

Lightening sliced through the bedroom, illuminating stark furnishings and narrow bed. Byron closed his eyes and replayed the scant details of the nightmare that had awakened him.

A woman's voice, filled with fear and pleading, called out. Then a man's voice, desperate, strained, louder than the woman's. The sound of the storm and the terrible groaning of overstressed wood, and the splintering that followed.

Most often it was the pitching motion that woke him. Some nights he even fell from his bed and awoke with the cold of the floor biting into his cheek. Some nights he awoke ill and had to vomit. He had learned long ago to keep a pan near the bed. He would admit this to no one, not even Jack Steele, who had become his closest friend.

Byron sighed, thinking about Jack's visit of the evening before. Jack was certain there was some sort of paranormal activity alive in the old house. It positively reeked, he had said, of electrical impulses and kinetic energy.

Jack did not believe in ghosts per se, but rather in imprints, the psychic fingerprints left off by an electrical discharge from living beings. It was these imprints, he had explained, that permeated the walls of the place, causing minor disturbances, bumping and knocking, the shifting of objects, the flickering of lights. Byron had witnessed all these things over the years.

The young psychologist had begged the old professor to let him examine the place with his high-tech equipment. But Byron had refused. He believed psychology ought first to understand the behavior of living organisms before expanding its research into the realm of the dead.

In the end Byron had been worn down by Jack's excitement for his subject, and by the younger man's scientific arguments in favor of psychic research. First thing in the morning he would contact his solicitor and change his will, leaving everything to Jack; and this way a part of Byron could go on practicing research, teaching at the college, experiencing life through the younger man.

Byron had never met the young woman, a great-niece, whom he had named in his will. She was a writer of children's books and lived in one of the larger Michigan cities far south of his small town of Brochtan. As far as he knew, she was not even aware of his existence and would never miss this meager inheritance.

Byron closed his tired eyes. The old house creaked and groaned in the September storm. The hollow sound of footsteps, eerily familiar and frightening, descended with him into sleep.

The icy water slapped him hard in the face, stealing the breath from his lungs. The wooden surface of the old boat was slick with rain and he slid helplessly toward the gaping mouth that had once been the forward mast.

The figure of a man lurched toward him. As he drew closer, Byron could see the dark hair plastered to the man's skull and the rivers of water streaming over his face. The man ran his hands across his eyes in an impatient gesture.

In that instant before the icy waters flooded his lungs, Byron recognized the dream, and waited to die.

**Thank you for reading an excerpt of *Shadow's Embrace*, by M.J. Simon.
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