

Pop did not rise when Judith and Mark did. He remained seated and before they had taken two steps calmly asked one simple question. “Where did you say this bowl was?”

Judith saw no harm in responding as they had reached the hut’s door. “It was buried near the lake.”

Pop responded, instantly, to her statement. “You said ‘was’—does that mean you dug it up?”

“As a matter of fact yes we did.”

Pop’s face took on a look of pure fear and he whispered one final question—tinged with a tone of hesitation. “Did you open it?”

Judith, by now, was tiring of this old man’s prying questions. “It was on our property—so yes I opened it.”

“FOOLS!” He screamed at them—his face contorted into a mask of shocked disbelief. “You may well have unleashed a horror unlike any that today’s world has ever seen. Where is the bowl now?”

Mark responded, strongly. “Who the hell are you to scream at us like that? We came to your house civilly, to see if you could help with an answer. We certainly didn’t yell or behave abusively. To answer you, it’s in the back of my car. Come on Judith—let’s get out of here.” He pushed open the door and grabbed his wife’s hand—almost dragging her out of the hut.

They started back up the path, intent on getting to their car and away from Pop, who they both now considered a mad man.

Judith was unnerved by the incident. “The guy just went nuts—I never saw anything like that before.”

“Nuts, is putting it mildly. Wait ‘til I tell Bill about his recommendation.”

They walked in silence for a while. Mark looked back over his shoulder, a couple of times, to insure that this crazed individual wasn’t following them.

Judith was deep in thought. Finally she sheepishly asked her husband. “Do you think there’s anything to Pop’s story? I mean it was the wildest thing I ever heard.” *I don’t think I should mention the similarity to my nightmares.*

“Wild is right. I think it’s just a mentally deranged individual offering his version of an old tale of Indian folklore. Look at the way he lives. He might as well live in a cave—no modern conveniences, no furnishings. That’s below the poverty level and appears to be his choice. What does that tell you about his mental state? Oh, and what about that supposed Indian name he made up? What was it?—‘The One Who Guards the Hidden’—is that not ridiculous? The only thing that’s hidden is his grasp of reality.”

“You’re right, hon. This tale will be a wild story for the next cocktail party we attend.” She suddenly felt relieved and at ease. *Boy! I sure had myself worked up over this foolishness—and yet—is it?*