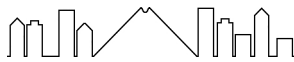


Börkur Sigurbjörnsson

# The darkness

short story



Urban Volcano

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Börkur Sigurbjörnsson

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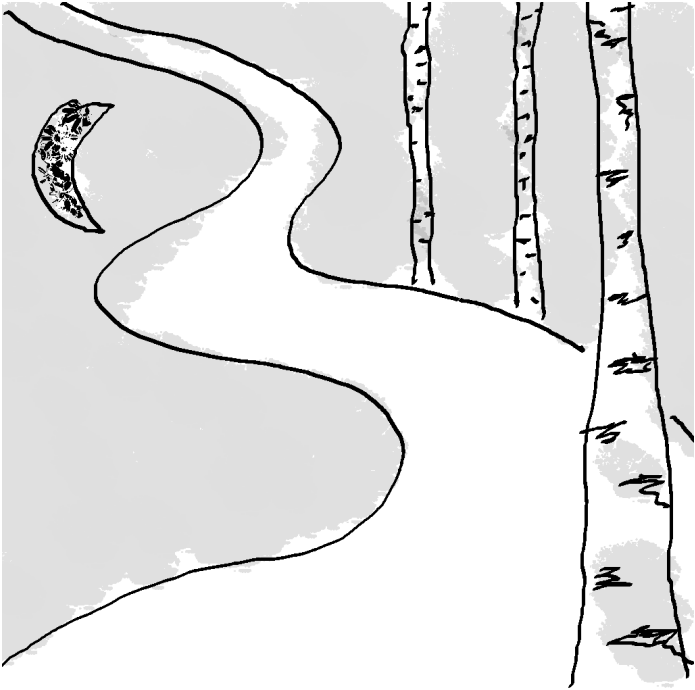
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## THE DARKNESS

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“Did you know that things exist that one sees better in darkness than in daylight?” you asked as we walked together in the darkness along the unlit gravel road that ran the length of the fjord in western Iceland.

“No,” I replied. “Like what?”

“Like ghosts, demons, gnomes, elves, and things like that,” you continued. “Anything that cannot tolerate the light of day.”

“But ghosts do not exist in reality,” I claimed, although against my own conviction. I bit my lower lip and felt a shiver run down my spine.

You did not reply but giggled.

We had been at a bonfire party but were now on our way to the farmhouse we used as our vacation home. Mom and dad had decided to stay longer at the party and have fun with the other adults. Mom had asked you to take me home. You were three years older than I, and it was thus your responsibility to bring the two of us home.

The night was pitch-black. Behind us was a faint glow of the cooling bonfire. On the other side of the fjord we could see the lights of distant farms. The lights of the farms on our side of the fjord were hidden beyond the dense birch woods that separated the farms and the road. We could see neither the moon nor the stars since the sky was completely covered by clouds. We could not see where we were going and had to put all our faith in the fact that we had walked this road so often before that we could find our way blindfolded. And so we did, quite literally, blindfolded by the darkness.

The night was silent. We were silent. We heard little other than the crunch of gravel from under our feet as we walked. Occasionally we could hear a faint sound of laughter coming from the party.

Otherwise, it was completely silent. Completely silent and completely dark.

All of a sudden an opening appeared in the cloud cover. The curtains of the sky opened and nature put on a show for us. The moon stepped onto the the stage and lit up our surroundings. Shadows ran along the road. A gust of wind blew down along the fjord. The birch trees waved their branches back and forth.

The show ended as suddenly as it had started. The opening in the cloud cover closed. The curtains of the sky closed. The darkness returned.

“Did you see that?” you asked as you grabbed my arm and forced me to stop.

“No,” I lied, because I was not sure what it was that I had seen. I had seen something. Something that had been creeping by the road. Something that had moved as the moon had broken its way through the clouds. Something that swayed in time with the birch branches.

“Neither did I,” you said and giggled.

I felt a shiver run through my body. A lump formed in my stomach. I knew you were playing with me. I knew you were trying to intensify my fear of the dark. I did not want the fright to take control of my mind. I wanted to forget what I had seen. I wanted to have seen nothing. But since you had mentioned it, I could not

help wondering whether I had really seen something. Something that maybe could not bear the light of day.

We remained silent during the remainder of the walk home. I listened to every crunch from beneath our feet. Was it really from beneath our feet? Or was it maybe from behind us? Or maybe ahead of us? I could not tell. As I could not see anything, I gave my imagination full freedom to fill in the gaps. I listened to every sound that came from the birch woods. Was there something out there? I could feel my heart beating faster. Was it really only my heartbeat that I was feeling? The fright had really taken control of my body.

I felt a great sense of relief when we reached the farmhouse and were able to turn on the lights. At last we could see our surroundings – our immediate surroundings at least. I felt better – slightly calmer. Yet I still had not fully recovered from the walk through the darkness. I could not stop thinking about what I had seen during that short period of moonlight. I could not stop thinking about your words about seeing things that could not tolerate daylight. I could not avoid the echo of your creepy giggle in my head. I could not stop wondering whether there really had been something out there.

“Good night,” you said with a grin on your face when we had brushed our teeth and prepared for bed. “Sweet dreams.”

You giggled as you walked over to your room. You knew that my dreams would not be sweet. You knew that you had intensified the fear inside me. You knew about my fear of the dark.

I twisted and turned in my bed and I could not sleep. I listened to every sound coming out of the darkness. I listened to the creaks from the wooden beams of the roof. I listened to the sound of birch branches scraping against the walls of the house.

I knew that ghosts did not exist. Or so I told myself. However, I could not avoid imagining someone running along the rooftop whenever I heard the creak of a roof beam. Whenever I heard the scraping of the birch branches I could not avoid the image of a phantom running along the walls of the house, peeking into every window. You had succeeded in scaring me. I could feel the presence of something outside. It crept in. I could feel the presence of something in my room. I kept completely still under my bed covers, listening to my own heartbeat.

All of a sudden I heard a smack, followed by a low squeak. My heartbeat went up a notch. I took a deep breath and tried to control myself. I managed to calm myself slightly. I rose quietly and got out of bed. I

walked slowly towards the door in search of the light switch. I turned on the light.

My eyes wandered around the bedroom. In a corner I could see what had caused the smack and the squeak. A mouse had been caught in a trap.

I bent down and studied the mouse. It looked at me with praying eyes. I smiled. I would set it free. It need not worry. It was beneficial for the both of us. I put my hand gently around the body of the mouse and released it from the mousetrap. I straightened up and stroked the mouse. I could feel its heart beating fast. It was frightened. As frightened as I had been just minutes before.

I opened the door and walked into the darkness outside my bedroom. I tiptoed along the corridor toward your room. I opened the door and crept in. I could not see much in the dark but I could hear that you were fast asleep. I put the mouse carefully on the edge of your bed, tiptoed back to the corridor and closed the door as quietly as I could.

I had barely made it back to my bed when I heard you scream. I knew how much you hated mice. You were as afraid of mice as I was afraid of the darkness. We were equal now. My heartbeat slowed down. I stopped listening to the creaks from the roof beams. I stopped listening to the scraping of the branches. I fell asleep. I dreamt of mice.



Börkur Sigurbjörnsson is an avid storyteller with a keen eye for quirky characters, funny dialogs and vivid scenario descriptions. Much of his writing falls within the genre of realistic fiction and his stories are more often than not based on real events in the author's life. Although the tales contain grains of truth, they are melded with fiction, making the reader curious to know the line between reality and fantasy.

### **Books**

Among Other Things, flash fiction (2024)

Talk To Strangers, short stories (2019)

Flash 52, flash fiction (2017)

999 Abroad, short stories (2012)

### **Links**

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