

Chapter Seven

Mrs. Old Lady Thornton

A mile or so down the highway there is a road that turns north off the main road and goes back in the sticks quite a ways. By taking a couple of other dirt roads you can make a full circle, a good day's ride by bike.

That route takes you by a couple of nice swimming holes on the way so it is always getting close to dark by the time we get home from that trip. When we leave going west from our house to the dirt road that turns north, it takes you right into the old Thornton place. I mean if you kept going straight you would run right into the house. Only thing, if you did that you would run right through the Thornton family graveyard. That dad-blamed thing was right in the middle of the front yard.

Now you tell me, what kind of folks would bury their dead in their front yard? Not on the side, not in the back, but slap-dad, dead stinking center, cotton-picking middle of their front yard. So you had to turn right to miss the place and then you had to pedal right past that grave yard, which took you about nine years if you pedaled as fast as you could.

Let me tell you a little history about the Old Thornton place: Old Lady Thornton lived there by herself for years and years. She had lived alone for a long time, since her husband was killed in the war. I'm not sure which war, probably the civil war or it might have been World War One. I know it was not WW2 cause Uncle El and the rest of my uncles that passed the physicals fought in it. My daddy didn't get to go because of his feet. He had two or three logs run over his feet. He could still walk and all, but I guess maybe they were afraid he couldn't "Double Time, March." The sergeant always shouts that out when he wants you to run or at least to hurry up. Anyways, Daddy didn't get to go and it made him feel bad, you could tell that.

Back to Old Lady Thornton, I ain't being disrespectful or nothing, that's just what everybody called her. I guess I could say Mrs. Old Lady Thornton. Probably would be a lot nicer. Well, Mrs. Old Lady Thornton had lived by herself for a real long time. Uncle El and Daddy were always telling stories about her. They say anytime they were hunting up in that area, rain, cold, sleet, snow or in the middle of the night, the very minute you stepped foot on her property, yonder she would come toting her lantern letting them know she knew they were either close

to or on her property and would tell them to leave. And man, they talked like there were some fine coons on her land. Them old coons were smart and they knew Mrs. Old Lady Thornton would protect them. Pop said they would do things just to test her out. She always came out to chase them off before they could catch any coons. If they just went down her fence line they could see her lantern going right down that fence line with them.

Well, back to my story. Mrs. Old Lady Thornton was already dead and gone by the time us boys starting seeing how fast we could pedal by that graveyard. We would always talk about how slow we were going to ride by there until we rounded the curve where you could see those old trees, with the Spanish moss hanging down, all around that old house.

We could see right down the breezeway of the house. And Lordy, if that wasn't enough you could see right in the kitchen window and the table was still set just like Mrs. Old Lady Thornton was going to be back in just a few minutes.

Ain't that weird? They tell me wasn't anything in that old house moved since the last time Mrs. Old Lady Thornton was in there.

You can't prove it by me. If it's up to me won't nothing be moved for the next hundred years. I ain't going in there. No sir-ree, not me, not on your life I ain't going in there.

Where was I, oh yeah, as soon as we would get to that curve, gravel would start to flying out from our bike wheels. You see, when we left our house going west that would put us going by the old Thornton place mid to late morning. Our swimming holes were east of the old Thornton place so we would have plenty of time for swimming and still make it home before dark. You never wanted to come by that old place after dark.

One time and one time only, we left our place going east. We got to our swimming holes and it was really hot. We each had bought a R.C. Cola and we had put them in the creek to get cold. Remember I told you how cold Middle Creek was. It would cool them R.C.'s pretty quick.

Anyways, between having a good time swimming and waiting on our R.C.'s to cool, the day just plum got away from us. Now there wasn't enough daylight left so we could not go back through town and it would be very close to dark going by the old Thornton place. There just was not another way to go. We even thought about going through the swamp. But the last few nights we had been hearing an old panther scream. You ever heard one? Them things send shivers all down your spine. It sounds just like a woman screaming. We decided

we would take our chances on Mrs. Old Lady Thornton not coming back tonight.

Coming down that dirt road from the east, you had an embankment on the right side of the road. It was about 10 feet tall one hundred yards or so from the house and it sloped down gently until it was about level with the road about where the graveyard started. You did not have a clear view of the house until you were right up on it.

Now folks, what I'm about to tell you is scary. It will make the hairs stand up on the back of your neck.

C.C. normally ain't scared of nothing and he and I were about even on who could ride fastest, but that evening C.C. was so much faster than me it wasn't even funny.

What happened was this. It was turning dusky dark and as we were approaching that bank we saw a faint glow coming toward the road. The closer we got the brighter it got. Then it started going the very same speed as we were and in the same direction. The closer we got to that house the closer and brighter that light became. By the time we got even with that graveyard, we decided if Old Lady Thornton was going to catch us she was going to have to get into high gear. That's a sharp curve when you go from west bound to south bound and buddy we had gravel going ten yards out into the weeds. Doug had done moved into second place and I was eating their dust. After I got straightened out from the curve I looked back at the house. The glow had already moved into the breezeway of the house and just before I went out of sight I looked again.

Folks, that light was in the kitchen. If you would have asked me before this if I believed in haunts I would probably told you no. I sure do now. We told Daddy and Uncle El about it. All they said was "She used to do the same thing to us."

But since this happened we have found out about other things that are strange and mysterious going on around that old place.

Another story Daddy tells about that place is one night one of his cousins went to spend the night with one of the Thornton boys. His cousin told him one night was a plenty. He said you could not separate the shovel from the fire poker. Whenever you used one of them and placed the shovel on one side of the fireplace the poker would always roll to the side the shovel was on. This went on all night long he said. Well, I believe him and they ain't no way I'd spend a night in that place. No sir-ree, not one minute of one night, no sir-ree buddy, not me.

