

Kentucky's Finest

Jordan 'JD' McOsker

prologue. *Lee Jennings.*

Monte has been seeing things.

He lives out of the way, down highway 165, in the farmlands. Woods border his property, but don't belong to him. They're acres and acres of dense foliage. Monte's own stuff is packed two-hundred feet from the road into an old farmhouse that happens to be perfectly isolated. And it was cheap. Disgustingly cheap. Monte supposes it's because the outside is rotting, porch caved in on one side, upstairs windows situated with rusted bars over them. Despite its appearance, it's always the perfect temperature, and the back windows let in a lot of light. It smells like sunshine, dust, and potted orchids. It's nice, but, *of course*, Monte's sister says this, venom dripping from her words, *a place like that is haunted.*

The creature he sees isn't so much a human as it is a primate or something similar. It walks on all fours, knuckles to the ground, and has a limp. Its face is upside down, with its forehead where its chin should be and a pinched little mouth. Despite the lack of saturation on the apparition, its eyes seem to be bloodshot. The thing loves to stare at him—its figure blurry out of the corner of his eye, pacing back and forth. Restless. When the hallway is lit with the moon, it runs at Monte, always dissipating before he can turn his head to catch its gaze. Sometimes he only has time to run. To slam his bedroom door in its face.

It gets close. Too close. One day it'll probably catch him. Maybe eat him. Or tear him limb from limb.

However, the worst part, *very worst*, isn't the running, but how the thing cries. It howls at night, unsettling, otherworldly sobs that leave Monte's arms covered in goosebumps and his heart racing faster

than his chest can contain. Sometimes its crying summons other apparitions outside the house. There's something else lurking in the woods at the edge of the shorn property. *Something, many things*. Monte hasn't seen them, but he can feel their presence on his skin as he hides under his comforter at night.

Monte's sister pulls out his middle name upon his first retelling of his "*supernatural*" accounts. He had waited nearly two months to tell her after she had helped him move in and refused to come back. It feels like proving her right when he finally admits a spirit actually exists.

Rosie demands he get someone to check it out. Her friend Heather told her a guy named Lee Jennings exorcised a ghost out of her dog. When Monte looks up Lee Jennings, his name pops up in a recent article wherein a few corpses had been found under the floor of a farmhouse in White Hill. There's a link to a YouTube video with his name in the description that shows 10 minutes of static and is titled, *Ghost Hunting in Edmonton KY*. Finally, there's a private Instagram account. Monte doesn't bother to search further, but Rosie is insistent. She continues to dig.

Her search culminates a few days later after stopping in a spiritual shop on the outskirts of Louisville and spotting a crudely done flyer with his name.

Lee Jennings.

Kentucky's finest.

Removal, exorcism, contact, and communication with ghosts, spirits, and otherworldly beings.

Two days after, with a total of twenty-seven messages having been left in Monte's voicemail, Rosie finally gets in touch with her brother. He calls her on the road when his service picks up, forgetting his task of getting groceries, and urgently parking his Nissan Versa next to the rusted pick-up that sits at the treeline. When Rosie reveals all her messages were about Jennings and not something actually important, Monte nearly hangs up on her. He only stays on the line because of how upset she is that he had taken so long to see the voicemails. They've been through this before. Monte's signal doesn't work in

the house. Rosie gets mad. He figures since they call for hours every time he goes to Walmart to restock the fridge and pantry, not being immediately available shouldn't be an issue. He moved to the countryside for peace and quiet, not for 5G service and working wifi. Rosie, of course, just calls this another inexcusable aspect of the haunting.

Jennings' number is passed along to Monte with a text that says, *CALL HIM!!!!*

Monte has lived in 105 Sharpes Garden Road for three months. The spirit is starting to sink its claws deeper despite never touching his skin. He's begun to feel jumpy. Nauseous. Unsafe. Miserable. He blames the spirit for the drafts, the unsettling beating beneath the floorboards, the moaning and groaning of a restless structure. He doesn't sleep at night and doesn't have an appetite. The spirit watches him through the kitchen doorway while he cooks. Staring. Pacing. Back and forth. Always a little out of sight.

Three months and a week later, after being kept up by another bout of crying, Monte walks outside to the pick-up truck and calls Lee Jennings.

act ONE. *Lee Jennings Drives in from the City.*

When Lee Jennings pulls up at Monte's property, it's in a grey Honda Civic with the bumper taped on. Its tires crunch uncomfortably through the gravel driveway. Lee Jennings himself looks whitish, maybe? Could be Hispanic, maybe Native. His features are a little ambiguous under the shadow of a wide rimmed hat. He's stylish, well put together in flared jeans and a fitted work jacket. There are several gold hoops in his ears but no rings on his fingers.

"Tremonte Mack?" he asks, taking only a few steps outside the vehicle to greet Monte before he stops. His line of sight passes over Monte's shoulder as Monte strides forwards to shake the exorcist's

hand. Lee gives him a low high five instead of establishing grip. He doesn't meet Monte's gaze, just keeps his eyes on the house. "Mind if we talk in my car?"

Monte squeezes into the front seat of Lee's Civic, moving the seat back to accommodate for his long legs while Lee pulls open the driver's side. He closes the door cautiously, locks clicking into place. The car smells like tobacco, but is otherwise clean. The back seats are raised, a huge duffle bag taking up most of the room along with a tent below the seat. There's a large black bin in the very back and a cooler.

"You've got some spirit staying with you," Lee says sourly. His eyes scrunch shut. Monte feels a little bad having dragged the man all the way out here if he was just going to get overwhelmed.

"Is it bad?" he asks quietly and Lee just nods, letting his head fall against the steering wheel. He takes a deep breath before suddenly shaking himself awake and opening the sunglass holder. A little alien figure falls out. Its paint job is sloppy, neon orange skin rubbery. It looks like something out of a prize capsule dispensed from a gumball machine at the mall.

Lee presses it into Monte's hands before he pulls open the car door and steps out.

Taking a moment to himself, Monte rotates the little alien between his fingers. It has one big eye and a friendly smile, orange rubber molded in a pair of thickset legs and a little waving hand with no fingers. Monte tucks it into the pocket of his sports jacket and steps out of the car to join Lee.

Monte watches as the exorcist—who already can't be more than 5'5"—becomes smaller, hunching with his face over the dead grass in the front yard, one arm out to support himself on a corner column of the porch. As Monte approaches, he looks up, one of his dark eyes hit by the sun through the clouds, turning a warm toffee color as it peers at him. Monte stops under the man's gaze, not quite feeling judged, but observed for what he is. Out of place at his own house. His posture sags like the roof and he scratches at the ashy spot on the back of his arm until Lee sighs.

"Why'd you move out here, Tremonte?"

“Monte. Monte is fine.”

“Monte,” Lee repeats, testing the name as one does when they want to remember. “Well?”

Monte kicks at the gravel under his feet. “Peace and quiet, I guess. Nowhere to garden in the city. And it was cheap.” A longer answer might meander through regrets and mistakes, unprocessed trauma from growing up poor in big cities, always on the move. Monte hadn’t been bothered by it all until Louisville, when his mom passed away, and suddenly the options for making money narrowed. Her debts put him in unsavory situations. He didn’t blame her, but he wanted to be able to make his own choices again.

Not wanting to further the conversation, Monte poses the question he’s been sitting on since the ghost first appeared in his kitchen. “You think it’s haunting me cause I’m Black?”

Lee huffs, amused. “I don’t know. But I’ve handled enough cases out here to know the answer is *probably*. Your property belonged to,” he waves his hand, “you know, whatever the hell, for a long time though. It really doesn’t want to let go.”

“Man.” Monte clicks his tongue. “So what then?”

“We get it to let go. If it gives you any comfort, I’ll make the whole process fucking miserable if it turns out it is a racist ass ghost,” Lee says. Then he turns around and gives a dry heave. “Dramamine. In my glove box. Get it from the car, yeah?”

After dry swallowing the pills, Lee requests they move away from the house, so they wander *away*, the coarse grass of the field pricking Monte’s feet through his slides. It takes them about five minutes of walking to make it to the pick-up truck, red paint gone in chunks, rust climbing up it like ivy. It’s just far enough south that Lee’s nausea backs off. They sit in the bed and wait for it to dissipate completely. They don’t talk much.

Monte curls his knees to his chest and picks his nails, wondering if it'd be impolite to spew questions at the exorcist, but he doesn't really know what to ask. He's never met anybody who could see stuff before. The things that were there, but not. A lot of people *talked* about ghosts or spirits or whatever, but Monte didn't believe them. In some weird way, he believed Lee.

"You got a gun?" Lee says offhandedly, eyes turned to a cloudy September sky.

"Nah," Monte responds.

"Not leading the hick lifestyle?" Lee jokes and Monte frowns. He doesn't have a gun for a slew of reasons, but the biggest one is that, despite having the deed to a fifty-five acre property fourteen miles away from the nearest store, he is a city boy. A city boy who is, frankly, scared of guns. He doesn't want something loaded near his body if he can help it. He'd rather fight off an intruder with pots and pans than have to hold a firearm again, but that sometimes became hard to understand for the folks who lived around these areas.

He was lucky they all left him alone.

"They ain't even hicks round here. Just all religious."

"Are you?"

Monte shakes his head and runs a hand over his fade, fingers catching in tight, overgrown curls. He needs a haircut but he doesn't trust anyone around here to do his edges right. "What's a gun even gonna do against a ghost?"

"Spirit," Lee corrects.

"Sorry. Spirit."

"Look, some of these things are a bit more... *physical* than others. You don't need to understand. It doesn't make sense. I have a pistol in my glovebox, but a shotgun might've been nice."

“We need a shotgun?” The question sits heavy on Monte’s tongue.

Lee shrugs. It answers nothing. Monte watches, spit thick in his throat, as Lee fishes for a red Altoid tin in the pocket of his tan work jacket before hopping over the side of the truck. He leans against the siding. Inside the tin, there’s a few hand rolled cigarettes and a lighter. Monte figures soon the smell of rain on the horizon will turn acrid, but Lee lights one of his “cigarettes” and it’s not all tobacco. Some marijuana tinges the background as well as something light and earthy. He offers Monte some of it wordlessly. Monte doesn’t ask what all is in it.

Lee looks out at the forest, head turning slowly, as Monte draws the smoke in deep, letting it linger in his lungs. He passes the cigarette back and forth with Lee for several minutes, waiting for a high that encroaches like mist in the morning instead of something that racks through his body. His toes begin to tingle and his thoughts gain little halos of blurred light. It’s somewhat pleasant until a chill runs down his spine.

Lee whips his head around to the treeline behind the truck. “There’s something in your woods,” he says, narrowed eyes darting through the trees.

“Not really my woods.”

“Your woods or not, they’re full of something I don’t want to touch. I’m good at this, but not good enough to clear a whole forest. Some things are older than us. I can probably still deal with your spirit though.”

Monte shrugs. The woods could stay haunted. He just needed to get rid of his housemate before it clobbered him to death—or whatever gorilla ghosts were prone to doing. Then he could finally, *finally*, have some peace and quiet.

act TWO. *Lee Jennings Encounters the Spirit.*

Lee throws a book at it.

Monte freezes, stepping into the living room from the kitchen with two glasses of water in hand, He witnesses no spirit, just the large hardcover copy of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* he keeps on his bookshelf hitting the wall then the floor with a rustling *thud, thud*. Lee pants at the center of the well lit room. Muted sun pours into the space from a span of windows that look out on the back garden. It's gotten a bit overgrown, bindweed leaking out into the paths from three months of little maintenance. It looks messy. So different from when Monte began working on it. Downright appalling if he were to be critical. Everything but the bindweed is dead, brown, and rotting. But he supposes that's what happens when you leave a garden unattended for three months.

"So..." Lee says. "I can see why you're scared."

"M' not scared. I'm more, like- I don't know it's weird. It's not scaring me, just freaking me out."

Lee laughs, though it's dry and not particularly amused. "Freaky when it runs, huh?"

"Fast as fuck."

"Shit. You ever let it catch you?"

"Fuck no. Are you dumb?"

"I'm gonna let that thing catch me."

"Man, don't fucking die in my house. I don't want you dying in my house."

Lee laughs again, the sound just as dry but with more mirth, as he goes to pick up the book. Monte puts their glasses of water on the short side table next to the leather couch. It doesn't quite line up with the other furniture, white paint scraped from all the moving trucks it had been in and out of. A piece

of junk, or so Monte's father had called it, but it's a reminder of when he was around at all, and that's comforting enough. Monte goes to sit in the worn leather recliner in the corner of the room, watching Lee expectantly. Sinking into its cushions always makes Monte wonder why his mother hadn't tried harder to keep it after her husband left. Probably reminded her too much of him. Monte doesn't care. It's with him now.

Instead of joining Monte, Lee inspects the bookshelf. "You still have the totem on you?" he says as he drags his finger over the spines of classic literature, stuff Monte's mom liked. Lots of plays mixed in with the authors she taught. The titles remind him of lectures over the dinner table about themes and symbolism. The sweetness of his mother's excitement.

"Totem?"

"The— fuck. What was this one?" Lee mutters. "The alien. The little orange guy. Did you keep it?"

Monte reaches into his pocket, fingers gracing rubber. The smell of rotting wood suddenly hits his nose, decay overwhelming him as he closes his palm around the thing. Something in the front of his skull bursts, sudden pain shooting through his head. He lets go of the alien and the subtle sweetness of his mother's floral perfume returns to his nostrils, soothing the ache. He breathes in until all he can smell is home again.

He opens his eyes to Lee staring at him. "I got it," he grunts.

"I worked hard on that one, so don't lose it."

"What you mean?" Monte asks.

Lee picks up a copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, weighing it in his hands. "Items carry energy, same as you and me. If you hold on to something long enough, it feels like you. Try hard enough and you can

put intent into it. Protection, luck, prosperity, all that. I try to put clarity into mine.” The book is returned to the shelf.

“Into an alien from a gumball machine?”

Lee chuckles. “Look, it’s easy to get my hands on, easy to hold. I can keep it in my pocket while I work. Plus kids like ‘em. I give out enough of these things that I need something disposable that doesn’t belong to something else. Therefore,” Lee pulls his hand from his pocket, purple, green, and white counterparts to Monte’s alien situated between his fingers. Monte squints, past Lee’s trinkets, as the living room’s baby blue wallpaper peels ever so slightly, exposing dark planks of wood, the finish eaten at by beetles. The longer he stares, the more his wall wears into a strange texture, shifting, flakey.

Lee puts the aliens back in his pocket as Monte blinks. The blue wallpaper looks the same as it did when Monte was six. He wonders if he’s seeing things. *Of course he’s seeing things.* His stomach sinks. The toy in his own pocket feels heavy.

Lee sits and they begin to talk solely about the spirit until the sun begins to dip into the treeline, the day’s stormy weather making it darker sooner. Lee tries to pose other questions, always digging at why Monte moved out here, each question worded differently, but not disguised well. Monte stands by his answer.

Quiet. Cheap. Gardening.

If Lee looks through the window and sees what has become of Monte’s backyard since he first planted the beds, he doesn’t say anything.

After a while, Monte makes coffee. Lee follows him into the kitchen, a stray comment on how nice the inside of the house is falling from his mouth to which Monte feels immeasurable pride at. The exorcist is the very first to see what he’s done with the space after moving in. Once the coffee is brewed, Monte proudly shows off the photos that hang in the hallway, so many having been forgotten by Monte

himself until he had found them. He shows off his father's select vinyls. Rosie's crocheted blankets on the back of the couch. His mother's teaching awards. Lee hums, listening intently as Monte rambles about his family. He leaves out his parents' death. His sister's unwillingness to leave Louisville. *Look at this. Focus on this.*

Once they've sat back down, things begin to come out of Lee's pockets. The topic of conversation returns to the spirit.

"So it shows up when you're cooking?"

"Yeah."

"And before you go to bed?"

"But not if I go looking for it."

"And it cries all the time?"

"Nah. Just once a week or something, but sometimes it'll do it for three days in a row. It's random. Time and everything, but always at night. It howls for usually, like, ten minutes, but it's gone for hours a couple times. One time I swear it cried the whole night."

Lee hums thoughtfully. "Sounds lonely."

In front of him on the table, he places a lighter next to a plastic bag full of what could be salt, a notepad, a black pen, a few hard caramels, and a pistol—which can't be new, the siding too flat and chrome. Monte looks at his reflection in it, warped as the light of the room bends his image onto metal, turning him into a featureless shadow.

Lee claps his hands, startling Monte. "We should cook dinner."

Monte's never been very good in the kitchen, but he stocked his fridge a few days ago. He pulls out a pork chop, some rice, and canned spinach, hoping Lee isn't very hungry. They do their best to work with what's at hand, but frankly, the spice cabinet lacks because Monte doesn't really know what sage does or if saffron is a real thing. It will end up bland, like most of Monte's meals, but the point isn't to eat it. Monte cooks the meat while Lee watches the rice, but their focus wanders towards the spirit that appears outside the doorway to the living room.

It looms, more agitated than usual in its pacing. The rhythmic thumping, the beat stuttering every third, makes it almost better heard than seen.

About ten minutes into meal prep, the thing stops pacing. Monte notices it just as well, his shoulders tightening. They both have a span of ten seconds of stillness in which Monte makes the poor decision to put his back to the spirit. He snaps like a glowstick full of adrenaline when he hears the hardwood of the hallway being kicked off. Thunder fills the room. The floor and Monte are shaken to their very foundations as the spirit barrels towards them. Monte turns quickly, hoping to stop the spirit in its path, but it is undeterred, eyes locked on Lee's back.

It shatters the door frame, chunks of rotting wood nearly dissolving with the force of its broad shoulders. Closer than it's ever been, Monte sees that its neck twisted in a way he never noticed. Its fur is coarse but has some transparency. It bears resemblance to a human, with uncanny black irises, no lashes or brows, eyes bulging out from sunken sockets, and a mouth poised for a loud resounding *whoop*. No noise comes out, but the deafening sound of something so large on the attack might have drowned it out.

It takes no more than a few seconds for the spirit to be mere feet away and Monte braces his body for impact. Lee has yet to turn around. Only an arm's length away, the spirit slows down, backpedaling to a stop.

“C’mon,” Lee mutters and light catches on the plastic wrapper of a caramel in his hand. He shifts it, crinkling the wrapper, and the thing looks down, sort of circling the exorcist. It shyly approaches Lee, plucks the candy from his hand, and sits down, its breathing heavy.

When Lee turns to look at it, the caramel falls to the floor, suddenly unattended to.

“Hey, look at that.”

Monte takes a deep breath. “What the fuck.”

act THREE. *Lee Jennings Completes the exorcism.*

It’s not something Monte might be able to reason with. Lee doesn’t explain it because he knows Monte can’t wrap his head around it, but there are things that work in an exorcism. And things that don’t. The gun doesn’t work but the note pad does. The pen and caramels are attractive, but the spirit is wary of the salt so Lee tucks it back into his pocket because it won’t work for them either.

Through minor trial and error, they find out that when Monte keeps his back turned, Lee is able to properly interact with the thing. It works in reverse as well, but having to observe the spirit makes Monte feel disgusting. He’s never reasoned with his anger well and staring at the spirit’s fucked up face makes rage climb his throat like bile. It shouldn’t be here, taking up Monte’s space, disrupting his sanctuary. He lets Lee deal with it.

The spirit enjoys Lee’s entire stash of caramels and quickly discovers how to use the pen. It outlines what looks like a tree and some rudimentary faces. Monte is dumbfounded when Lee shows him. He thought the thing was only smart enough to choose a target to charge at. When he vocalizes that, Lee leans back into the couch and doesn’t say anything.

“What?” Monte asks, just to get something out of the man.

Lee pops a crick in his neck, rolls his shoulders back, and takes his hat off. His hair is a dark mullet underneath and he fusses with it. He suddenly looks a lot younger when not under the shadow of a brim.

“So, I think I know what’s going on.”

Monte grunts.

“Your house is haunted.”

It has to be a joke, so Monte lets out a laugh, but it doesn’t come out feeling good. Genuine.

“Yeah. It is.”

“Your house is *so* haunted, it managed to catch a spirit.”

The house groans, creaks running along the pipes that lined the floor. Monte traces them wondering if the house feels like he does. Confused. A little Nervous. “What?”

“Your spirit needs to get out of here and I don’t think you should stay here either. I’m serious about this. This house is full of something nasty.”

“No way,” Monte answers before he can think. “I spent my life savings on this place. I’m not gonna just leave.” The house agrees, settling in satisfaction.

“Is any of this shit even yours?” Lee asks, gesturing to the books and furniture. “None of it feels like *yours*. There’s no attachment. Not a bit of energy from you or your family. Everything feels like this goddamn house.”

“No. It’s mine. It’s my family’s. All of it,” Monte hisses.

“Yeah. Alright.” Lee’s words are so lackluster, they make Monte feel like boiling over.

When Lee picks up his pistol and checks the cartridge, something like a growl comes from Monte's throat. He reaches across the coffee table, firmly grabbing for the gun. Lee holds it out of reach, clicks the magazine in place, and turns the safety off. He stands, and Monte instinctively steps back.

"Just trust me. You're not going to want to stay here once I'm done with the job."

Monte's heart jumps into his throat. "What the hell are you talking ab--"

The gun fires off two rounds, right into the ceiling. Monte cowers, covering his ears. Plaster rains down and he feels a sharp, odd ache surge through his nervous system. Suddenly overwhelmed, he cries out. His ears ring, but he can still make out Lee's voice saying, "*Bingo*" over the sonorous droning. Overcome by a blistering emotion, he lunges for the exorcist's legs, using his size to his advantage to tackle Lee to the floor and pin him down.

"What are you doing!?" Monte cries, head pounding. The gun falls and slides out of reach.

The exorcist looks unphased. "I need you to grab that totem, Monte."

Monte grabs the lapel of Lee's jacket and yanks him into a sitting position. "You need to get the fuck out of my house," he snarls. "We're done. I don't want you here anymore."

"I'm trying to help you."

"Help me? *Help me?* Yeah, I *hired* you to help me and you're hurting me!" The house groans in agony and Monte groans with it. His body *aches*. It feels as though there's two little holes in his skull, letting his brain leak out onto the floor.

"The totem--"

"Shut the fuck up about the totem!"

“*Goddamn it Monte,*” echoes Lee and Monte feels even more rage enter his body. He grabs Lee by the throat. The house eggs him on as he squeezes. Monte realizes too late that Lee’s line of sight is cast over his shoulder because the spirit has appeared once again. He doesn’t have time to turn before footfalls echo right behind. There is fear, but it doesn’t last long. An odd feeling overcomes him on impact, one that starts in his back and ripples through his body, cold and warm at the same time. Then the world narrows into itself as his consciousness stretches to contain more than just him, alone.

interlude.

It smells like fresh rain. The forest. Deep and true. Days pass in the shade of the leaves. Months. Years. There is company there. A great many spirits. Family. Friends. Some stay with every season. Some leave. Some are reborn. Community thrives between the trees. With the arrival of man, trees slowly fall. You were once connected to deep roots. Now all you have is lumber. The worst of the men begins to build. Selfish, he separates.

There is no more fresh rain. No more rotting leaves or sunshine. The forest is razed, all its energy stuck deep in the soil in what little remains. A house is built on top of a graveyard. The foundation is filled with misery. Years upon years pass inside a corpse that desperately tries to hold on. It rots, from the inside, hoping to keep someone within its walls. But you are not enough to feed it. You will never be enough.

epilogue. *Tremonte Mack*

Possession, Monte learns, is a very intimate act. He doesn’t quite recover. His sister notices. She calls him quiet as he moves into her apartment. Jumbled around his head, there are more thoughts than he’s ever had before—questions of land and belonging. He can’t voice them, can barely make sense of any of them,

so he just thinks. What he does voice, however, is that he's glad to be close to Rosie again. He feels more himself in her presence than when he lived alone in the countryside.

Lee Jennings didn't call it living though. He called it dying. He had said Monte was dying; that energy had to subsist on other energy. There was a law about that. Something scientific if Monte didn't believe him, but he did. He believed Lee.

In the moments that followed his possession by the forest spirit, tears streaked down Monte's face, sobs racked his body, and a small rubber alien sat clenched in his hand to let him see what sort of evil his house truly was. *Hungry. Dilapidated.* The totem provided clarity in the dark. The illusion fell away. All the stuff Monte had yearned for was replaced with dark shadows. Every photo sloughed away and the paper peeled from the walls. The chair that Monte loved so much began to deteriorate faster and faster, stuffing falling to the floor before unraveling. The books were turned to dust. The only thing that remained was the blanket Rosie had crocheted for him, vibrant hues of green the only truly living thing between the walls.

In the wake of the rot, Monte mourned the loss of so many precious things, but clarity was worth the price. He had to remind himself, as the house he had wanted so badly to be his crumbled, that clarity was worth it. From the corner of the room, the spirit stared at him with its blood shot eyes, perfectly still.

Monte hadn't wanted to leave it there. Alone. He understood now.

As he drove Monte back to Louisville, Lee said he knew a guy who would tear down the house for cheap. That it was the only way. There wasn't some cursed object in the walls or nails full of ghosts keeping the shingles together. There was nothing they could remove to fix the problem. The problem was the house itself. Blood shed from selfishness had stained the place from top to bottom. It turned the house into an entity on its own, too many souls having left pieces in the floorboards. It made Monte sick to think about.

He meets Lee once more on the day of demolition, and they watch the house come down in silence. Lee asks about the weather, Monte's recovery, and that's that. There's an odd peace in the air once the walls have been demolished. The prickles on the back of his neck Monte always got from the forest subside for once, like it's been finally released of tension. Like it's grateful to have its brother back.

Monte understands.

He goes home to his sister, one-hundred and twenty-five miles away from a farmhouse that is no longer and sits in a chair that didn't belong to his father. He reads books that didn't belong to his mother. But they're not empty promises. They don't feed upon him. Upon being let go, the world opens up. Quiet is found in moments with Monte's fingers in the soil at the inner city community garden, as Rosie crochets and listens to her horror podcast, with a good sandwich for lunch in the park. There is no need for isolation. Over time, problems fix themselves. He keeps the little alien in his pocket till his thumb has worn down the paint. He appreciates its clarity.

In the wake of gorilla ghosts and a haunted house, Lee Jennings becomes another story, a compass. It becomes easy to say that the poster was right. That he might just be Kentucky's finest exorcist.