

The Everglow Ghost
by Andrew BZ Williams www.AndrewBZAdventures.com

I don't even like walks. Just have to get out of the house. We're not married yet, but I still want to treat her like a princess, like my dad treats my mom. She stresses out when I tell her I want us to be closer, to be around her, and hold each other. We did that while we dated and I thought we would do more when she moved in, but we do less. Whenever I bring it up, she yells about how demanding I'm being. I don't bring it up much. When I feel pressed to talk about it, I take a walk in the neighborhood, but tonight I brought it up. She was tired after work, so I asked if we could put on some music she liked, sit on the couch together, leaning on each other, or whatever. She said it was her body and she didn't feel like bowing to my whims, and she was tired anyway. I apologized, loaded the dishwasher, and now I'm on another walk.

Dusk. Be getting colder soon, but the blue sweater over my polo shirt and my khakis will keep me warm enough if I keep moving. Maybe when I finish the walk around the neighborhood I will expend enough energy and be ready for bed.

Not much to see in the neighborhood. Few children live here, and they're not out at night. It rarely rains. At least there are no puddles to step in. Almost forgot I need to water the lawn when I got back. I still haven't gotten the routine down of actually taking walks. It's the same path every time, though. The first time Jenny asked me where exactly I would be, in case of emergencies, so I stuck with winding around the streets of the neighborhood and circling back just the way I said. She didn't come with me, she never does. She's usually too tired, and she never comes looking for me.

Nearly at the end of the last street before I loop back. How have I done this so fast? The lawn can wait a little longer, and Jenny doesn't greet me when I get home from walks because she's usually on the phone with friends. What's the point of going straight home?

In the corner of the last street there's an empty lot with mostly dead grass and weeds. It isn't on my normal path. If I walk through there, Jenny won't know where I am if this is the night she comes looking. Maybe I could do this for me, just this once. Nowhere to go, no one to meet, no one waiting for me. It's mostly momentum, but I start to walk through the empty lot.

My shoes are dirty. The paved street never does that. She'll know I went off-path. Must remember to clean them. Or maybe confess I went off-path in a moment of weakness because I have to keep moving.

A dead bird in the empty lot. Odd. Wonder how it died. With little rain in our neighborhood, maybe it collapsed when it was flying. Maybe today. You'd think it would have flown somewhere else where it could manage better. Why didn't it just fly away?

At the end of the lot. Wooded area ahead, behind the neighborhood. Have to keep moving.

Pine. Dirt. Fresh Air. Until I met Jenny, I used to go for hikes, maybe an hour. I close my eyes, and breathe deeply.

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Barely visible beams of light come from deeper in the woods. Is someone there? I pass a few trees. The light is a shade between white and blue. My steps are loud over the twigs and leaves. Have to quiet down and move closer.

It's a glowing tree. A cleared circle of 20 feet surrounds it. I look closer and the light changes. Something takes form. A face. A human-like face in the tree. In the light. From the light. The light from the tree gathers itself and forms the shape of a human body on the tree.

I stumble backward but a twig snaps underfoot and I freeze.

The whole body of light on the tree faces me and makes a quick, high-pitched swirling sound. An arm of light stretches out directly at me from the tree. It's a normal-sized arm, so it can't reach. The swirling sound happens again and the entire body emerges from the tree, composed of only light, and leaves no light behind on the tree.

No one will ever find me if something happens here. No help will come. I have to run but my legs shake. I force a few steps back, but the ghost lifts from the ground and rushes toward me.

The last moment of life. I look into its eyes and see my own. This phantom of light is my body, but feebler, and its clothes hang looser on a shriveled body. It's my face, but with folds of light for wrinkles. Somehow this is me, or the ghost I will become at any moment. My Everglow Ghost. It comes as close to me as it can and screeches one word louder than I have heard anything in my life. The screech shakes my head and body, and I can almost pretend I don't know what it says, but that's a lie. Face to face when I cannot look anywhere but its sunken eyes, it screams at me, "ALONE!" It's almost one syllable, the way the "O" shrieks and holds in the air and in my body.

The ghost vanishes, and I haven't died. The glow of the tree had been transferred to the ghost, and with it gone the woods are near total blackness.

Could I have imagined the whole thing?

That would be another convenient lie. My imagination isn't this good, not with days of construction planning, dishes, and tending to Jenny.

I stumble out of the woods, reach the empty lot and back on the neighborhood street. Nothing has changed. Same porch lights are on. No children. No puddles.

I get home and close the door behind me. Oh no – I haven't watered the lawn. And my shoes – they're dirty. But Jenny's snores travel from the bedroom. I get a damp paper towel, clean my shoes, and tuck them under the couch by the front door, next to Jenny's shoes. I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror in the living room. Even my clothes are dirty from my stumbling in the woods. I strip and hide the dirty clothes in the washing machine for the night, careful not to wake Jenny.

Next day, I get home from the office and start the laundry.

Should I tell someone? Bring someone to that tree? But what will that do? Is it right to freak someone else out? And the glow of the tree had left, anyway, and the ghost disappeared.

Jenny comes home and everything is the same, so I go for another walk at dusk.

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Still hate going for walks. But I did used to go hiking, didn't I?
My throat hurts, and I'm dizzy, but maybe I should go back through the empty lot and to the woods again. Can't say why. There are things I don't understand about the spirit realm. Maybe I should leave this alone, and if I ever get too curious, I could revisit that tree. I walk by the empty lot, staying on my path back to the house. Jenny might notice me being out for a long walk two nights in a row. She's my princess. I don't want her to worry.

I turn the corner onto my street. It was about this time yesterday when it happened. Just two houses away from mine now, but...

There's a glow in front of me. It's the same distance away as the glowing tree had been when I first saw the face form. The swirling sound whispers loudly and the glow shapes into a face - my face, my older face - and the glow grows into the mocking form of my body. All life escapes from my chest. I'm dying again. I can run diagonal across these lawns to get to my front door, can't I? But no, I have to escape this fully formed Everglow Ghost. I turn and run.

That swirling sound. A glance behind me confirms the ghost sails at me through the darkness, falling toward me. It flies over and ahead of me, stares at me and screeches.

"ALONE!"

The shout pierces my body and knocks me on my back.

The ghost vanishes.

A front door across the street opens. One of my neighbors enters her home and closes the door behind her. Why does she go inside, so casually?

She must not have seen the ghost, or seen me fall.

I stagger up. I don't know the rules of whatever is happening with this ghost, but it has gone now.

Alone.

Alone.

Jenny has fallen asleep.

I forgot to water the lawn again.

Another day, but the Everglow Ghost is going to haunt me, chase me again, isn't it? No one else has any idea. Something is disrupted, and that ghost is waiting for me, even now. Does it take delight in haunting me? What wrong have I done to it? If some version of a future me, why treat me this way? I never want to see it again...