A Night Under the Stars

A nameless drifter on an unknown quest. A brutal murder stalking his prey. When they clash one night the question becomes, who is the real killer? A Night Under the Stars is a 1,400 word short story previously published as part of a mini anthology titled Drift. It is presented here in a revised form.

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by

Stewart Felkel

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He was sitting on his porch listening to the radio, drinking wine when he saw the man creeping through the RV campsite. Porch might have been slightly misleading as it was only 7' wide and 3' deep. Since he had built the thing with his own two hands, however, he felt that he could call it whatever grandiose terms that he liked.

The radio was giving the latest news about the Rest Stop Butcher, lingering almost lovingly over the details of his latest victim. Again, this was a misleading term as only the first few murders had taken place at rest stops. The rest had taken place at RV parks, campsites and any other lonely place a victim could be caught unawares. Still, what's in a name?

He followed the man out of the corner of his eye as he slunk closer to him on the porch of his house. Even though it might be built on the back of a trailer, only measure 20' by 8', and was pulled by his truck from site to site it was his house. He had been inspired by that company out in California who built those prefab houses out of bamboo. People often thought he was crazy, but he preferred the term eccentric.

He reached the bottom of his bottle of wine, it was a small bottle after all, and went inside for some more. He walked through the Spartan living room with its solitary chair and small bookshelf. The curtains were drawn keeping in the light and keeping out any prying eyes. The entrance to the kitchen was beside the ladder to the loft bedroom. His was a home that was not designed to entertain guests. That was fine with him however. He preferred his solitude. He reached into his small dorm room style fridge and got out another one of the four-pack that he had picked up on his weekly grocery run.

He had been at this park for two weeks now as part of his ambling cross country trek and thought he might stay a week more. It didn’t matter; he had nowhere to be and forever to get there. He had watched the park slowly empty as news of the killer spread and was one of the few brave souls still there. The lack of neighbors didn’t bother him. He trekked the short distance back to his porch, it was a porch dammit, to watch the stars continue coming out. He grabbed a light sweater by the door as he walked out. Looking up at the sky his breath made a fog as it escaped. He knew he wasn't alone, but pretended nonetheless.

"Excuse me, do you have a light", he heard?

Looking down he saw the man standing at the bottom of the short steps to his porch. He wore glasses, was balding, and a little bit dumpy. There wasn’t anything about him that was particularly intimidating.

He slipped a hand in his pocket and pulled it out with a half full Bic lighter. The man lit his cigarette and handed the lighter back. He leaned against the porch and inhaled deeply.

"Nice night isn't it? It's cold, but the stars look great from out here."

"That they do" he responded and then fell silent again. They stood there a few more minutes while cigarette man puffed away. He took quick drags off of the cigarette like he was trying to finish it in record time. After a few minutes the pudgy little man began shifting from foot to foot. His gaze kept darting around nervously.

"So, have you been keeping up with the news about the Rest Stop Butcher" Cigarette Man asked without anymore preamble? “You know the one who stabbed all those people to death."

"I've heard of him. Heard he kills at more than just rest stops these days. They think he's hunting the RV parks now."

"If that's true aren't you scared staying here, especially with so few people around?"

"Nah, I'm not scared. Men who have to hurt and kill women to feel tough aren’t men at all."

At this the pudgy man grew red in the face and started puffing air like a fish out of water. His cigarette fell from his hands when they started shaking. Then he straightened up and grew tense.

"You should be scared, you should be very scared”, he said through gritted teeth.

He knew it was coming, but had hoped he was mistaken or that Cigarette Man would move on looking for other prey. There was the click and then a glint of moonlight. Cigarette Man lunged at him with the knife. His face was twisted in a snarl, but he made the mistake of trying to stab upwards at his target. When his intended victim easily sidestepped he lost his balance which is when the drifter delivered a kick to his face that made his nose run red and broke his glasses. He dropped the knife and covered his face in shock. The drifter leapt off the porch and, almost casually, slid around behind him and locked in a choke hold.

The erstwhile killer in his arms began to thrash, but his struggles grew weaker as his brain lost oxygen. He glanced around but no one else was outside and the few windows with lights coming from them were covered. He dragged him up the stairs and inside the house.

The lack of neighbors served him well. He counted to 60 to make sure of him then laid him down while he went back outside. He left the body while he went to retrieve his work gloves from his truck. His arms were shaking a little from the exertion and adrenaline in his system. On his way back in he retrieved the knife and the broken bits of glasses from the ground. He stood up and then paused like he had forgotten something.

Glancing around him he saw the still lit cigarette. He extinguished it with his toe before adding it to the pile of evidence. He went back inside and began removing any trace he might have left on the body, just in case it was ever found. He stripped his jacket to remove any blood from it. He even wiped down his lighter to remove the man’s prints. He checked his ID and saw that he was a local man, which would mean he would be missed soon. That was a shame. If he was a drifter, like himself, then this would have been so much easier.

Soon enough he was in his truck headed to the hardware store. As was his practice, the first day he was in town he had taken the day to drive around and familiarize his self with the town. That familiarity would serve him well again tonight. First the hardware store for plastic sheeting and Sack Crete and then to Wal-Mart for duct tape and industrial sized zip-ties. It wouldn't do to buy it all in one place.

When he returned home he wrapped the body in sheeting with the evidence laid on top and duct taped it together. He then placed the plastic wrapped body on another layer. The Sack Crete he mixed in a bucket in the living room before pouring it liberally over the body. Then he wrapped it again with several layers and zip tied it together. He glanced around again before dragging it to the truck, but the park was still empty. He lugged the body to the truck and closed the hard bedcover over it. He drove the limit exactly, never failed to use a blinker, and otherwise took great pains not to be noticed.

A twenty minute trip found him on a small bridge over the Ouachita River watching the body sink out of sight. He stood there a minute and watched the stars some more. They were even more beautiful over the water. He supposed that he would need to stay long enough not to raise suspicion when someone filed a missing persons report, but he doubted that the body would ever be found. Not in the dim, dark, deep waters of the Ouachita. He drove home and turned on the radio. The news was once more about the Rest Stop Butcher. Police were still looking for suspects and asking anyone with information to call in. In the dark of his cabin he smiled.

About the Author

Stewart Felkel lives in Sterlington, La with his beautiful wife and their three fur babies. He has been a band director, music minister and optician. His hobbies include an eclectic mix of things including boxing, archery, bowery, medieval combat and writing. For more freebies, news of upcoming works and the occasional book review check out his website www.stewartfelkel.weebly.com.