

## The Devil in the Details

Edgar tapped the note in the palm of his hand. The sun was deep in the west, the courier and his horse a long shadow disappearing down the dusty lane. The man had said he would be back tomorrow at the same time, weather permitting. Rain was just beginning to fall. He opened the folded paper in dreaded anticipation...

One sentence. Straight to the point, straight through his heart. His publisher had not even bothered to sign his name.

*Get the final draft to me by Friday or our contact is terminated.*

50 miles lay between his home in Merrimack and Boston, a hard day's journey for even a seasoned rider and steed. If the weather turned bad or the horse threw a shoe... One day! *Dammit!* Not even close to the three-month extension he'd asked for. Wiley was asking the impossible—and missing the deadline was his fault anyway. "...the end just doesn't work for me...the reader won't find it satisfying..." That's what he'd said when he rejected his last draft. The truth hurt. The beginning and the middle of his manuscript was complete, full of excellent prose, hearty beats and spine-chilling suspense—but alas, no matter how

hard he'd tried, the end would not come to him. His protagonist was stuck in a literal literary limbo. The day had started with such high hope; he'd sat by the fireplace, Tabby curled up at his feet in the toasty den, ideas for an exciting climatic scene bouncing around in his head.

He opened a bottle of 18-year-old Scotch and meditated. Then, he immersed himself into some Lord Byron poetry. Later, he picked up his guitar and strummed a few melancholy tunes on his guitar. The new barmaid at the pub came to his mind, how she could carry four mugs of beer by supporting them on her voluptuous breasts. He imagined his head curled between them, which brought on a throbbing erection. Yet, nothing could summon his muse.

Now it was past midnight, one candle completely spent, the other down to a stub. The logs in the fireplace reduced to embers. On the table, the ink unused, the pen idle, the page blank. A half empty glass of whiskey remained, or was it half full? Neither sounded better.

He picked up the pen and held it above the paper, as if the words would magically appear. The page remained as barren as his mind. Advice from his agent came to mind, to remember, "The Devil is in the details."

Edgar shoved himself up from the table and yelled, mimicking bitterly, "The Devil doesn't know shit!"

A grumbling moan came from the forsaken fireplace. Air began to suck into the throat of the hearth as if it were taking a breath, stirring the ashes, kindling cloven tongues of fire that grew bright as the sun. The room fell stone silent. In a moment, the fire died. He breathed a sigh of relief..

Suddenly, from the depths of hell, the demon came forth, exploding from a ball of fire.

Edgar stumbled back and stepped on Tabby, who jumped up startled right into the demon's legs, immediately catching on fire, running around and around the room with Edgar trying to catch it with the fireplace tongs. The demon rolled with laughter and opened the door so the cat could run outside into the pouring rain.

Finally catching the hysterical cat, Edgar dunked it into a puddle of water. Thankfully, besides a little singed fur and charred whiskers, Tabby was ok. He peered through the doorway. The demon leaned against the fireplace with his legs crossed, twirling its tail in one hand, the other pointing at him.

The Devil asked gruffly, "Do you want help with your book or what?"

"I do," Edgar replied, "but I don't want to pay for it with my soul."

It had a funny sounding laugh, like a braying sheep. The Devil said, "I don't want your soul, Edgar. I just want you to write an acknowledgement for my help inside your book cover. And don't worry. I promise, notoriety is much more profitable than mere fame."

Edgar went back inside his house, edging against the far wall with Tabby in his arms. He sat the cat on the table and sized the demon up. "Ok. How do I end my book?"

"It's done. Read it, see if you like it."

He opened the book to the last chapter: his protagonist had saved the day and married the princess and they lived happily ever after. "This isn't right," Edgar fumed. "Don't you know, there are no happy endings."

The Devil bristled in anger, its skin bursting into flames.

"It's getting hot in here." Edgar opened the window and took a deep breath. The fresh air cleared the cobwebs in his stale imagination. "I have a great idea for the ending."

"Then it will be as you choose," the Devil said, his black lips curling into a wicked smile.

"So, the prince tricks the witch," he explained, "and she turns him into a tiny moth—no, no. Not just any moth, but a Hummingbird Hawk-moth..."

A bright light flashed across the room, and with it, the Devil disappeared into the fireplace. The candle reached the end of its wick. Its flame flickered and went out, leaving the room in darkness. The pitter-patter of rain drops drummed on the roof as a cold moist breeze prowled into the house. Tabby swatted at an insect buzzing near her ear, like it was trying to talk to her.

End