



the library of the Creeping Shadow
(hidden in the backwoods of davidstuarddavies.com)

press your esc key to leave full screen mode // navigate with your arrow keys, or by clicking a page to turn it

Hounded



Damn, the sky seemed so low, bubbling and roiling just an inch above the chimneystacks of the decrepit manor house. By the sounds of things God was shifting His heaviest furniture around up there, and the rain rattled against the windows like handfuls of gravel, driven so hard by the icy wind it actually formed vertical puddles on the glass. A damnable night. And, doing little to brighten the situation, circling the shambling house ceaselessly, in the shadows and undergrowth, a beast, of some kind, it's enormous tracks could be seen in the mud, outside the windows and doors, the footprints of a gigantic hound, of some godforsaken breed.

John Watson stood at the window of the drawing room and regarded the evil night with excitement trickling electrically through his veins. He was old, but he could still get it up. His reflection in the window was faint, ghostly, a smudged chalk thumbprint on a blackboard. He stepped closer to the glass, and an old face he barely recognised loomed toward him, like something dead floating to the surface of a stagnant pond. The years, and his illness, had been unkind. The remorseless process of loss. He had lost a lot of weight, and a bit of height. He smiled to himself, only a tiny smile, he couldn't help it, yet even the tidgiest smirk made his old eyes crumple and pucker like the derrieres of two cats. He put his face straight and serious, and shifted his attention to the reflections of the people in the room behind him, waiting on his announcement. The sour and grotesque visage of little old Lady Wainhouse, her skin a hundred square inches of horror, warts, boils and diseased flakes. Her eyes, though, were a beautiful, warm chocolate brown. But they clashed like a bastard with the icy blue of her irises.

Watson could feel her gaze burning into him. She could probably incinerate a turkey from five hundred yards, the loathsome old witch. When his back was scorching from the combined impatient gaze of the audience, and his face chilled by the cold seeping through the window, he decided to spin, turn, and face them dramatically. A china cup rattled, he had startled the vicar, a fart of a man, so thin, he probably had to run around in the shower to get wet.

It was unnecessary and ungentlemanly to keep them all waiting. But he had learned from an old, sadly no longer with us old friend, a little showmanship sweetened the pot.

"You are probably wondering why I've called you all here." Watson began. He had been itching to say those words for, oh, forever...

Outside, while this was going on, a man in black was scaling the perimeter wall. He was tall, lean, he seemed to simply float up the brickwork despite the wind trying to rip him off, a skilled intruder. He paused only once in his ascent. A spider the size of a bunch of black hairy bananas regarded him evilly from it's home - his fingerhold. If there was one thing he hated. It was spiders. And bananas. He scanned the area for a different hold, saw one and reached for it, then thought no. It was simply not on for him to be scared of anything. To prove his merciless intent in the execution of his 'duties' the man in black deliberately stabbed his finger into the hole and crushed the spider dead. Then he floated higher and peered over the wall into the grounds of the manor.

He had good reason to believe there would be a big dog. That was the reason he had some poisoned meat in his bag.

He regarded himself as a dog lover, he owned three, but he was a bite hater. Anyone that saw the scars on his legs would understand why. Reaching into his utility bag, he tossed a black wooden ball high into a tree. It hit the trunk loudly, and rattled it's way to the ground through the dripping wet branches.

He waited silently, scanning the trees and bushes.

While he waited for the guard dog, the hound waited for him. Not moving, not blinking, not even breathing. Not even glancing at the rabbit that shot close by, startled by the ball.

Five minutes elapsed. Stiles wondered if the dog had been kept inside, out of the rain.

"Can't hang around here all night." Stiles muttered to himself, and then he took hold of two of the iron spikes adorning the wall, and heaved himself up. He despised iron spikes, anyone who saw the scars on his arse would understand why. He took three of his trademark black wooden balls, each with a hole, and he jammed them onto three of the vicious spikes for protection.

Stiles was a damn good shot with those wooden balls when necessary, practice made him able to knock an ant's hat off from fifty yards without disturbing its hairstyle. Using them on past jobs, he had incapacitated X amount of human guards and two alsations.

His balls were his calling cards.

So to speak.

He always left at least one behind. The 'Black Ball' some called him, those that moved in 'better' circles. "Oh dear boy, you've been black balled, how delicious!"

Those who moved in lesser circles knew him as 'Black Balls'. Which made him sound like some

kind of depraved buccaneer. A pirate who'd buckled his swash in some very dodgy holes.

Over the thus blunted spikes he went, silent and lithe, jumped and rolled. With ne'er a sound. Barr that blasted twig. It broke under him with a loud report and he froze. Just as he was wondering why he was so worried, after all, he had recently bounced a wooden ball off a tree trunk, and nothing had stirred, and a rumble of thunder had shouted over the noise, the undergrowth erupted towards him.

Stiles' reactions were exemplary. He sprang at the crumbling wall in terror, boosting himself up from a large rock, his hands flailing desperately for holds, like the tentacles of a squid with a hot iron up it's arse. Just by pure numbers, his attempts yielded results, and he was nearly half way up when the filthy grey streak hurled itself at his withdrawing legs and smashed violently into the brickwork.

The creature, dog, creature, bounced off the wall with a loud crack and flopped to the ground.

"You.. bastard." Stiles hissed shakily, looking down at the big lanky, manky thing with distaste. It had a number of bald patches in it's straggly, ratty coat, and some nasty looking sores, glistening wetly. It was an ugly bastard, and, he was glad to note, a dead bastard.

Its tongue hung out of its mouth on the grass and its sickly yellow eyes stared lifelessly ahead. It had broken its own neck in its eagerness to get him. It was not breathing.

Despite the time of death, one could be forgiven for assuming it had died some weeks before. It looked that way. Diseased and foul, wasted, maggoty, god knows what bacteria squirmed round those evil fangs. Bubonic Plague. Leprosy.

And God it stank. Despite the wind and being halfway up a wall he could smell it.

Holding his breath he lowered himself. It had a rough rope collar, and a tag. What would someone call such a thing, he was curious. Dinky. Pixie maybe?

Stiles lowered himself enough to look.

He could make out the letters H, O and L.

The beast suddenly inhaled hugely. It twisted its head to focus on him, lips peeling away from those long filthy teeth, lunging at his legs, barely missing. The massive jaws crashed shut on thin air. Stiles scaled the wall all the way to the top before looking down. The thing was carefully placing its paws on the wall. Looking for holds! And its front two legs weren't doing too bad, but when it introduced the back two, things went doolally. The dog fell to the ground, tried again. Fell again. What frightened Stiles the most was this; though it was possible, probable infact, the dog had been stunned by the impact, he had a terrible feeling it had actually been faking it. Holding it's breath to trick him into coming down. It just hadn't been able to hold it quite long enough.

Still the thing did not bark. For a guard dog - odd. It was mute perhaps. Whatever the reason, it wasn't attracting attention to him, so it wasn't necessary to kill it. He loved dogs, especially ugly ones for some reason, mean, ugly manly dogs. That explained his wife. And he certainly wouldn't poison her unless she made a lot of noise. Plus, of course, leaving the creature alive had one big advantage. Should it's master call, it would be able to go to him. He wouldn't have to come looking for it, suspicious and most likely armed.

Stiles pulled one of the black wooden balls from a spike and weighed it up, and smiled down at the

thing below.

"Not going to kill you, but you need teaching a lesson."

He hurled the ball at the creature's head as hard as he could from an awkward position, and missed, only skimming the beast's flank. It leapt away, stung, then chased after the ball as it rolled away into the bushes.

It retrieved the ball and dropped it right below Stiles, wagging, actually wagging, it's crooked stump of a tail, looking up expectantly at him, the way his own dogs did when they wanted to play.

"Do you really think I'm stupid enough to climb down there and play fetch?" Stiles asked.

The dog merely sniffed at the ball and rolled it around a bit with it's nose.

"Fetch this one then boy. Thing. Boy-thing." Stiles hurled a second ball away to the left, quite some distance, and started counting. Would there have been time to reach and climb that tree over there?

Plonk. The dog dropped the ball beside the first one. There would have been time. Easily. So, yes, from that tree he could access a network of branches, hopefully far enough reaching to get him onto the roof of the manor house.

Stiles threw the third ball and readied himself. The dog took off, levelling bushes and small trees, its claws ploughing the ground viciously. Stiles lowered himself fast, jumped and rolled as before, straight into a headlong sprint. Through treacle.

He risked a sideways glance and his hot heart went cold. The dog had stopped dead. It was watching him.

"Find the ball. Holy Christ." He begged, and the God of Thieves must really have been with him that night, for the creature ignored him and went

on searching for the ball, which it promptly found and snapped up in its fearsome jaws, and ran back with. God Almighty it was fast. And that tree was further away than he'd thought, and taller damn it, and seemed to be moving away from him, as if his braces had snagged on the wall. But he wasn't wearing braces. Shit what if his pants fell down? His mind was chattering away all bog eyed and dribbling. Come on. One leg. Another leg. Faster than that! Must go faster must go faster, but like a watched kettle his bottom half just sat there with its arms crossed.

He jumped, reaching up desperately. A branch, on closer inspection a poor excuse for a twig. Please hold. He couldn't hear the footfalls of the hound, it had launched itself into the air too, stretching for him as he stretched for the branch.

Stiles closed his eyes.

"You're probably wondering why I called you all here." Watson said again.

"Each and every one of you in this room had cause to poison Elijah Twice."

"What's the poin..?" Tom Granger piped up. Just about everyone in the room shot him a glare, including Watson, who instantly regretted it. Just because the man could not resist every obvious and unfunny joke did not warrant the amount of hate he seemed to garner.

"Yes." Watson smiled at him, "Once was enough."

The major humphed. He was a huge slab of a man, a Yorkshireman, retired policeman, ex boxer, hogging most of the heat from the blazing fire, a man with an unfeasibly thick neck. To be in proportion, really, his head should have been three feet across. He rose from his chair and aimed

himself at Watson. His mode of traction was this; being so large, much like an ocean liner, he moved best in straight lines, he could not slalom, he aimed his barrel chest the way he wanted to go, then leaned further and further forwards, further and further, for a moment flouting the laws of gravity, until his disproportionately short legs had no option but to set off full tilt, flat feet pedalling like mad to prevent him falling flat on his already flat nose. Anything in his way would be expected to move or be destroyed.

He was not a genius, and he'd never been a very good boxer. He got knocked down so often he had a cauliflower arse, and it was possible some brain damage. But his heart was in the right place. But his brain wasn't.

He stopped about an inch short of Watson's nose.

"The chuffin' 'ummer you clackin' on about?"

Watson smiled back at him blankly.

"Everyone in this room had reason to poison mister Twice. Even YOU, major Copley."

The major's eyes widened, flicked to and fro, and he bolted from the room, straight through the wall. An exaggeration, but only a slight one. The door was damn near wrenched from its hinges in his haste.

Watson blinked in surprise.

He had not been expecting that to happen.

"Get after him!" Someone exclaimed. And Watson made a couple of moves to do so, then stopped.

"He won't get far with that hound out there."

Stiles dangled from the branch with the hound below, snapping at his heels. He decided he was going to have to silence the damnable thing.

With the poisoned meat in his bag. He hoped the portion was going to be enough, the hellhound below looked like it could polish off a shire horse in thirty seconds. Stiles blew raindrops from his nose and adjusted his hold on the branch.

"Sorry about this." He said, tossing the tainted flesh to the creature.

The thing tucked in hungrily.

"Enjoy it lad. It's your last meal."

In mere moments the dog thing had finished its deadly meal. Its tongue slapped around its face and it looked up expectantly, hoping for more. Stiles started counting down the seconds of life remaining.

Suddenly the beast twisted its head toward the manor, hearing something over the wind and rain that Stiles did not. With a last look up at him, the creature raced away, toward the manor house, already unsteady on its feet, back end trying to veer to the left while the rest charged on.

Stiles waited and counted.

He made it no further than six. A sudden terrible screaming damn near made him fall out of the tree. Some poor soul was in torment somewhere in the trees, the tortured screaming seemed to go on and on, shrieking, gurgling, and then as abruptly as it had begun, it stopped. The steady rattle of rain was the only sound, other than Stiles' heart woodpeckering away in his head. Stiles had a horrible feeling the guard dog had found a second intruder, and chewed him limb from limb in the undergrowth. That suspicion seemed confirmed when the thing returned to its place below him, licking its jaws, leisurely picking its teeth with that unnaturally sharp tongue.



"I want you to die." Stiles informed it, his voice shaky. But the thing, for a time, showed no signs of complying. Eventually though, it began to sway drunkenly, blinking, shaking its head. The poison at last. It staggered and bounced off the tree trunk, collapsing on its side below him, tried hard to get up, but found its legs just useless jellies. Shortly after its head dropped heavily to the ground, its breathing growing shallower.

"Just relax and let it take you away."

Just relaxxxx.

Stiles, when he came down from the tree, trod lightly. No way on God's earth was the thing still alive, no possible way, but still he dare not breath out loud, or blink, no way. There had been enough poison in that steak to kill a blue whale, but Stiles still half expected the hound to suddenly leap up at him. Instead, it lay there dead. Already half decayed, it would be a maggoty mound within the hour.

Lamp, said a clear and professional voice in his head. And it was right. Ahead of him, deeper into the trees the darkness became virtually complete, even the lightening didn't show much of its face through the dense leafy canopy. Stiles took out his trusty lamp and turned it on. Its glow was just enough to see one's way by. He cast its soft light over the motionless body, marvelling at the ugliness of the brute, then he turned toward the manor house. There was work to be done.

By some stroke of luck, or intervention by the deity of thieves, a root snagged his foot and he stumbled to one knee, dropping the lamp close to the ground, and there he saw something which instantly froze the blood in his veins.

The slab of poisoned meat. Uneaten, hidden. The bastard creature had pretended to devour the flesh, shoving it into longer grass in the shadows. Actually pretended. And hidden.

"Jesus." Stiles croaked. Behind him he heard a rustle of leaves and grass, and a low rumbling growl as the beast got to its feet.

"What the devil is.."

"Stay back madam, I urge you." Watson interrupted/warned Lady Wainhouse, and the others who stood behind her, huddled in the open doorway of the house. "This is not a sight for, well, shall we say a restful night?"

"What's happened?" Tom Granger asked, straining to see past Watson as he tried to shield the great dead hulk of major Copley from them.

"I'm afraid the major is no longer with us." Watson explained, raising his voice over the wind and rumbling thunder as he ushered the group back inside. He'd only been outside a few moments and was already quite wet. The storm was worsening if anything.

"What? Dead? Has the dog actually killed him?"

"Yes." Watson said. "Most definately. Don't you people ever feed that thing?"

"It's nothing to do with any of us." Lady Wainwright snapped, jerking her thumb in the vague direction of the poisoned man's bedroom as she headed straight for the fire. "It's HIM. Cantankerous old wretch. He kept that thing alive somehow. By ungodly means I shouldn't wonder. On the stoke of midnight he lets it, pardon me, used to let it out into the grounds."

"And how does he, did he, call it back in?" Watson asked, closing the drawing room door.

"Em, everyone, we surely aren't going to leave

the major just lying out there?" Tom Granger piped up. No one replied, but they looked to Watson for an answer.

"How is the hound called back?" He pressed, urgency in his voice.

"Someone will have to, offer themselves to it."

There was an uneasy silence after the withered old woman whispered those words. Watson broke it when it looked like the old bag was about to elaborate.

"Yes we're leaving him out there. He was a murderer let's not forget, that cost him the right to any dignity. If the dog comes back to eat some more, I'm going to shoot it."

Tom Granger paled and collapsed into a chair. He did not have the correct constitution for this kind of thing.

"I need my bed."

"We stay where we are." Watson announced gravely.

One of the staff, James Inness, usually impeccable in dress and manner, but caught in nightclothes, robe and insane hair, was the first to notice Watson had slid a heavy chair in front of the drawing room door, jamming it shut.

"You think it's in the house." He said, as calmly as he could. Tom Granger nearly shit his pants.

Stiles ran.

As if all Hell was after him. He sprinted, but roots and stones snatched and kicked at his ankles to get him, trying to bring him down. They need not have bothered. The hound was fast. There was no possibility of outrunning it. It slammed into him full tilt, flattening him, massive jaws slamming shut on his shin. The pressure was tremendous, and Stiles expected to hear snapping bones and

the wet rending of flesh, but the padding on his legs delayed the savage amputation. He stamped down hard with his free leg, crunching his heel into the beast's eye but it held firm. Panic ran around inside him like chipmunks in an oven. He lashed out again and again, unable to shake its grip. His hands, operating independantly of his useless brain, stumbled on a branch and latched tightly onto it.

Stiles put more oomf into the blow than he would have thought possible. Superhuman on an overdose of terror and adrenaline. The hefty branch thumped into the animal's side and something cracked. Hopefully a rib. It yelped, releasing his leg as he swung wildly again, slamming both legs from under it and dropping it down.

"Right you bastard!" Stiles raised the branch to stave in the creature's skull but it rolled quickly and scrambled to its feet out of range.

They glared at each other as Stiles got to his feet, wincing, praying the leg wasn't broken, glad it had not got him by the throat or his head would be rolling away into the grass by now.

Stiles' branch was a beauty. Long, strong, and with sharply splintered offshoots pointing the enemy's way. He could not have designed a better branch for combat if he'd tried.

The hound weighed up his weapon and backed off, melting into the darkness like a mist, silent. So quietly that Stiles was tempted to click his fingers by his ears to ensure he hadn't gone deaf.

A glance at his leg revealed pants torn to shreds, and the padding beneath ruined, penetrated. The thing had reached his flesh and there was blood flowing.

Disease. That was the first thing he thought. Cunt! That was the next.

But looking on the bright side, at least the creature had not alerted anyone to his presence. It was surely mute. Or it didn't want anyone to come along and spoil its fun.

Stiles headed for the manor house, quickly, planning to bind his wounds as soon as possible, as soon as he was out of reach.

He reached the wall. Still no sign of the thing. It must have learned it's lesson. Mess with the best and you get your arse kicked by a big branch. Stiles propped his branch against the wall and used it to boost himself up to a small unlit window. From there it looked an easy ascent to the roof. He could have hopped up with both eyes tied behind his back. From the windowsill, to there, across to there. A slight stretch to that ledge, then up to the next window. Easy work. The brickwork was crumbling here and there however, he must be careful, not too hasty and confident. Stiles looked down, checking the landing area incase a handhold gave way and he had to contend with a fall.

The branch was gone.

Stiles over-ruled his increasing fear of the creature and focussed on the business at hand. A climb to the roof, and the skylight there, and soon after - riches!

All he had to do was not fall. Death waited to catch him if he did.

Tick. Watson scratched his nose with his gun and stifled a yawn. Once again he checked the big clock. Tock. Time was dragging by.

Out in the rain, wrapped in a bloody sheet the corpse of major Copley waited impatiently. Watson squinted, pressing his face to the window, and he observed the major's fingers drumming

on the path.

"God almighty." Watson breathed. The dead hand flipped over on its back suddenly and very distinctly beckoned to him. The fatality of the major's wounds was in serious doubt.

"Close the door after me." Watson announced, interrupting a card game some of the others had started, and stirring Lady Wainwright from her fitful slumber on one of the chairs, legs flopped akimbo in a most unlady-like fashion. Everyone hoped she would clamp her legs together once she realised, but she didn't. Tom Granger tried not to look up her skirt again. It was surprisingly easy.

"I'll be back shortly."

Stiles snagged his grappling hook on the rim of the skylight and dropped the length of rope into the gloom, watching it uncurl away into the darkness. He was behind schedule because of the dog, but it did not matter, it wasn't as if anyone would be coming along. He just liked making a schedule and sticking to it, more professional.

He tested the hook's grip, then lowered himself into the manor house. A few feet down he could see through a tall leaded window out into the grounds. There was no sign of the hellish creature. He didn't know if that was a good thing or not.

Stiles swung himself to and fro, enough to reach out and grab the elaborate bannister, which he skipped over onto the third floor landing. The luxurious carpet muffled his landing effectively, but the floorboards beneath were creaky bastards. His passage along the landing sounded like the rigging of a ship on a rocking horse.

He knew exactly where to locate the safe. Right there behind a portrait of a man holding a dead

pheasant. Pleasant. But time for art appreciation later, when he could afford to buy some.

The painting swung open on its hinges, revealing his goal. Stiles grinned, cracked his fingers, then set about cracking the safe.

Watson held one ear close to major Copley's lips, one finger jammed in the other lest it fill up with rain.

"Why," the major breathed, "have you left me lying out here?"

"Because," Watson replied, "If the hound comes back to eat some more of you, I can shoot it while it dines."

The big Yorkshireman growled.

"It's not right likely is it you gormless..., Black Balls will have poisoned t' thing."

"But they don't know that." Watson hissed. "It's fear of that thing which is keeping them all in that room. When Stiles gives us the signal I'll take your 'body' away, somewhere far flung and of pleasant aspect, until then you can lie in the rain and be dead."

"Why can't I be dead in t'house?"

"Because someone will try to examine your body. That MIGHT make them think we're up to something."

Stiles grinned, he had defeated the lock in next to no time. He swung the hefty safe door open and received the shock of his life. The safe was full, but not with what he expected. The dog was in there, waiting for him, and it propelled its bulk out of the safe like a cork from a bottle, smashing into him. Stiles was knocked right back hard against the bannister, and almost over it, but he twisted as his back bent dangerously, and by luck the dog's

momentum carried it over the edge, out into mid air. Its evil teeth snatched at his face as it fell, its claws slicing his clothes and flesh. But it could not get a grip on him, which was fortuitous, or he would have been pulled over with it.

Stiles watched it plunge into inky blackness and there was a shockingly loud explosion of breaking glass, surely audible to every soul in the shire of York.

"You bastard!" Stiles hissed down at it, scared and in pain, and bleeding. He held his lamp out over the drop but its light did not reach the floor. He swore again and turned his attention to the safe. The safe was empty, barr a steaming pile of dog faeces.

The huge animal must have landed on a glass table, or massive vase or some such. But, though it must have been hurt, and most likely lacerated by shards of glass, it had not been stopped. Stiles could hear sharp claws rattling on wood as the thing raced back up the twisting staircase to get him.

Stiles grabbed a bloody big sword from the grasp of a suit of armour. He decided to make a stand, to face the beast. But even with the sword he felt tiny and fragile. A paper thin bag of blood and sloppy organs. A slab of dog food in the shape of a man. Blood flowed down from his brow, and from other wounds, and the hurried scabbling of claws on wood came louder, and he found himself backing away, the huge sword shaking in his grasp as if divining water.

Watson walked into the drawing room and closed the door behind him, once again jamming it closed with the sturdy chair.

"He's definately dead." Watson announced,

removing his sodden jacket. "It must have been the wind moving the sheet, I thought I saw him twitch."

"Listen, we can't sit here all month waiting for someone to rescue us." Said one of the house guests, "We need to hunt that dog down, or lure it somewhere, and kill it, or trap it."

"I concur. Poison I think. I trust I shall find some prime cuts of meat in your kitchen?"

"You don't have to be the one to go. You've been a friend of this family for many years Doctor. There are servants for that kind of thing." Tom Granger piped up. One of said servants blew a raspberry and presented two fingers to him.

"You impudent.."

"I'm armed." Watson interrupted, "Gentlemen. Ladies. And I'm happy to do it. I'm not entirely unacquainted with danger remember. Remain here."

Watson slicked back his hair with his hand and rain ran unpleasantly down the back of his neck. As he went to move the chair there was a huge smashing sound from within the house. He gripped his pistol harder and charged from the room, shouting back over his shoulder to them.

"Remain here! Jam the door!"

The hound raced up the final steps onto the landing. It looked at Stiles nastily for a moment, deciding whether to go the left or the right way round to get him. It chose left and stalked toward him, but he backed away, keeping the large open gap between them. Soon they had swapped places. Stiles stood at the top of the stairs and the yellow eyes of the fiend burned him from the balcony.

He debated making a dash for it down the steps.

The safe was empty, somehow. All that was left for him was a clean escape. But he had left his lamp on a long cupboard, near where the dog now stood, and he feared, in the darkness, he would trip on the steps, tumble, and it would be upon him and that would never do.

On the next circuit he would grab the lamp, then make a headlong dash for home. That was the plan, unless the hound came at him apace. He couldn't reverse anywhere near as fast as it could attack. The sword would be his only chance if that happened. But for the moment the dog just watched. Occasionally it took a few creeping paces clockwise or otherwise, round the balcony, and Stiles matched them oppositely.

But then the dog jumped up on the long antique cupboard, French of origin, a bugger to get up the stairs, and with a last long sinister look at Stiles, it extinguished the lamp.

Stiles held his breath and listened hard. He could see absolutely nothing. He had no idea how well dogs could see in little or no light. His damned heart shattered the silence and he cursed it, straining to hear stealthy footfalls. He heard something creak, from that direction, one of the floorboards. Thankyou. He knew from recent experience that every other floorboard creaked noisily. The dog may as well have tried sneaking along the ivories of a piano. He would be able to track its progress by the sounds it made unless the blasted thing knew where all the silent boards lay!

Lightening flashed, for a split moment illuminating the scene through the skylight above.

The hound was swinging through mid air towards him, its jaws clamped on the very rope he had used to descend into the house. Stiles uttered a

low, disbelieving moan, backing away, raising his sword. He should have held it steady there and impaled the creature as it swung to him, but his brain did not work that fast. His back hit a door, which opened behind him, and he hastened inside the room, clutching desperately for the door handle. Yes. There. Too late though, surely? It was on him. He willed his body to move, to slam the door shut, there may still be time, a split split second of life.

The heavy door thumped on the beast's head, he could hear it, feel and smell its breath, drool from its snapping jaws splashed his leg where his pants were torn. It heaved, claws flailing for purchase, trying to force it's way into the room, and it was succeeding. But Stiles pushed every sinew to breaking point, and even dared stamping down on the thing's head, invisible in the pitch black, he risked putting his foot right in its mouth but he was lucky. His heel connected with the misshapen skull and it ducked instinctively away, giving him chance to force the door further closed, slamming it on the dog's front left leg. Again Stiles stamped on it, deducing what had happened. He had it's foot trapped, it was trying to back away but he kept up the pressure.

He jabbed down with his sword, and for the first time the beast made a sound.

It was a sound he knew instantly would haunt his every night. Terrible. Not canine, almost, animal, but almost human, devilish. Hellish. Satanic. But at least, Stiles grinned wildly, it was pain. He raised the sword again, and hacked at the leg, rather than stabbing. The blade dug in and the chilling unearthly wail, this second time, was more desperate, more furious too.

The hound smashed itself against the door and

very nearly toppled Stiles. Panic seized his heart in icy claws, but the creature took the opportunity to escape, withdrawing it's injured leg, and the heavy door, with Stiles' weight on it, slammed home, shaking pictures on the walls. Fingers fumbled. There was a key. It felt so so good. He turned it in the lock and sank to the floor, his back to the door, pale and shaking.

When he got home, he vowed, his dogs were going in the river.

Stiles jumped when there was a knock on the door. He assumed it was either Watson or major Copley, come looking for him when his, now long overdue, signal did not transpire. The shattering glass must surely have indicated to them that something had gone awry.

"Watson? That you?"

There came two knocks.

Stiles stood up and backed away from the door. There was faint light filtering under it. There was growing horror filtering through his body.

"Is, the dog still out there?" He asked. Part of him already knew the answer.

There was a single clear rap on the door.

Once for yes, twice for no.

"Are you..man?"

A knock, teasing, then the dreaded second knock. Not a man.

What then? Demon? Stiles could not bring himself to say it out loud. It was preposterous. It did not tally with his beliefs.

"On a scale of one to ten, how intelligent ARE you?" Stiles asked. That was a question he could have put to anyone, a stranger at the door for example, not a dog. One. It would be stupid, two, to ask a dog such a thing. Three. Four. Five. Six.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

