

The Many Woes of Albert Varney

Retold by Judy Freeman

Albert Varney was a mild-mannered, taciturn man, verging on grumpy. He lived in a small shack in the woods with his yellow dog, Sam. With his dog at his side, Albert was self-sufficient, hunting and trapping, growing his own vegetables, catching fish in the river. Once a week, he'd hike down to the general store for provisions. That's where he was one afternoon in October. He'd left Sam at home to guard the house. While buying this and that, he couldn't help but overhear three codgers talking about the old abandoned mansion on the edge of town.

"It's haunted," they were saying. "No one who goes in there stays for long. They get chased out by ghosts."

Albert snorted. "There's no such things as ghosts," he scoffed.

"That so?" said one. "You care to stay there tonight yourself and find out?"

And before Albert stopped to think what he had gotten himself into, he agreed to sleep all night in the master bedroom on the second floor of the old mansion.

The wind was blowing and the full moon rising when Albert opened the door to the old house. It creaked and squealed, the hinges were so rusty. Help me open that door, won't you? (*Listeners will make squeaky door noises as they pantomime opening the door with you.*)

Inside the floor was dusty, the foyer musty. Albert sneezed. Then he made his way up the dark, tall staircase to the second floor. The stairs creaked and cracked. Albert stopped and listened. Nothing. "Hmmp," snorted Albert. "No such things as ghosts."

He found the master bedroom. White sheets covered the furniture. A large four-poster bed sat in the middle of the room with white sheets and a pillow. Albert opened the window to get some fresh air and then hoisted himself up onto the bed. It was a warm night, so he only needed the sheet for a covering. Before he lay his head down on the pillow, though, he slipped his revolver underneath, just in case. "No point in taking any chances," he said to himself, and closed his eyes. Soon he was asleep.

Around about midnight, Albert's eyes flew open. He thought he heard something nearby and looked towards the door. "Who's there?" he demanded, but there was no reply.

"Hmmp. Probably just a squirrel or a mouse. No such things as ghosts."

Now he heard something scratching at the window. "Probably just a tree branch," he muttered, and he turned his head back towards the window where the moonlight was streaming in. And there, at the foot of the bed, in the middle of the bed, were two huge, white, ghostly eyes, staring back at him, unblinking.

Slowly and oh-so-quietly, Albert slid his hand under his pillow and grasped his revolver. He drew it out from under the pillow. He aimed it right between the two ghostly eyes. Slowly, he squeezed the trigger and **BLAM! AUUGGHHHH!** (*Scream loud enough to make everyone jump.*)

Well, you'd scream, too, if you just shot off your own big toe! His two big toenails, sticking out from under the covers, looked just like big, ghostly eyes, with the moonlight shining on them.

Poor Albert Varney. After he bandaged his sorry foot, he hobbled on home. When he arrived at the door, there was no Sam to greet him. "Hey, Sam," Albert called. "Here boy." No dog came running. The dog was gone. "That dern fool dog is probably off in the woods somewhere. Some guard dog he is," Albert grumbled and went back to bed.

The next morning, the dog was still gone. With his sore foot throbbing, Albert limped outside and called for his dog. "Heeere, Sam. Come home, boy." But Sam didn't come home.

Albert went out to check his traps, and called for that dog, but Sam was nowhere to be seen. Albert came back home and went back to bed. He awoke around midnight. He thought he heard a noise, up in the attic.

Slowly and oh-so-quietly, Albert got out from under the covers. In his bare feet, he crept over to the fireplace and carefully took his shotgun down from the wall. Silently, he walked over to the steps leading up to the attic. He tiptoed up the attic steps. Halfway, he stopped to listen, but he didn't hear anything.

When he got to the top of the attic steps, he stopped again and listened. He didn't hear anything. He grasped the doorknob to the attic door with one hand. Slowly, he turned that knob and pushed open the door. Help me open that door, won't you? (*Listeners will make squeaky door noises as they pantomime opening the door with you.*) He took one step and AUUGGHHH! (*Scream loud enough to make everyone jump.*)

Well, you'd scream, too, if you just stepped on a nail in your bare feet!

Poor Albert Varney. His dog was still gone and now he had two sore feet. But he needed to get some supplies from the general store. So the next morning, he started out, limping down the road. Unfortunately, no sooner was he halfway there when a huge thunderstorm blew in. Lightning flashed and thunder crashed all around him. There, on the side of the road, on the edge of town, stood that same old mansion. It didn't make sense to stay out in the storm, so Albert decided to seek shelter in that house again.

Albert opened the door to the old house. It creaked and squealed, the hinges were so rusty. Help me open that door, won't you? (*Listeners will make squeaky door noises as they pantomime opening the door with you.*)

Inside the floor was dusty, the foyer musty. Albert sneezed. Then he made his way to the living room. The floor creaked and cracked. Albert stopped and listened. Nothing. "Hmmp," snorted Albert. "No such things as ghosts anyway."

It was warm and dry in the house, and that was something. He sat on the living room floor to wait out the storm. As the lightning lit up the room, he looked around. There was not much in there anymore—just a few sticks of old furniture. And then he heard . . . a noise. It was faint at first, but soon grew a bit louder. It was a strange rapping noise. RAP RAP. (*Knock on a wooden surface or tap your*

foot on the floor to make this noise.) It seemed to be coming from the other side of the room. RAP RAP.

At first Albert ignored the noise. It grew louder. RAP RAP. And more insistent. RAP RAP. He got up and walked over to the other side of the room. RAP RAP. It was louder over there. RAP RAP. The closer Albert got to the closet, the louder the noise became. RAP RAP. It seemed to be coming from inside of the closet. RAP RAP.

Albert didn't want to open that closet door. He'd had enough excitement already that week. RAP RAP. But he couldn't ignore that noise. It grew louder and more insistent. RAP RAP. He didn't want to open that door, but he had to open that door. He couldn't stand it one more minute. RAP RAP. He walked over to the closet, and he opened that door. Help me open that door, won't you? (*Listeners will make squeaky door noise as they pantomime opening the door with you.*)

RAP RAP. The noise was louder in the closet. In the closet, there was a shelf. RAP RAP! On the shelf, there was a box. RAP RAP! Albert lifted the box. He didn't want to open it, but he had to open it. Albert lifted the rusty latch. RAP RAP! He opened the box. Help me open that lid, won't you? (*Listeners will make squeaky noise as they pantomime opening the lid with you. If you have an actual box you can use, all the better.*)

Albert looked down and gasped. (*Gasp in horror, your eyes wide. Listeners will clutch the person sitting next to them.*)

Now he could see what was making that terrible rapping noise. He reached in the box, and pulled out a roll of . . . WRAPPING PAPER! Yes, it was a roll of WRAPPING PAPER! (*If you are using an actual box, you will want to pull out a roll of wrapping paper and hit it against the box so your listeners really get the wordplay joke and laugh in relief.*)