



The Bogey Man and the Black Knight



By Ardath Rekha

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Synopsis: Riddick, Jack and Imam have left the planet. Can Riddick put his past behind him and start a new life? A ghost from the darkest part of his past surfaces... will it hold him back, or move him forward? This is a dark and angsty piece. Be warned.

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Imam Abu al-Walid had known it was coming even before the first whimper. He'd known it to be inevitable. Despite her fierce bravado and the tragic wisdom in her eyes, young Jackie had been doomed to have nightmares.

As will I, when I sleep, he reflected. It was no lack of strength on her part. The only one among them that might not have horrific dreams was Riddick, currently sitting in the pilot's seat beside her. He watched as the large ex-con turned his head and looked at the girl, expecting disdain to appear on those enigmatic features.

He was surprised.

A strange frown, almost of pain, crossed Riddick's face for a moment. He rose, pushing back the seat and moving to the girl's side.

Odd, Imam thought as he watched Riddick put an uncharacteristically gentle hand on the girl's shoulder. *He always did treat her differently from any of the rest of us. I wish I knew why.*

"Wake up, kid." The rumble of his voice, too, seemed to have softened. "You're having a nightmare."

Jack flinched, her eyes opening. Imam wondered if she would shrink away from Riddick, but instead she seemed soothed by his presence. Again, odd. The girl had been afraid of him — *as had we all*, he reminded himself — at first, but that fear had vanished quickly. She'd warmed to Riddick long before anyone else had, and he, in turn, had treated her with surprising indulgence.

It worried Imam more than he wanted to admit. A young teen like Jackie was vulnerable to predation, especially from someone she'd chosen to regard as a hero. He would have to watch this closely.

"Sorry," she muttered, as if she'd committed a faux pas.

"Nothing to be sorry about, kid. Look, there are some blankets in the back. How 'bout we sack out where it's more comfortable? I'll keep your nightmares away, you can keep mine away."

Now *that* admission was something Imam would never have expected at all. He watched closer. Riddick's smile told him everything. The big man wasn't anticipating having any nightmares himself; he was just saying it to help the girl save face, to put her at ease...

...to lure her in? God help me if that's his intention.

Jack got out of the seat, a relieved grin on her face stripping away her carefully-cultivated "I'm-tough-so-don't-mess-with-me" expression. They both headed back to his section of the skiff, where various supplies had been squirreled away before the eclipse. Water bottles. Ration packs. And above all, pillows and blankets from the settlement. Imam watched in bemusement as Riddick began arranging them into a large, nest-like pile.

"There," he grinned at the girl after a moment. "A bed fit for a p— ...king."

Jack grinned, apparently not noticing the odd slip. Imam marked it though. He would puzzle it over later. He watched as the two got comfortable, side by side, and realized that Riddick had made room for three.

"You wanna join us, Holy Man? Share the warmth, ward away the Bogey Man?" Something odd flickered across Riddick's face at the last words, as if he'd tried to tell a joke only to realize, too late, that it wasn't funny at all.

"I am well," Imam answered. "But thank you. Perhaps I will join you later." He still had many prayers to say. And much to think on.

"Suit yourself." Riddick put his arm around Jack. "Better, kid?"

"Much," Jack said with certainty. She closed her eyes and turned slightly, resting her head against Riddick's shoulder.

It was the tiniest flinch. Imam wondered if Jack felt it at all. Mostly the flinch had been in Riddick's *face*. Something had surprised him. Something about the way the girl had cuddled close to him had *unnerved* him. Riddick turned his face a little, and their eyes locked.

For a long moment they stayed that way, two men watching each other across the width of the skiff, both of them wary. Then Riddick raised one eyebrow, as if to ask "what are *you* worrying about?"

Imam broke contact for a moment and turned his gaze on the fragile girl in Riddick's arms, before looking back at his face. He hoped his message was clear.

It was. And Riddick's answer was even clearer. The idea that he might take advantage of the girl *disgusted* him. It *offended* him. Those emotions swarmed through the air at Imam as strongly as if Riddick had jumped to his feet and shouted in fury. Silver eyes rolled and his lips quirked in an aggravated sneer. Imam could almost hear the words.

It just figures you'd jump to that conclusion about me.

He made his expression apologetic. Riddick let out a gusty sigh and turned his head away, looking down at the girl, himself, now. His expression was thoughtful. Then he closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the pillows.

And I am none the wiser... but I do think I am reassured. Imam returned to his prayers and soon they calmed the racing of his thoughts.

It figures. It just fucking figures. Riddick had closed his eyes but he was more restless than ever now. Jack cuddled trustingly against him didn't help any, either. It had awakened unexpected old ghosts.

He didn't know why. Small as she was, she was *much* bigger than Miguela had been. No hair was fanned out over his shoulder and chest, tickling at his chin and lips and nose. No bedtime stories had been uttered, no elaborate good-night code-phrases exchanged. And the monsters were all far away, vanquished or sated on other meats.

It still burned him. He knew this moment.

"I'll lock your window, and I'll check under your bed and in your closet, and I'll stay with you until you fall asleep. Is that good enough?"

"And if the Bogey Man is under the bed?"

"I'll kill him for you."

"What if he's in the closet?"

"I'll kill him in there, too."

God, it still hurt. After all this time, it still hurt. No matter what he'd done — and he'd done so much — it had never stopped hurting.

Jack sighed as her breathing slipped into the rhythm of sleep. His throat began to ache. That sigh had always marked the moment when he would get ready to leave, extricating himself from small, delicate limbs and rearranging blankets. Not this time.

This time I'm not leaving your side. He wasn't even sure who he meant... the girl in his arms or the lost princess of his past.

Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess...

Miguela...

Her name was Miguela Camille Santiago and at five she had the face of an angel. Rick had been stunned the day she appeared at his foster parents' house. Her story was heartbreaking. She was an orphan, of a kind. Her mother had been murdered and her father was being sent to prison for killing her. He heard Ryan and Danielle, later on, talking about the crime when they thought he was asleep.

Miguela's father had strangled her mother to death in front of her, believing that she'd cheated on him. The little girl had seen everything.

Rick was fifteen then. Full of hot blood and the certainty that he knew it all, that the world had opened up for him and shown him its full mystery and glory and darkness. Still, he was smitten by Miguela. She was the most beautiful creature he'd ever seen, and he wished that she were his *real* sister, by blood. He'd taken her over and begun to spend his afternoons with her. Later he would learn that Ryan and Danielle had been relieved by that. They'd been afraid that he was falling in with a bad crowd, and his devotion to their new charge had cut him off from that group.

Sometimes he'd wondered, after... everything... if they'd ended up wishing he *had* ended up partying mindlessly with the hotrodders they'd disapproved of so much. But at the time, Miguela had been the center of his universe.

She was beautiful. In some ways she looked like she *was* his sister, to the point that people who saw them on the streets or in a playground assumed as much. She had skin a similar color to his, a lovely caramel shade that he thought made her smile all the more luminous. Her eyes were an astonishingly pale brown that always arrested people's attention. And her hair...

He'd loved her hair. It had flowed like a coffee waterfall from the crown of her head to down below her waist, waving and curling. Combing it for her had become one of the things he lived for.

She was very girly, something he'd never had patience with up until then, but which seemed perfectly reasonable coming from her. Her favorite stories involved beautiful princesses on magical adventures. Okay, yeah, some of that appealed to him, too. He loved it when the Renaissance Faires came through, and he'd *almost* talked his Metal Shop teacher into letting him try his hand at making a sword.

Even now, that argument — “You want me to help you *make an edged weapon* here in the *school*?” — made him smile. In spite of everything.

So why *not* let Miguela be a princess? She ruled his heart, so it made perfect sense to him. He bought her all kinds of fairy tale vids and quickly learned that the princess had better *not* be a blonde in them. When kids from his school had seen him in the stores, perusing the G-rated titles, their catcalls had only made him grin. They should be so lucky to have a princess in their life.

He knew she had a crush on him. She told all of her friends that she was going to marry him when she grew up. But there had been no doubt for him at all. She was his sister. When she *did* get married one day — and whatever guy she ultimately picked, he thought, had better be damn impressive — he would be the one who walked her down the aisle and gave her away.

Despite Ryan and Danielle's belief that Miguela would have nightmares about what she'd seen, she hadn't. She'd slept soundly every night for more than a year. So it took him by surprise, the night he opened his eyes and found her standing in front of him.

“The Bogey Man is looking in my window, Rick. Can I sleep in here?”

He sat up, yawning, and glanced at his clock. Three in the morning. She must have had a *bad* nightmare.

“The Bogey Man, huh?” He wondered if that was a phrase one of her friends had taught her, or if it was something from her old life.

She nodded, eyes huge and somber.

“Tell you what... let's go see.”

“I want to stay in here.”

“You know Ryan and Danielle don't like that.” She'd found some of his ...special... magazines two months earlier. His ears were still ringing from the scolding he'd gotten over that. He kept them in a much better hiding place, now, but they still didn't want Miguela venturing into his den of iniquity anymore.

“But...” He could see her going through arguments in her mind, discarding each one as she realized it wouldn't get her anywhere. She was a frighteningly smart girl. Soon she'd be starting first grade and he was already certain she'd be the smartest kid in her class.

“Tell you what. I'll come with you back to your room, okay?” He could see her about to protest. Smiling, he raised his hand and cut the protest off. “I'll lock your window, and I'll check under your bed and in your closet, and I'll stay with you until you fall asleep. Is that good enough?”

She sighed. “Okaaaaay...”

He climbed out of bed and picked her up, carrying her back into her room. Sitting her on her bed, he went over to her window.

“I don't see him out there.” All he saw was the top of the back porch roof, and the dark expanse of the house's back yard. The summer night air had finally cooled. He could turn off her fan and close her windows without the room becoming stuffy, so he did, making sure she watched as he locked each window.

“What if the Bogey Man is already inside? What if he's under the bed?”

“Well, I'll do what Sir Lancelot did in that vid I got you.”

“You'll kill him?”

“Absolutely.” He grinned and knelt down, looking under her bed. “Nope, no Bogey Man under the bed. Just your shoes. And Mr. Flopper.”

He pulled the plush, fuzzy trout — *whose idea was it to make a fish into a stuffed animal?* — out from under the bed and set it on the pillow beside her.

“What if he's in the closet?”

"I'll still kill him." He grinned and rose to his feet. Going over to her closet, he reflected that she'd never needed its light left on. No closet light, no night light. This was the first time since she'd arrived that she'd ever needed reassurance of any kind, in order to fall asleep. "Nobody in here. Just lots of pretty dresses."

"Okay... will you stay with me?"

"Until you fall asleep. Then I have to go back and sleep in my room... there just ain— isn't enough room in here." Half of Miguela's bed was taken up by her stuffed animal collection. Dozens of pairs of glass eyes, shining silver in the darkness, gazed sightlessly at him. He sat down beside her. "Scoot over a little?"

She wriggled up against her toy friends to make just enough room for him to lie down on his side. *No, can't sleep here... first time I rolled over I'd end up with my ass on the floor.* He lay down beside her, carefully, putting his arm around her. She smiled and rested her head on his shoulder.

"Tell me a story?"

"It's three in the morning, Miguela."

"Please?"

He sighed. "Okay... once upon a time, there was a beautiful princess."

"What was her name?"

"Princess Miguela."

"And she lived in a big castle." Her voice sounded a little heavier. Soon she'd fall asleep.

"Yeah." He knew the kinds of stories she loved best by heart already. Making this one up for her was easy.

"And she had lots of beautiful dresses, and she was always the most beautiful girl at every ball."

"But there was a mean Bogey Man and he wanted to get her."

Wow. Whatever nightmare she'd had, it was really sticking with her.

"Yeah. He was mean... but the princess knew she was safe because the bravest knight in all the land, Sir Rick, was always there to protect her."

"And he killed the Bogey Man..." She yawned softly.

"Yeah. He killed the Bogey Man. He struck him down with his sword and he said 'This is what you get for messing with my Princess Miguela.'"

Silence. Then a soft sigh, as Miguela's breathing shifted into the pattern of deep sleep.

He waited a few moments before untangling their limbs. Drawing her blanket up, he stroked her hair back from her face and kissed her forehead gently. Then he padded back to his room and went back to sleep.

She was back the next night at three. "The Bogey Man is back at my window, Rick. Can I stay with you?"

It soon fell into an almost ritual. Every night he would wake up at three to find her in front of him. The Bogey Man had returned. The things they said to each other became almost codified. He would take her back to her bedroom, look out of her windows before closing and locking them, and check under her bed and in her closet. Then they would lie down, and he would tell her the story about Princess Miguela and how her defender, Sir Rick, killed all the Bogey Men in the land for her, so nobody would try to hurt her.

Summer passed this way, night after night. After the first week he told Ryan and Danielle. They discussed it with Miguela's case worker, trying to decide whether a therapist was needed. But in the meantime, they told him, he should continue to give her this comforting ritual that had been established.

School began and Miguela discovered the joys of first grade. She began to bring home new friends, several of whom treated her fascination with fairy tales, princesses and knights with disdain. But he would hear them giggling about *him*... it seemed that all of her friends wanted to marry him when they grew up.

A week into school, Rick woke with the sense that something was amiss. He rolled over and glanced at his clock. Bright green letters announced that it was 3:15 a.m. He sat up, puzzled, trying to figure out what was wrong. It took him a moment to shake the cobwebs out of his head enough to realize.

Miguela hadn't come to him, asking him to drive the Bogey Man away.

Weird. It had become so much a part of his nights, he thought, that he now couldn't stay asleep even if she *didn't* come. He considered going to check on her.

No. The case worker had been pretty specific about that. "If she manages to have a night where she *doesn't* have a nightmare, we need to reinforce that. Don't look in on her. You'll just wake her up and then she'll probably need the whole ritual again. Let her sleep."

He sighed and settled back into bed. It all felt *wrong*, somehow. Every instinct kept telling him that he should go check on her. Close and lock her windows. Look under her bed and in her closet. And tell her their story...

He settled for shifting his position, so that his pillow was in his arms as if it was her. *Once upon a time*, he thought to himself, *there was a beautiful princess. Her name was Princess Miguela...*

He was never sure how far into the tale he had to go before he fell back asleep. The next thing he knew, Ryan was knocking on his door.

“Rick? You know you’re not supposed to have Miguela in with you.”

He rolled over in bed, frowning. The sun was up. It was a Saturday morning. Already after nine in the morning. Oddly, for once, no sound of cartoons was filtering up from downstairs.

“Huh?”

The door opened. “Look, I know she has nightmares about Bogey Men every night, but we *discussed* this—”

“She’s not in here, Ryan.” Cold was suddenly filling his every vein. Lunging out of bed, he shoved past his foster father and headed for Miguela’s room at a dead run.

The stuffed animals on her bed were in a strange disarray. Her blanket was crooked, not bunched up the way it usually was by morning, but... *wrong*. Rick turned and looked at the window. Unlocked because he hadn’t come in at three to lock it. Open because he hadn’t come in at three to shut it. Just the screen between it and the outside summer air...

...and oh God, there were a dozen of Miguela’s beautiful, coffee-colored strands caught at the bottom of the screen. Half in her room, half whipping in the breeze outside the window.

The Bogey Man had been real. All along... *real*. And last night he had taken Miguela at last.

The police found almost no evidence. No fingerprints, only one possible footprint in the yard. A few drops of blood that might be Miguela’s or someone else’s if perhaps she scratched him.

Rick was let off school, after two days of blurred, nightmarish attempts to concentrate in classes, and allowed to join the search. Groups of volunteers combed the lots and alleys, the woods and fields, calling Miguela’s name. Her picture was up on every comm pole. Rick went from shop to shop, distributing flyers and putting them up on bulletin boards, and then began searching the fields again.

It was three weeks before Miguela was found. Worst of all, *he* was the one to find her.

The hair almost threw him off completely. Miguela’s hair was so beautiful and so lush, that the matted tangle of brown he spotted out of the corner of his eye looked nothing like it. It couldn’t possibly be her hair. But the feeling that moved through him, a sense of nauseated predestination, made him venture closer. The other searchers came running at his inhuman scream. They found him cradling her body in his arms, rocking back and forth. It took five grown men to get him to let her go.

She’d only been dead for one day. Whoever had taken her had kept her alive the entire time... and had done unspeakable things to her. Rick only knew about them, once again, because he listened to Ryan and Danielle talking to *his* case-worker when they thought he was asleep. He *should* have been. They’d given him enough sedatives to—

...knock out a fucking mule team...

—but he’d been awake instead, and listening.

A pedophile. He’d never heard the word before then, but he filed it away. A pedophile had taken Miguela and had sexually abused her for three weeks. Finally she’d died. Internal bleeding. That was what had killed her. And the sick fuck hadn’t let her go, hadn’t dropped her off at an emergency room or anything, when she started to weaken. He’d continued abusing her to the end. And then he’d tossed her body into the ravine.

Rick had one of the strongest stomachs ever made. He’d never thrown up, even once, but he was suddenly closer than he’d ever been in his life to doing so. He’d listened on, sickened.

The police hadn’t gotten anything useful. They said whoever did it was experienced and knew what they were doing, and hadn’t left any genetic material behind that could be traced back to him. Every known sex offender on the list was being questioned—

There’s a list? What list? There’s a list...

—but nothing had come up yet.

The conversation moved on, at that point, to helping Rick cope with his grief, and he headed back into his room in disgust soon after.

Emotionally delicate my ass. I know what has to be done.

The day of her funeral came. Dressed in the first and only formal suit he ever wore — which would not be put on again for more than a year — Rick stepped up to Miguela’s coffin.

Some miracle worker had restored her beauty. Her hair was washed and lovingly brushed and shiny and beautiful. Not the way he did it, but a valiant effort. She almost looked like she was asleep.

"I need a moment alone," he grated out. After a minute and a whispered conference, he heard the others leave the room.

He gripped the side of the coffin for a moment. Leaning down against it, he put his arm around her.

"Once upon a time..." He swallowed and forced the words out. "There was a beautiful princess. Her name was Miguela. And she was the most beautiful girl in the whole world. And everybody loved her. But there was a mean Bogey Man, and he wanted to hurt her. But her protector, Sir Rick... he tried to keep her safe. But one night..."

The silence of the room overwhelmed him. No one asking "and then what happened?" No sigh as someone drifted into slumber.

"...he failed..."

It took him a long moment to recover.

"The Bogey Man came and he took Princess Miguela away... and he did terrible things to her... and she... died... and Sir Rick swore... he swore... he'd kill the Bogey Man... all the Bogey Men. So this would never happen again..."

He was out of time. The door behind him opened and he could hear the others returning. He lifted his head and saw—

Oh god, she's alive, she's crying—

Then he realized that those were *his* tears. They'd fallen from his cheeks onto hers. Ryan stepped up beside him and gave him a sympathetic look, carefully taking out a handkerchief and blotting them away. A tiny, flesh-colored stain from the thick funeral makeup appeared on the white cloth.

Bending down, Rick gave Miguela one final good-night kiss on the forehead.

He sat through the whole funeral cursing God. *If you won't do justice, you fuck, I will...*

And he did.

It took him a month to get his hands on a copy of the Known Sex Offenders list. Finally he stole it off of the post office wall when things were especially busy and nobody was looking. Armed with names and addresses, he began his hunt. He couldn't torture his prey for three whole weeks, but each of them suffered for a long time before finally dying.

It took the police almost a year to catch him. At that point, he'd exhausted the entire list and had begun trolling the local net boards, pretending to be a grammar school girl out of her depth and luring the men who would use such a girl out to rendezvous points where their nightmares were realized in place of their sordid dreams. They only caught him because he made the mistake of luring a plainclothes detective, also trolling the boards for pedophiles, to meet him.

The headlines were extraordinary. Seventeen at that time, he'd been tried as an adult for sixty-seven counts of first-degree murder. They might have gone for the death penalty, except he was too young... and quickly discovered that a large part of the public considered him some kind of strange folk hero.

The story of "Princess Miguela and Sir Rick" somehow came out... and he was dubbed "Sir Shiv-A-Lot" by the press.

The trial moved swiftly. He was sentenced to life in prison with no hope for parole and shipped off in less than a month.

I will never forget that first day...

He'd made it through all of the indignities and had been released into the general populace. Terrified, he'd braved his way through the stares and murmurs, trying to ignore the *hungry* way some of the men were looking him over. He'd found a seat and taken it, hunching over his food and trying to vanish into the crowd. Good luck.

When the silence had fallen, he'd looked up. A huge man had been poised above him, smirking.

"Looks like nobody's welcomed you yet, pretty boy—"

Then the knife had appeared. At the man's throat.

"Stay away from this one, Marco. You got me?"

Rick blinked, trying to figure out what the hell was happening. The man holding the knife was dusky and slight, but exuded menace unlike anything he'd ever felt. Marco, though twice his size, moved back in a hurry. Once he was gone, the slight man made the knife vanish and turned to look down at Rick appraisingly.

“You Richard B. Riddick?”

“Yeah...”

Powerful emotion appeared on the other man’s face and he held out a hand. “Joachim Morales Santiago. I think you knew my daughter.”

They’d gone on a hidden crusade together in the prison. Strange, fatal accidents began to befall the pedophiles locked up there. Eventually Riddick — no longer Rick except in dreams where a little girl smiled and called him *Sir Rick* — was caught again. Eventually he began learning how to escape from prisons.

But they always caught him again... because it was never very long before his compulsion drove him to kill again. To prey on the predators.

It haunted him. The man who killed Miguela had never been caught. His promise had still not been kept...
Keep it for me now, Rick—

Riddick’s eyes snapped open in the dark of the skiff.

Jack was still fast asleep, tucked up against him. The soft click of the Holy Man’s prayer beads sounded from a few feet away.

Shit, been a long time since I dreamed about that...

“Nightmares, Mr. Riddick?” came Imam’s gently pitched voice.

Riddick turned his head and considered him, remembering the uncomfortable assumption that the cleric had made about him not long ago.

“Not really sure,” he answered as softly as he could. Jack made a little noise and snuggled closer, but didn’t wake.

Not a nightmare. Not a happy dream, no, but not a nightmare. What was it? A message? He had another chance to start over, here. Everybody would believe he’d died in the crash of the *Hunter-Gratzner*. Could he let them? Could Sir Rick let go of his crusade — *better not use that word in front of the Holy Man* — and try to live a normal life?

Maybe.

Maybe he could, now... he had someone to defend. Funny, he suspected that if he tried to call her “Princess Jackie,” the little spitfire in his arms would deck him. But just maybe...

Is this what you want, Miguela? Is this what you meant, just now?

He didn’t know.

But he was going to try.

Riddick lifted one hand and smoothed it over Jack’s scalp, as if brushing back loose strands of hair from her face. He didn’t realize what he was doing until his lips pressed against her forehead.

*I don’t even wanna **know** what the Holy Man thinks he’s seeing.*

He closed his eyes again. No more nightmares. No more Bogey Men. *I hope.*

Imam Abu al Walid waited a little bit longer before finally setting aside his beads and joining the two in the nest Riddick had made. He considered them both for a moment. There was an aura of peace about both of them, now, as if something... mystical... had happened.

I do not know why, Allah, but I seem to see your hand shielding them. I hope I am right.

In Riddick’s arms, Jack looked fragile and tiny. And utterly defended.

I hope I am right.

End.

Author’s note: The genesis of this idea came out of a moment of the movie *Signs*, by M. Night Shyamalan. Don’t read further if you haven’t seen the film yet. In the movie, the little daughter went into her father’s room and told him that a monster was outside her window. He carried her back to her room and tucked her

back in bed, and then saw that there was, indeed, someone (or *something*) outside her window! I began to ponder what might have happened if he hadn't spotted the bogey man... if, in fact, he'd put his daughter back in harm's way and as a result lost her. And this story began to unspool in my head. Then, as some of you may know, I lost a beloved pet over that weekend. And part of me had been tormented ever since, wondering if in some way, by failing to do or see something important, I allowed her to die. So the piece that had been evolving in my head began to scream to be released. And here it is.