

BEN'S BEST FRIEND

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'Ben's Best Friend' First appeared in Charles Black (ed), **Ninth Black Book of Horror**, (Mortbury Press, 2012)

Illustration: Chrissie Demant

Ben had a new best friend, Andy. Andy had moved down from Liverpool. They met at the local rec'; they'd become mates straight away. Andy swore a lot and that made him laugh. It was always 'fucking this' and 'fucking that'. Ben went home one day and said '...is my fucking tea ready?' 'cause Andy dared him. His dad clipped him around his ear and sent him to bed early.

Andy's dad imported exotic animals. Sometimes he kept them at their house - that was what Andy said. Ben had never seen them. He'd heard them though.

They sounded scary.

Ben always left Andy's religiously at 10:30 pm so that he'd be home by 11. The first

part of his journey, a half mile cycle ride down the Fairway took him out of the Bay Estate. The Bay Estate was a sort of council estate for the filthy rich. There were 15 lamp posts; Ben knew because he counted them every time. He'd reach the exit to the estate and then turn back so that he could watch the lights go out. They went out one by one, starting with the furthest. The estate would slowly be plunged into total darkness. It gave Ben the creeps, but in a thrilling way. In his imagination, when it got dark, the Bay Estate became a bleak and savage world inhabited by flesh eating creatures.

Sometimes he'd be a few minutes late and the lights would go out as he cycled down the Fairway. That was even better. The darkness would chase him and his heart would race. He'd be shit scared but at the same time excited. The flesh eaters would be tearing after him but as long as he was in the light, he was safe.

Then one day he left even later than usual. It was Andy's fault. His parents were out for the night. They raided the drinks cabinet, got drunk on cheap sherry and amused themselves by making a few funny phone calls. Ben became anxious when he realised the time, but that added to the excitement.

It was 10:45 pm.

He'd *never* been that late before.

The street lights were still on when he left and that set his pulse racing.

He reckoned he could make it though. The first light went out behind him. Ben raised himself from the saddle and pushed down hard on the peddles. A quick glance over his shoulder and he saw that three, maybe four street lights had gone out. The fear was irrational, but his imagination was working overtime. He wasn't on a bike he was on a Harley. He'd made halfway when a flood of darkness passed him. His blood ran cold. His pulse raced. He laughed - nervously. The feel of cold air rushing by felt good.

And then he saw four figures silhouetted across the exit to the estate as if they were waiting for him.

And that made him stop.

'Fuck...' he said.

His blood ran cold. When he looked again one of them was gone. The remaining three things were making horrible sounds - like grunting through thick phlegm. They began to walk in his direction. Not really a walk, more of a demented swagger.

‘Oh fucking shit...’ he groaned.

Ben thought he might piss himself. He doubted that they could see him. He was in darkness. Silently he moved from the road, abandoned his bike and slipped into the front garden of one of the big houses. He’d hide until they’d gone and then make a dash for it. Peeping through a leylandii hedge, he watched them. They were looking in gardens and down drives. Ben thought he could smell something horrible, like the filthy stench from a sewer.

He moved further back into the cover of the trees. There was enough moonlight for him to see the closest one. It had a jutting jaw and wild, bulbous eyes. It had pustulent skin and clumps of hair missing like it had radiation sickness. It was naked – that really freaked him. By the look of its stonking great genitalia, it was male.

Ben felt sick.

He was either going to puke or piss himself. For a moment the thing looked in his direction. He shrank back into the shadows. His breathing was slow and shallow. The beast pulled a strange face; it was sniffing the air. It could probably smell him. He wanted to cry. He wanted to be home. He wanted to be tucked up in bed.

Warm, cosy and safe.

The sudden sound of frenzied laughter filled the air, and it was coming from his pocket. It was his stupid fucking ring tone.

Andy was texting him.

‘U hme yet m8?A.’

His cover was blown. The closest one moved like lightning and dragged him through the hedge by his hair. They were hideous things. The other two were female. They had droopy, hairy breasts from which protruded stumpy nipples. One of them let out a hellhound shriek; the sound cut through him like a knife. They had clawed hands and teeth like razors.

They started tearing at his clothes.

‘What are you doing?’ he screamed, ‘What are you fucking doing!’

His bladder went into spasm and he felt the warm flow of urine running down his leg. The fourth one stepped from the shadows but it wasn’t a beast.

It was human.

Ben couldn’t believe his eyes.

‘Andy?’ he said.

The skin of a young boy was found hanging in a tree on the fairway to the Bay Estate early the next morning. There were a few bits of raw flesh on the ground. Forensics found hair, fingernails and some teeth. They found an eyeball in a nearby drain as well. The other one had rolled down the road, but a young PC called Colin accidentally trod on it.

There was no evidence though so they stitched up a known paedo who lived on the estate just to keep the public happy.

Andy cycled down the fairway a few days later. He was mourning the loss of his best mate. There was some consolation though. He had a new bike - not exactly new, sort of...refurbished.

He was off to the rec' to find a new best friend.

THE END

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DEC 2015**