

The House on Strathderry Hill

Jimmy felt rather proud of himself, he had just bought the house on Strathderry Hill in the beautiful Donegal area of Ireland and was very pleased that he obtained the house for almost next to nothing, though it did need a bit of repair. Jimmy planned to have the house ready in time for his wedding, which was only three months away and thought that it would be a perfect present for his new bride, Janice.

The thatched roof cottage seemed so perfect, high on a hill that overlooked lush green fields and had a magnificent backdrop from the Forrest, a wonderful secluded place to raise a family, the main idea for purchasing the property.

Jimmy told Janice that he would be spending a few days away with his friend, Harry, on a fishing trip before they set off from Strabane in the North of Ireland, taking their van, which had been secretly crammed full with the equipment and materials to make the new house habitable and welcoming.

Almost two hours later, Jimmy and Harry stopped off at a roadside bar and restaurant that was overlooked by Strathderry Forrest, and Jimmy's new house. Of course, several regulars in the bar, mostly elderly farmers, sat with questioning stares as they whispered amongst each other.

'So,' the bearded barman said with a sigh. 'You tell me that you're the new owner of that house up there on the hill?'

'I sure am, I'm hoping to get ship-shape before my wedding.'

'Now then, why on God's good earth would you be doing a silly thing like that?'

'I don't think getting married is stupid,' Jimmy said defensively.

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‘No, I mean, why would you be buying that terrible place up there?’

The secreted whispers stooped and all eyes fixed on Jimmy as he continued to munch into his bacon sandwich.

‘I don’t think it’s stupid, especially as I got the place for next to nothing.’

‘It be cheap for a reason my friend,’ the barman continued. ‘Have you not heard of the goings on up there__ surely to the Almighty you’ve heard of Legless Mary?’

‘Legless Mary! Are you for real? Who the hell is she__ is she the local drunk?’

‘Oh now young fella, if you take my advice you’d leave right now and forget about that terrible ungodly place up there__ tis a cold, evil place to be sure.’

Jimmy and Harry paid no heed to the barman, and, after finishing their lunch, cautiously steered the van up the narrow, twisting path that lad direct to the house. Immediately, Harry noticed that the towering trees appeared to be fluttering their leaves, as if applauding, yet there was no breeze and the air felt strangely cold.

‘Now Harry, I think you’re letting those weirdo’s in the bar run riot with your imagination,’ Jimmy laughed as he opened the backdoors of the van. ‘Legless Mary__ have you ever heard the likes of it?’

‘What’s supposed to have happened to this Mary, do you know, Jimmy?’

‘Haven’t a clue, but I do know what will happen to you if you don’t start helping me unload this van,’ Jimmy laughed.

‘Christ, by the looks of those big scratch marks on the front door you’re going to need a new one for sure,’ Harry said. ‘They’re too deep to even paint over.’

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Jimmy led the way inside and immediately both men noticed that there were similar scratch marks along the wooden floor and halfway up the staircase.

‘Maybe that was this Legless Mary, maybe she came home drunk one night and couldn’t make it up to her bed,’ Harry laughed.

‘You’d think she’d have got a wheelchair or something instead of messing up the good floorboards,’ Jimmy joked, feeling an icy chill fill the air, as though someone had sped right passed by him and the front door slammed shut.

‘Don’t bang the door like that Harry.’

‘I never touched it, it must’ve been the draught or something; the backdoor’s open. Hey, those scratches are even over the floor in the sitting room too.’

‘I think the scratches were probably made by a wild cat or something. A good industrial sander will have the floors looking like new in no time, Harry.

Just then, Harry’s wife called him on his mobile phone insisting that he returned home as their ten year old daughter had been taken into hospital with suspected appendicitis.

So, with a few cans of Dutch courage, Jimmy began the repairs to the house on his own, working constantly through as night began to fall. It was then that Jimmy realised there was no electricity, so he set off down the hill on foot hoping to buy some candles or lamps, and, have something to eat.

‘Ah now, you didn’t heed my warning then?’ The barman sighed heavily. ‘You’d be doing yourself a favour now and going back over the border, tis not safe up there__ tis an ungodly place to be living.’

‘You don’t expect me to believe all that rubbish about this__ whatever the name was, now do you?’

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'Tis true my friend. Legless Mary has been seen__ and heard. The pitiful groans and wailing can be heard for miles. And the terrible sounds of her dragging her legless body over the ground. She'll curse you, mark my words. She won't let you stay in her home__ she never does.'

'Aye well, I've bought the place now and I'm staying, ghost or no ghost. Now give me one of those home-made steak pies with all trimmings.'

'You're either very brave or very stupid, if you don't mind me saying. The goings on up at that house are real terrible.'

'Right, okay, so what's the craic then with this Legless Mary doll?'

'Well now,' the barman began, seating himself eagerly at the corner of the bar dark ebony eyes like saucers. 'T'was about a hundred years back to this very day, two weary travellers arrived at Mary's O'Flaherty's house looking for a bed for the night. The story goes that the travellers tried to rob her through the night. There was a terrible fight and they killed poor Mary stone dead, so they did.'

'So, how come she's called Legless Mary?' Jimmy smiled, trying to appear interested, although all he wanted to do was finish the sumptuous meal.

'The story goes that the travellers decided to live in the house after they killed poor Mary. They took her out to the old barn and began to cut her up. They had cut off her legs and hid them somewhere but they were disturbed by something. After that, they returned to barn to continue with their terrible deed, but, Mary's body was gone, not a sign of it, all that could be seen was a bloody trail leading from the old barn into the Forest. You can see the trail to this day, not a blade of grass has ever grown there on that spot, just clawing trails that her fingers made in the ground.'

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