

They Speak To Me At Midnight

by

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FADE IN:

INT. DARK BEDROOM - NIGHT

Asleep diagonally amid twisted sheets: JUSTIN HUFF, 20s.

A VOICE emerges--someone with raw, tumorous vocal cords.

VOICE (O.S.)

Let me in.

Justin stirs. Blinks off sleep.

VOICE (O.S.)

Lemme in.

Out of bed. Justin scans. Leans sideways. Adjusts his boxers.

JUSTIN

Who's there?

The floorboards creak under his weight.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Snapping on the light, Justin investigates.

The voice croaks from behind his back door.

VOICE (O.S.)

Let me in.

One step back. Two. A glance to the window--pure darkness.

VOICE (O.S.)

Cold out. Lemme in.

JUSTIN

No.

He pulls open a kitchen drawer: two soup spoons and a butter knife. He grasps the knife.

JUSTIN

Go away.

He stares at the door's wooden grooves. A moment crawls by.

Justin hesitates, moves forward, turns the knob, swings the door open...

Darkness. Nothing.

EXT. YARD - NIGHT

Justin shuffles out, butter knife clutched.

Night dew on the grass wets his socks.

Justin slogs to the far end of the yard. Tucked in the corner by a withered plant is a garden gnome.

Justin frowns. Lifts the gnome. Lugs it inside.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Justin dumps the wet gnome onto his kitchen table.

The gnome's once-cherubic features have been eaten away, blasted by years of wind/rain/snow.

The face is mostly chipped paint and exposed stone resin.

The eyes: beady, washed-out. A smirk. Arched eyebrows.

Justin places his thumb on the gnome's lips.

JUSTIN

Wanna say somethin' else to me,
little man?

A fixed stare from the gnome.

Justin digs his thumb into the gnome's lips.

JUSTIN

You wanna bite?

Thumb presses harder.

JUSTIN

There. You're inside. Now shut up.

Justin snatches his butter knife and saws it against the gnome's neck. An awful scrape of dull metal upon stone.

After a half dozen swipes, Justin drops the knife.

JUSTIN

I'm sorry. That was...aggressive.

He trudges away, snaps off the light, abandons the gnome in darkness.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

As he lies in bed, Justin grasps a framed photo from his nightstand. A pretty woman smiles in the night shadows.

He whispers to her. Tender. Earnest.

JUSTIN
I'm sorry. I'm trying.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sunshine. Justin sips coffee, glares at the gnome.

He dials his cell phone. Hears a muffled message. A beep.

JUSTIN
(into phone)
Hey, Doctor Odom. It's Justin. Just
wanted to set up an appointment.
Something's come up.

A quick glance at the gnome.

JUSTIN
No. Wait. I don't really mean that.

Swallows.

JUSTIN
I'll handle this one myself.

A deep breath.

JUSTIN
Pretend you didn't hear this.

He hangs up.

A few cautious steps toward the gnome. He speaks to it.

JUSTIN
You're not the first one to wake me
up in the middle of the night. It's
happened before.

He sloshes his coffee.

JUSTIN
Want to know how that turned out?

The gnome stares. Justin swallows his drink.

JUSTIN

Not good.

Justin shifts.

JUSTIN

Since you like to talk, maybe you
can give me some advice.

Taps his finger on the table.

JUSTIN

Do I deserve this? Am I to blame?

The gnome's smirk is fixed. Justin waits for an answer.

JUSTIN

Nothing? No words? C'mon.

Justin puts his nose close to the gnome.

JUSTIN

You jabber all night, but you've
got no advice? What do I do, little
man? Nobody loves me anymore.

He jerks back, spills his coffee, pours a small, hot stream
over the gnome's head.

Dark-roasted rivulets flow along the gnome's battered nose,
cheeks, and chin.

Brown puddles spread on the table and floor.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Justin slides into bed, groans, buries himself in the covers.

LATER - NIGHT

Justin sleeps, but not much longer. Another VOICE hisses from
only a few feet away. A woman's voice.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Gone forever.

Justin sits up.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Gone forever.

Justin whirls and faces the framed picture of the woman.

JUSTIN
(to picture)
No.

He snatches the picture frame.

JUSTIN
Please don't say that.

He buries the picture under a mound of covers.

A new HIGH-PITCHED VOICE calls out from the kitchen.

HIGH-PITCHED VOICE (O.S.)
Cut, cut, slash.

Justin's on his feet.

HIGH-PITCHED VOICE (O.S.)
Cut, cut, slash.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Justin confronts the smirking, mischievous gnome.

JUSTIN
Shut your mouth!

But the gnome isn't the one who's talking. The high-pitched voice sounds from the far end of the kitchen.

Justin scans the room for the source.

HIGH-PITCHED VOICE (O.S.)
Cut. Cut. Slash.

Justin searches.

HIGH-PITCHED VOICE (O.S.)
Cut. Cut. Slash.

The cabinet. Justin swings it open. On the highest shelf--almost out of reach--is a knife set.

He slides two knives out of a holder. The blades gleam.

JUSTIN
(to the knives)
What do you want from me?

Justin studies the sharp edges.

JUSTIN
Cut, cut, slash?

Justin looks over to the gnome.

JUSTIN
You want me to do this?

The gnome's eyes bore down on Justin.

Justin puts one of the knives to his own neck.

JUSTIN
Cut and slash? Like that?

He searches the gnome's rotten face for an answer. He pulls the knife way from his throat.

JUSTIN
Then who? Tell me.

Justin shuffles to the gnome, puts his ear near its crumbling lips, listens to its secrets. The words are inaudible, but Justin seems to understand.

He kisses the gnome's smirking lips in appreciation.

Clutching the knives, Justin moves to the back door. He swings it open, casting one sad glance back to the bedroom.

EXT. BACK YARD - NIGHT

Justin squats in the spot once occupied by the gnome. He scrapes the two knives against each other. Metal on metal.

Scrape. Scrape. Scrape. The shrill noise echoes.

JUSTIN
(whispers)
Cut, cut, slash.

He plods to the gate, his socks wet, muddy, weighed-down.

Justin spots a FEMALE NEIGHBOR across the street. A night owl. She sits on her porch and texts on her phone.

He tightens his grip on the knives: white-knuckle pressure. Off he goes to see her, his lips twisted, his eyes far off.

The night wind stirs. Cool and eerie.

FADE OUT: