

Fats' and Punky's Monster  
By  
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Punky lived way off down yonder in a hollow south of me. It was at least five miles if you were walking around the road to his house. If you went through the woods it was a whole lot shorter but it was so dad-gum scary going that way. Still, I went that way a few times after seeing what we saw and those few times was a' plenty, I can tell you that.

What we saw was the old monster or what ever it was that got almost in the middle of the path, in the ditch, right near the log that crossed the branch and just stayed there. And it was always in the same place every time, you could nearly 'bout count on him being there, especially if you were in a hurry. And where he stayed was right at the bottom of a big hollow where the branch ran through it. Wasn't no other way to get around that branch.

You had to get up on this log to cross the branch, unless you wanted to wade the branch and get all scratched up with all the briars, get wet and take a big chance on poison oak.

Oh yeah, and there were a few cottonmouth moccasins in that branch too. That is where that "dang old monster" took possession of that path ever time.

Some folks said me and Punky was lying about that being a monster; that it was really a big old dog or something, but none of them had ever seen it. Just me and Punky. But it was big. And Mean. Its growl was so loud it would plum scare you to death. One or two times hearing it was enough for Punky. Once was a 'plenty for me.

Neither one of us had actually seen it, well seen all of it, anyway. One time Punky had seen its head and at the same time I saw its tail. And when we talked later and talked about where Punky said his head was and from where I said his tail was, was about twenty feet. That was the best we could determine under the circumstances; the circumstances being wasn't neither one of us gonna go down there and measure.

So lately, me and Punky had taken to going all the way around the road so we would not have to encounter that "dang old monster". And we told everyone who would listen to us not to go down through the hollow or they might get eaten up by the "dang old monster" hanging out down there, especially it was hungry.

It was much better just to go around the road and not take a chance on that monster being hungry. A whole lot of folks pooh-poohed me and Punky saying we was skeered and all, but most of them doing the pooh-poohing was taking the long way round to Punky and them's house themselves.

One day Punky's cousin came to visit him. She was from Tuscaloosa and she was about the prettiest little thing I ever saw. Boy, I mean P-R-E-T-T-Y, hubba-hubba; you better believe I'm talking good-double o-looking with a capital G! When she looked at me I got plum weak in the knees. It was hard for me to look her right in the eyes 'cause when I did that I felt plum faint and I had a hard time breathing. She was about the prettiest girl I had ever seen. She wore shoes and everything, and it was summertime.

But she did not like walking. She had walked with Punky all the way around the road over to my house and she told Punky she did not want to walk that far ever again. I mean I don't think she was disappointed in seeing me or nothing like that, her being a city girl and all, she was just not into a whole lot of walking.

I spoke up quick like and said, “Punky can take you through our short cut over to his house.” Punky shot me a look that could have killed me. I could tell that I had done said the wrong thing.

Punky said to me, “You know I can’t take a girl through there with all the snakes down in that branch. She may get chased by one of them black racers.” Then he said to Autumn, (that was her name Autumn) “There have been rumors that black racers will chase anyone moving down in the middle of that hollow. I don’t worry for me; I worry about you being able to out run one of them. They are fast. Me and Fats are proven runners when it comes to snakes. We might just start running and forget all about having you with us. Mind you, it was not a black racer we have outrun, but another variety.” Punky stopped short of telling her it was a garden snake. But when it comes to snakes, Punky and me have running in common. It just comes natural.

Autumn said, “I ran in school. I ran track. I am the fastest girl in my school.”

Punky looked sick. I felt sick. Autumn looked healthy. Punky spoke up and said, “There is a whole lot of poison oak down there in that hollow as well. I better tell you about that before you catch it. I don’t want you blaming me for catching a bad case of poison oak.

Autumn said, “If it is a trail, I’m going to stay on the trail. Lets go home, Punky.”

“Fats is coming home with us and I’m gonna ask his Mom if he can stay for supper. We eat supper early so it will not be too dark for him to walk home, huh, Fats.”

You talk about looks that could kill; I was shooting deadly arrows at him with my eyes. And he could tell. And I could tell he was enjoying me shooting them arrows at him too. Matter of fact, it made me mad enough that I was ready to walk through the hollow

of the shadow of death and I just hope that He will be with me and that His rod and His staff will be close by His side while He is walking with me. I hope He don't even come close to Punky. Punky and that monster deserve each other. It will be ok if Autumn walks back there with me 'cause Mr. Punky is "gonna take the lead through this valley."

We started out walking and if Punky looked like he was gonna let me lead I would slow down and pick something from between my toes, seemed like I always had something between my toes that could be picked. Autumn would always stop to watch. I don't think she ever had anything stuck between her toes. (You have to go barefoot to have that happen to you. I don't think them pretty little feet had been in a mud puddle, ever.)

Punky would start lolly-gagging around every time I stopped. Then I would have to examine the bottom of my feet for stickers. This went on for some time.

Finally, Autumn could not stand us "two idiots standing around acting so weird." She took off down the path that leadeth unto the valley of the shadow that was over our hollow of death. Surely goodness and mercy will follow her so I went running trying to catch up. I felt like as pretty as she was, she was really blessed so I would be ok if I stayed real close.

Punky was bumping into me from the back, trying to keep close to the two of us. I kept pushing him away. He grunted a right smart but he never did complain out loud.

About the time we entered the very depth of the hollow, at the crossing where the monster always made itself known, Autumn jumped up on that log and went tearing across. She reached the other side just a skipping and running and in general ignoring

everything around her. It was a case of “ignorance being bliss”. She just did not understand the monster could attack at any time.

I got me a head of steam and brother I went to running, intent on ketching up to Autumn, which was hard ‘cause she was fast. I had not ever seen a girl run like this girl could run. I got over that log and I looked neither right nor left, keeping my eyes on Autumn’s backside. (It’s hard to think about monsters when you are looking at a girl’s backside. Did you ever notice that? Your mind somehow just naturally pays attention for a change. And I didn’t think about a monster all the way across that log.)

Punky wasn’t so lucky. He had to look at my backside which wasn’t nearly as interesting. So he went to looking all around. He screamed about the time he got out in the middle of the log, right over the branch. His feet went out from under him as pretty as you please and he dove, head first right into the middle of the branch, never minding the snakes and poison oak, the briars and stickers, sinking up to his shoulders in mud. (Mind you, his head was buried in tons of mud, old black mud, and maybe a little cow manure was in there too.)

I took a quick look at Punky, but not to long because I knew something made him scream. I was not gonna run down there to help him until I was sure that the monster had left the valley of death.

Autumn screamed at me, “You go help Punky. What are you waiting on?”

“Oh, ok, eh, reckon what happened to him? What you think happened? You reckon there was a snake or something?” I tried to sound concerned for Punky.

Punky finally got his head out of the mud. His eyes were as big as saucers and he was pointing over on the other side of the log. All I could see was a shaggy head but that was

enough. I pointed at it and said to Autumn, "Let's get out of here. There is the monster. It's always right through here. We should have told you. We did not want to scare you. Let's run."

I started up the hill, running. Autumn started down the hill, walking. Walking right at the monster. I stopped with my breath caught right up in my throat. This girl was plum crazy. Punky had already run up the side of the hill but not in the path. When he saw Autumn going down the hill toward the monster, he came to a screeching stop also, watching Autumn walk back down into the valley of death. That little girl knew no fear. Surely the Lord was with her with His rod and His staff.

About the time she got down to the bank of the branch, three cows stood up. They had been lying in the branch. Right smack dab in the middle of the branch. They all turned and walked out of there plenty fast like they were scared of Autumn.

I looked at Punky and he looked at me. We were not at all sure these were the monsters we had been seeing. If that girl Autumn had seen what we saw when we saw it, I believe she would have been scared too. She lucked out because I am pretty sure them cows run the monster off.

"Monsters? Monsters? I figured boys like you living out here in the country would be real brave and tough. The city boys I know are a lot tougher than you two. Calling cows monsters."

With that Autumn turns and walks off. Punky looks at me and I look at him, then we both look at Autumn's backside going over the hill. Punky puts his head down and starts following her. I put my head down and start back home.

I never saw Autumn again. I never saw them monsters either.