

Old Story About Crone of the Quequechan Is Surrounded with 'Creepy' Atmosphere

Witches, goblins and ghosts have been brought to life in frightening fables down through the centuries. Plots vary with each retelling, for every story-teller incorporates his own interpretation of intensity and horror. Yet, basically, the theme remains unchanged—still intriguing, exciting, with a 'creepy' atmosphere which surrounds the villain, the victim and the hero.

Fall River has a unique story in its history entitled, "The Crone of the Quequechan."

The original tale appeared in the April 3, 1845, morning issue of The Weekly News.

Was there ever a crone of the Quequechan? Is the following account fact or fiction?

"Has thy flesh and blood a charm against heated iron and scalding oil?" Scott asks.

On the southern bank of the Quequechan, the Indian name for the little stream which passes through Fall River, there stood, near the middle of the 18th century, a miserable looking log hut, perched upon a rocky eminence, overhanging the great falls, not far from the spot where now stands the Massasoit mill. It was constructed of unhewn logs, unskillfully locked together at their angular joinings, and occupied a spot close upon the brink of the chasm through which the current below dashed and foamed in its passage to the bay. The building had a one-sided antique appearance. Its roof, in places, had partially fallen in and one of its corners, that nearest to the margin of the stream, had settled away, so as to incline the structure over the yawning chasm, into which it seemed ready to tumble at any moment without aid of any extraordinary force.

By whom it was created, and why in that uninviting, if not dangerous spot, nobody could tell. It had long been deserted except by bats and reptiles, and was fast going to decay under the alternate action of the sun and rain.

Site Elevated

The ground or rock on which the building stood was the most elevated spot on the southern bank of the stream, and overlooked the whole surrounding country, including the opposite shore of Mount Hope Bay, except the southeastern portion which was covered by higher land in that direction.

Like most deserted houses it had a bad name. Lights, it was said, had been seen, on dark and stormy nights, through the crevices in the walls, sometimes emitting red or blue flames; and strange noises had more than once been heard by passers-by, issuing from this dilapidated structure.

Many, indeed, were the stories told of what had been seen and heard about the premises, and few among the inhabitants were hardy enough to trouble its vicinity much, if it could be avoided after night-fall. Such was the general dread in which the building was held, that the inhabitants had more than once threatened to burn it down, to clear it away, the belief being



SESQUI-CENTENNIAL SEAL: This is the seal which was used to mark all official publications and letters connected with the Sesqui-Centennial observance of Fall River, Sept. 12 to 20, 1953.

Woodward, "that a committee be appointed to visit the premises."

"I second the motion," said Stephen Davis.

"Send four or six men to the spot, and if anything less than a legion of infernal spirits are there, we'll plunge them into the Quequechan.

Crone Appears

This observation was scarcely uttered before the door of the shop flew open, and exhibited standing within the entrance a hideous looking old crone, bent half double with age, her face disfigured with irregular streaks of smut, and her blood-shot eyes flashing fire as she gazed on the motley group within.

Her head was thrust forward, exhibiting a nose of uncommon magnitude, covered with warts and carbuncles, beneath which a mouth, half open, extending almost from ear to ear, showed here and there a few long dark tusks projecting out like half burnt stumps in a newly cleared field. Her chin was covered with several huge tufts of long gray hair, portions of which curled up and lodged within the corner of her capacious mouth. Her eyebrows were black and shaggy, and her ears projected out at right angles with the head, exhibiting the appearance of large curled and crisped pieces of dingy sole-leather.

Her large bony hands, foul with sore and accumulated filth, were thrust forward, and her long hooked fingers, incessantly in motion, seemed eager to seize whoever or whatever might come in her way.

appeared to have paid the last debt of nature without a struggle.

There was the stillness of the tomb in that assembly for several minutes, while gazing on the relaxed and motionless body of the old crone. Fear and consternation were depicted on the countenances of the whole group. Not a breathing was heard nor a word uttered. At length Brownell stepping forward lifted one of her arms from the floor; then letting go of it, it fell heavily at her side.

"Merciful God," he exclaimed, stepping back with a look of inexpressible horror, "I have killed the woman!"

She Revives

These words were scarcely uttered when the muscles of the crone's face were observed slightly to move; her limbs contracted; her lips parted, her eyes flew open, and in an instant after, she uttered a long, loud howl, and sprang to her feet with the easy bound of a tiger!

Terrible as was the presence of the hag, her sudden appearance to life was a joyous relief to the assembled neighbors. Murder was not at all in their hearts, and perhaps least of all, in that of poor Brownell, who a moment before, would have given empires could he have withdrawn the blow. It was all right and over now, and he laughed outright with excess of joy.

"Laugh, fiend or hell!" shouted the crone, casting on Brownell a look of terrible scorn.

Crone Seizes Child

"Laughing at the fiend world!

hausted child freed from the iron grasp of the raging crone!

A long, loud shout from the assembled crowd and a sudden rush to the spot followed this unexpected feat of relief. A circle of all ages and sexes was instantly formed around the struggling crone, all eager, as if by instinct, to do the bidding of her athletic conqueror.

"Give me a strong cord," said Lot Lee, still keeping one foot securely fixed on the hag's chest. "She has no more liberty on these grounds."

A rope was soon procured with which her hands and feet were securely tied, when the pressure upon her chest was removed, and she was left untouched upon the ground.

"To the hut now!" shouted Lee; making towards the dilapidated structure, followed by the whole neighborhood; "Let us see the nest of the she-devil, before covering it into ashes and smoke." And he seized the crone by the shoulders and dragged her towards the entrance of the building.

On trying the door it was found securely fastened, apparently on the inside, and by means not readily overcome. An attempt was made to force it open by a violent push, but a second trial showed that it could not, in this manner, be effected. A low, chuckling laugh was, at this moment heard issuing from the throat of the old crone as she lay upon the ground at the feet of Lot Lee.

"Ye cannot do it, ye cowards! she exclaimed, looking her conqueror full in the face, "mortal strength alone will never open that door, so batter it down if enter ye will."

Hut Door Forced Open

"A stone there!" shouted Lot, speaking to the crowd in the rear; "a stone. Stephen; now is your time to stir up the spirits."

A heavy rock was instantly applied to the woody obstruction, which after two or three smart blows, began to yield, and soon tumbled down upon the earthy floor within. Lee dragged the crone over the threshold into the apartment, followed by the whole assembly. What a void was there!

The whole building was lighted up by a great fire, made of old stumps and large pine knots, which burned brightly and strongly on its ancient hearth. A solitary stool stood in the center of the floorless apartment, rickety with age, and mouldy from lack of use.

Not another article of furniture was anywhere to be seen; not a table or chair, or other object, except in one corner was a heap of straw, on which the hag must long have lain, for it was much broken up and matted together as though years had elapsed since first placed there.

"Fire the hut!" shouted Woodward, after satisfying himself there was nothing valuable within

the inhabitants had more than once threatened to burn it down, to shove it over the brink into the foaming flood below, but the threat, like many others, had never been put in execution, and so the hut stood, year after year, the theme of many a wild and thrilling tale.

Light Seen In Hut

On a cold, bleak night in the month of December, when the good quiet people in the neighborhood of the Quequechan had sought their snugly closed rooms, well heated with great, burning logs, around which old and young were gathered in the full consciousness of comfort and security, a brilliant light was seen, pouring through the holes and crevices of the deserted hut, as though its interior were lighted up by innumerable torches; and what had never been before seen, a fiery column of sparks was observed to escape from the top of the little chimney, indicating that a blaze fire was raging on its ancient hearth.

By not a few, lights had been seen there before, and frightful stories told of the sudden appearance of an old woman, strangely habited, about the hut on such occasions, known among the inhabitants generally as the "Crone of the Quequechan." But here was a brilliant illumination long before the usual hour of retiring, conspicuous to the eyes of the whole neighborhood.

The fact was undeniable; its intensity attracted the observation of the whole population, and the first movement was a gathering of all ages and sexes at the grocery store of Peter Leonard, which stood on the east side of what is now North Main Street, near the spot occupied by the Mount Hope House.

Excitement Reigns

Great was the excitement among the neighbors when assembled. Women and children were crying; strong men looked grave and doubtfully at one another; and, all, except Stephen Davis, exhibited unequivocal signs of fear and anxiety.

Stephen was a tall, lank, bony fellow, some two or three and twenty years of age—the noisiest braggart of the settlement, and at all times more ready to pick a quarrel than willing to stand his ground when met by a fair opponent. In the present instance he was unusually loquacious—called on any three to join him and assist at once to demolish the illuminated hut—said he did not care the value of a cast iron jack knife if Old Scratch and all his family were at the bottom of the matter; all he wanted was enough associated with him, to bear witness of the manner in which he should stir up the spirits. No one regarded the vaunting of poor Stephen, for his blustering, on all occasions, was well known to all the inhabitants. At length Peter Leonard suggested that something should be done besides talking.

What To Do?

"I propose," he said, "that we take the Bible and move in a body upon the spot."

"I propose," said Lot Lee, "that we first send for the minister at Assonet."

"I propose," said Welcome Brownell, "that we take guns or other weapons of offense and at once attack the hut."

"I propose," said Joel Wilson, "that we stay where we are."

"And I propose," said Mark

Strange Dress

On her head she wore a scarlet colored handkerchief, the ends of which were brought round and tied in a bow directly in the center of her forehead. Her dress was a scarlet robe, of ample dimensions, which fell down nearly to her ankles, and was tied about her middle with a broad sash of the same color. Here shoes were of rawhide, ornamented with strange figures in red paint, and fastened over the instep with large black cord set off with small red tassels.

As the door flew open the crone placed one foot on the threshold, and leaning forward scanned, for an instant, the several persons within. Then stepping boldly into the room, and contracting her features to a hideous scowl, she exclaimed in tones harsh and grating:

Crone Speaks

"Who talks of throwing me or mine into the Quequechan? Who talks of priests and Bibles? Who of guns and fire?"

Then bursting into a low, hoarse laugh, she fastened her blood-shot eyes on Stephen Davis, and shaking her long bony finger as she spoke, she continued in tones of biting scorn:

"Thou, braggart! Thou, Stephen Davis, talk of stirring up spirits! Thou, who dare not enter a cellar in the daytime, talk of firing my hut! I would like to see thee alone, within a rod of its entrance when I am there. Out upon thee, thou scorn of thy race!"

Davis shrunk away under this bold invective, pale as a ghost, and sought protection behind the counter, where stood Lot Lee and Peter Leonard. Not a word was uttered in reply, but there stood the crone, motionless as a statue, still keeping her fiery eyes fixed on Davis as though she would annihilate him by a look.

She Taunts Group

"All dumb!" at length said the crone, looking round the room, and scowling horribly, as her eyes fell on each individual of the group in turn.—"All dumb, are ye, my masters? O ye are a valiant band, truly! Burn my hut, will ye! No, the man is not here that dare do that!"

And she strode up and down the center of the open space, with a firm, heavy tread, looking alternately to the right and left, as she passed between knots of individuals on each side of the room.

She made four or five turns, each time approaching near and nearer the place occupied by Welcome Brownell, in front of the great open fireplace. At length she came close to his side and cast on him a quick, fiery look of defiance and indignation. With the quickness of thought Brownell drew back, raised his arm and planted a deadly blow, with his heavy iron fist, directly between the eyes on the lower edge of her forehead.

Crone Is Felled

The old crone fell like a log at full length upon the uoor, trembling and quivering for a moment in every fiber and muscle of her prostrate body. A few seconds elapsed, and all was as still as death. Her features assumed a livid hue; her breathing became imperceptible; her muscles relaxed; her arms fell heavily down by her sides, and she

Crone Seizes Child

"Laugh, imp o' the fiery world! but know ye my revenge is certain and speedy"; and away she bounded towards the door, seizing on her passage a child, little more than a year old, sitting in the lap of Mrs. Brownell. One moment more and she was dashing through the narrow street toward the illuminated hut with the speed of a race horse. The mother uttered a piercing shriek and bolted through the doorway, followed by the whole assembly.

Joel Wilson led off, but it was seen at a glance, fleet of foot as he was, that the old crone was more than a match for the young settler, even encumbered as she was with the weight of the child. She dashed over the narrow plank bridge which crossed the stream, near where now stands the Quequechan factory, and mounted the opposite bank with the fleetness of a young deer. Another bound and she stood upon the edge of the rock overhanging the cataract, at the corner of the still illuminated hut. Those in pursuit, one after another, in quick succession, reached the elevated ground a few rods higher up the stream, all conceiving, at one and the same instant, as if by divine communication, the terrible purpose of the old crone.

Threatens Child's Life

"Not another foot nearer!" shouted the infuriated hag in loud and grating tones, holding the shrieking child at arms length over the dashing current below: "Not another foot nearer, ye devils incarnate! — one step and the heir of Brownell never breathes again!" and she made a motion indicating her purpose should her command be disregarded. Awe-struck and palsied stood the whole assembly. No one moved; no one uttered a word. Desperation marked the expression of the terrible being before them.

The mother sank upon the ground, senseless as the clod on which she lay, while the father stood gazing on his child in an attitude of speechless despair.

"Ho! Ho!" at length shouted the crone, breaking out into her accustomed low, hoarse, guttural laugh, and casting on the silent and motionless group a wild and fiendish look of triumph; "Ho, ho, ye dastards! fire my hut, will ye! Ay, fire it! But know, ye knaves, while ye destroy with fire, the crone of the Quequechan destroys with water;" and she bent forward as if in the act of dashing from her still shrieking child.

While the awe-struck spectators each expected every moment to see put in execution her terrible threat, the athletic form of Lot Lee was seen cautiously, but rapidly gliding across the open plot of ground in the rear of the seething hut, keeping that object between him and the fiery hag. As her back was turned in that direction she did not observe his silent approach, and he passed unobserved to the northern angle of the building.

Child Is Rescued

From this covert, a moment after, Lee made a single bound forward, and seizing the crone with one hand, and the child with the other, hurled her with the strength of a giant several feet from the fearful edge of the chasm. As she fell he leaped towards the spot, and placing one foot upon the breast of the prostrate hag, held up the ex-

ward, after satisfying himself there was nothing valuable within. "Fire the hut, boys; now we are in possession let us make clean work"—and he seized a brand.

Crone Protests

"Hold! hell-hounds!" exclaimed the Crone, in accents deep and hoarse, at the same time, tied as she was, leaping to her feet and standing erect in the center of the apartment; "eternal vengeance light on him that dare apply the torch! Out upon ye, slaves of fear! Away to your homes! The Crone of Quequechan neither sues for favor nor regards the hate of man!"

While giving vent to this burst of indignant feeling every muscle in the body of the Crone expanded, her eyes glowed like balls of fire, her hair, beneath her turban, stood erect, and as she finished, her voice assumed a fullness and depth wholly unlike what had before been heard.

Box Discovered

In the meantime Davis, while rummaging about the bed of straw, discovered a small box which he drew out from what was intended for a pillow. At the sight of this, the Crone bounded forward, seized the box and fell prostrate at the feet of Stephen. In this effort, the cords which confined her hands and feet gave way and left those useful members of human action at full and perfect liberty. Though finding herself thus relieved, she made no effort to escape, but deliberately seated herself upon the rickety stool, which still remained undisturbed in the center of the room, and took from the box a small package, which she handed without uttering a word to Lot Lee.

Note Gives Identity

He opened and read as follows:

"Boston, June ye 10, 1700

"Mary—
"I am in the iron grasp of the king's bloodhounds! Take care of thyself. KID."

Every eye was instantly turned on the old crone, who still sat on the stool, intent on the effect which the reading of this note might produce.

"And you are," — said Lee.

"The last mistress of Kid, the pirate!" shouted the hag, snatching the note from the hands of Lee and walking deliberately out of the hut!

No effort was made to detain her; each individual stood riveted to the spot, as if chained by a spell more potent than human will. She mounted the rising ground on the south of her cabin, paused a moment, as if to take a last look in her strange habitation, then dashed off into the high road leading to Newport. This was the last ever heard or seen of the Crone of the Quequechan!

MILL INCORPORATED

The American Printing Co. was incorporated 1880 and was formerly owned by the Fall River Iron Works Co. later by M.G.D. Borden and Sons, New York. The closing of the printing plant was announced Oct. 30, 1934 with the actual closing taking place Dec. 15, 1934.

One-Ship Line

The first steamboat line to be operated out of Fall River was a one-ship affair. The Steamer Hancock ran between here and Providence.