

—THE DREAMCATCHER

by Nate Kenyon

Jeremy Foxx stood at the kitchen window, flicking the edges of the photo he held against his breast. He watched as the sheet of rain swept across the hay field and up the sloping lawn to the house.

Mom always says a glass of milk is *good for the nerves*. The scrawny blond boy in wool socks and long underwear slipped away from the window and put the photo on the counter to pour a cup. The carton shook and a little milk slopped onto the kitchen table. He stared at the spilled milk and tried very hard not to think about what was waiting for him upstairs.

His grandmother had gone with his mother to the hospital. Apparently he was too young to go with them, but old enough to stay by himself for three hours. He was half-inclined to prove them wrong by breaking something. But then he would have to “face the music.” That was no big deal for movie tough guys like Bruce Willis, but Bruce Willis had never met Jeremy’s grandmother. When she yelled at you it was like sticking your hand in a hornet’s nest and holding it there while they did what came naturally.

He took his milk into the living room and plopped down into a chair. Bugs hit someone over the head with a hammer on the television, and that helped a little. But he couldn’t seem to focus on the cartoon. He kept looking at the ceiling above his head.

It’s waiting for me.

Immediately he stuffed the thought into his handy mental drawer and locked it. Everyone gets jumpy sometimes when they’re alone. It was, in the immortal words of his father, NO BIG DEAL.

But adults weren’t always right. Some said that the way to beat something like that was to stare it down, but these were undoubtedly the same people still sleeping in a room with an especially strong nightlight.

The thing was, he’d never actually seen the coat tree move. At first he thought his mother was responsible for it. But why she would move the thing two or three feet to the right or left made no sense to him, and when he asked her if she was coming into his room in the middle of the night, she denied it.

He couldn’t very well tell his grandmother. He knew exactly what she would say: *Don’t you go and upset your mother, not in her condition. It was hard enough when your father left, and now this. She needs her strength.*

NATE KENYON

The coat tree was really a sculpture that Dad had brought back from a trip to Senegal years ago. It was carved from a rich mahogany and polished to a shine. Two legs and a long tail in back helped it stand up straight; the fat belly of the thing tapered up to a round ball that was much too small for a proper head. Two upraised arms made it look like a football referee signaling a touchdown.

There were really three places to hang things, the two arms and the little head in the middle. But when you put a hat on the head, the coat tree began to look a little too human. And if you hung your jacket around it, that was even worse. Alone and naked, the coat tree gave only the barest suggestion of human form, but with a little help it changed into a potbellied troll squatting in the corner, waiting to pounce.

When he told his friend Maria, she said that it must be possessed. She described a show she had seen on the Discovery Channel about primitive cultures. "You should get someone to come look at it," she said. "An expert could tell you right away if there was a spirit inside."

He didn't know anything about any experts. He tried to recall what his dad had said about the coat tree when he brought it home. But it didn't make any sense.

Jeremy realized he had forgotten his father's photo on the kitchen counter. He jumped up and ran to get it, and a familiar feeling of relief washed over him when he held it in his hands. Flick, flick, his thumb absently moved a corner up and down as he looked into his father's face. He forced himself to concentrate. Then he tucked the photo in the waistband of his long underwear and went back to the living room.

Bugs Bunny had given way to a talk show that featured a fat woman with a microphone and a bunch of bigger, fatter people who yelled at each other. A minute later the channel went to a commercial about a diaper that would make old people feel more secure.

That was when he heard a noise above his head.

A gust of wind shook more drops off the big oak tree near the window. The builders had placed the house right on the edge of a valley. Below the porch the ground fell off at a steep angle, and on clear days, if you looked out the back windows, you could see for miles.

Now he was thinking about different things. For example, theirs was the only house within three miles, and if he needed help, it would take someone at least ten minutes to get to him. That was assuming they knew he was in trouble and came right away.

He padded catlike up the stairs and paused at the top. His bedroom was at the far end of the hall, the door partway open. He couldn't remember if he'd left it that way.

When he tiptoed down the hall and peered through the shadows, the coat tree was standing in the middle of the room, halfway between its accustomed corner and his bed.

Jeremy stared. The coat tree stared back, its bulbous face as smooth and shiny as black ice.

He could feel his heart thudding so hard it shook his scrawny chest. His grandmother had come up to use the bathroom, as she always did before a car trip, and when she was on her way back down she must have moved it.

But why would she do such a thing?