busy. I live in the country too and I’d had doors slam shut at home lots of times, but that was when a thunderstorm was coming up when there was some serious wind going on, not in a light breeze like this.

Later, after I had concluded arrangements with the lawyer and bought the books I wanted, he took off again and left me to pack them up, so I looked for the most direct exit to load up which turned out to be through that porch. I got in the Unicorn-mobile, drove across the yard and scraped my way back between two giant bushes lining the front walk to the porch door. Not taking any more chances with doors, I had propped the outside porch door open with a sturdy wooden chair.

I had a full view of everything through the open rear hatch as I was backing up. Just as I neared the door and was about to stop, at the last instant, and for no apparent reason that same porch door which I had propped wide open against the porch wall, sprung around knocking over the chair so that door met hatch dead on at a 90 degree angle with a surprising crunch putting a big dent in my formerly pristine, undented vehicle. I mean the timing for the accident was perfect. If the door had met the hatch an any other angle, the car would have just pushed it aside.

I got out and found that while the porch door was completely undamaged, the corner of my hatch door was so badly bent that it wouldn’t close. Oh, well. Well, I’d just have to deal with that later, tie it down if necessary, but now I had to get the books loaded up and get back to the store.

I then proceeded to pack up the books that I had stacked on the floor leaving the ones I didn’t want still up on the shelves. I was outside loading one of the boxes when suddenly there was a horrible crash in the library. Now what? It wasn’t a door slam. This

time, for no particular reason, two big books had fallen off of a high shelf destroying themselves on the floor with a surprising amount of noise. These were books that I had not touched because I wasn't interested in them. I had no idea why they had fallen. They certainly weren't teetering on the edge of the shelf when I saw them.

It was just starting to dawn on my preoccupied brain that something was odd was going on here. Doors slamming shut, my van being attacked, books jumping off of shelves. Maybe I wasn't alone.

This is kind of embarrassing, so please don't tell anyone, but for no particular reason, right there in the empty (?) house in case the former owner was listening I announced aloud that I was buying the books that his family didn't want, and I was sorry if he was upset, but that they would be going to good homes and I hoped that was okay. I mean even if you don't believe in spooks, you can't be too careful. And if he wasn't listening, then hey, I was only kidding.

I am sure it is a coincidence, but for all the rest of the time I was there, no more doors slammed even though by then the light breeze had turned into a gale when doors *should* have been slamming. And that is the truth. Weird. I did some crude repairs to the hatch and got the heck out of there.

I had just gotten back at the store, when a long time customer, who I will call Rob because that is not his real name, dropped in to see what was new, so I showed him my latest acquisitions. We got to talking and I said I just had an odd experience buying them. I said that I didn't believe in ghosts, but if I did believe in ghosts then there was one in the house where I just bought these books.

I related my experiences and described the house but not where it was nor did I mention any names. Rob got an odd look on his face and asked, "Was that Kerr Mudgeon's house? (name changed to protect me from any more supernatural vengeance). Now it was my turn to look shocked. I mean that place was an hour and a half away and I said "Yes! how did you know?" Rob said, "I think you just came as close as you will ever come to a ghost." Then he told me *his* story.

Several years previous to this in the course of his doing some research, Rob was told that he should go see a certain Mr. Mudgeon who could help him. Rob phoned and introduced himself. Mudgeon was agreeable and invited him over the next week for an interview.

Next week came and Rob made the long drive to Kerr Mudgeon's house and knocked on the door. Mudgeon opened it and when he found out it was Rob showing up for his appointment, slammed the door shut right in his face! After that unpleasant experience, Rob asked around and learned that Mr. Mudgeon could be a tad bit difficult to say the least and this kind of behavior was typical. In fact, the guy had moved down here from New England to get away from his family because he was on bad terms with them, too. Apparently he hated everybody. Rob described his visit as a short, ugly experience and thought that the miserable SOB would be capable of anything including coming back from the grave to guard his books. I said he still likes to slam doors, too.

Rob bought a few of the books and that was the end of that- or was it? Later on I was home walking my dog around the yard. It was dusk and a pleasant enough evening when suddenly I heard a screech owl up in a tree right by me. I've heard their weird, tremulous calls all my life, but always at a distance, never this closely before. I mean it was probably looking down at me from the top of that tree. I saw Rob again a few days

later and we were talking and he just happened to mention an odd thing. There had been an owl in a tree right next to his house. He has lived in the country for 18 years and heard lots of owls, too. But never in all that time was there one just outside his bedroom window before. It was so loud, it kept him awake for most of the night! Then I told Rob about *my owl*.

If there was a ghost how did it find its way back here? Were the books haunted? Did the ghost follow Rob home from the bookshop and then wail at him all night in owl form “Ooooooh!! *Why did you take my books?? Give them baaaaack!!!* “ For some reason, I got off lucky. I slept fine, but maybe it was because I had apologized.

What does it all mean? I don't know. I just know that I've been buying books for three decades, from all kinds of houses, in all kinds of situations. In many empty houses, from many deceased owner's estates. I once bought books from a deserted farmhouse in the middle of a field at night using a flashlight because the electricity had been turned off. Never bothered me, so I don't think of myself as particularly flighty.

And I didn't have any bad feelings in Kerr Mudgeons house either. Maybe all the weirdness was because of the wind and there was no ghost, I don't know. Nevertheless, I'm glad I didn't have to spend the night there. I suspect that I would have heard that owl calling my name and telling me to “*GET OUT!*”

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