

Creature of death

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Creature of Death

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The saga of the Plenty family and the hunt for the vicious predator that terrorized the community.

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CREATURE OF DEATH

“The Terror Begins”

“Kiamichi Mountains, Indian Territory, 1875”

Thick rolling fog engulfed the small valley as the young boy entered the dense forest. He had two minutes to live as cold piercing eyes stared out through the tangled brush. The predator would attack from the rear, less likely to be injured by this method. Then he would sink his sharp fangs deep into his neck, and hear the crunch of his bones.

The predator would feel the rapid pulse of the young man as blood rushed to his brain. Razor sharp teeth would sever the jugular vein. His heartbeat would grow weak as the beast held him with his steel like jaws, and in less than a minute the predator’s prey would be dead.

The young man walked down the brush-choked path, pushing aside the leaves, unaware of the danger ahead.

When the young boy didn’t return home that night the sheriff was notified and the whole country tromped in the woods searching for him.

Noted tracker Nathan Plenty searched alone like he always did. He picked up his tracks and it led him into the vast deep glen near the swamp. Deep in the matted foliage he found the young boy. He couldn’t recognize the face of the boy lying on the ground. He was young, eighteen in the prime of his life. His entails had been eaten. One of his boots had come off during the struggle, and the boot looked new. A jack knife, partially opened, lay beside him. Nathan’s eyes focused on the large paw print embedded in the dark soil. One of the panther’s toes was missing and the cat would be easy to follow. Nathan slipped into the thick brush on a journey that would change his life.

The tracks led Nathan into a dark hollow. Fog so thick he couldn't see. Something inside told him to avoid this place, but the panther had killed his neighbor's son. Someone had to stop him. A black snake slithered out of the fog. Two steps inside the fog and Nathan vanished. He looked down and couldn't see his boots. After each step he paused to listen. Chip of a cricket, croak of a frog, and the dripping of water was clear. Trees so close he had to squeeze through. The tracks brought him to the high bank of the river.

He peered down at the churning water when he heard the patter of something running behind him. He whirled around as the edge of the bank broke loose. He got a glimpse of the panther and fired the shotgun as he fell off the bank.

Twenty foot later he hit the swirling water and it carried him downstream. The only thing Nathan clearly remembered was the growl of the panther.

* * *

"Five years earlier, Indian Territory 1870"

Large snowflakes fell from the sky covering the landscape with a white glow. In a small cave, high in the mountains, two cubs were whining as their mother licked their tiny bodies. They had entered this new world unaware of the dangers they would face. Instinct told them they needed nourishment, and after filling their tiny bellies they purred and slept.

Two months later, they became active and began to snarl and slap at each other, preparing themselves for their natural ability. Being naturally curious, the cubs began to venture from the den.

A hopping frog caught their attention and they gleefully gave chase. The frog suddenly stopped and they were puzzled. The male of the two, stiffed and pawed the tiny frog until it began to hop and once again their playful chase continued. An approaching sound in the distance and in an instant, they retreated to the safety of the den. Inside the den, the cub's eyes focused on the entrance when a familiar face appeared. They rushed to their mother and drew the rich milk from her breast.

As they grew bigger, and stronger, their mother began to take them on short walks. She showed them a world filled with flowers with dazzling colors, bright-winged butterflies, and the discovery of sweet tasting berries. They were led to a small stream and taught how to fish. The high protein was tasty and delicious as their tiny teeth stripped the meat from the bones. A large fish flopped and slapped them in the face with its tail, teaching them to always be careful. Each experience they encountered was a valuable lesson, a lesson they must learn to survive in this harsh new world.

When they grew older the cubs began to drift further from the den, exploring and experiencing all the many wonders this world would offer. They learned right away to stay away from bees, sharp thorns, and skunks. One day they ran upon an unusual slow walking creature. They thought this would be an easy prey as they pounce on this helpless animal. They couldn't seem to get away fast

enough as the quills of the porcupine jarred their senses. A valuable lesson, sometimes things are not as easy as they seem.

In time, they joined their mother on her hunts. They would watch as she silently stalked her prey, and taught them the advantage of surprise. Eventually, they began to work as a team. They would chase the prey, while their mother lay hidden. An unexpected attack would prove to be fruitful.

The male of the pair grew at a rapid pace and towered over his sister, his frame twice as big as her, although she was more cunning and swift. She was his only friend and companion, and his manner to her was mild and gentle.

One day while they were out exploring his sister, came from the forest into a small clearing. A huge male boar blocked her path. The boar pawed the ground, grunted, and shook the wet saliva from his mouth.

The male, heard the commotion and advanced. Without warning, the boar attacked the female, slicing her side with his sharp tusks. The boar was too large for the young female and her future uncertain. Out of the bushes the male charged and covered the boar with his huge frame. The first bite broke the boar's neck, and his claws ripped into the flesh. It had been quick and deadly. This was his first kill and the male was exhilarated. He felt strong and superior, and now knew of his strength and ability. They feasted on the boar, and then returned to the den.

A brisk cold wind blew across the high mountain and snowflakes drifted down as the beginning of the cold winter had arrived. The cool air made them antsy, and they romped and played in the frozen snow.

The scent of raw meat lay in the air and they began to follow the tantalizing odor. They were led to a clearing and saw the fresh meat lying on top of the snow. Mindful of the possible danger, the female crept towards the waiting meal. With caution, she hovered above it and glanced around. Then she laid her paw on the fresh meat. Suddenly, a loud snap, and the steel jaws clamped down on her paw. The more she struggled, the more the trap tore at her flesh. Nothing she could do would release her from its deadly grip. Exhausted, she lay down panting, while the male lay nearby confused. Darkness came and it began to snow.

The next morning, snow had covered her black coat. Blood was still oozing from her paw. A faint sound of something approaching came from the bushes. The male slithered into the thicket. The scent of an unusual smell was in the air, a scent they had never smelled before. A tall unknown species emerged from the white. The female snarled, showing her white teeth.

"Well, well, what do we have here?"

The hidden male stared at this unknown species with a distinct odor.

"That skin will bring me a few bucks." The man said, and aimed the rifle at her.

The female snarled again, hoping to drive him away.

He cocked the hammer on the rifle and she heard the click, but was unaware of the consequences. The man wrapped his thick fingers around the trigger, smiled, and aimed at her head so he wouldn't damage the hide. A loud boom and the male flinched as it echoed across the valley. The man quickly cut her throat, and began to skin her.

Instinct urged the male to leave as soon as possible or he too would die. He turned and slipped

through the snow. As the male trotted across the meadow, a sharp crack and immense pain came from his paw. He fled into the forest as another crack roared.

When the male reached the den, he lay in a dark corner and licked the blood from his paw. One of his toes was missing. This would be his first night alone. The male's mother arrived a few days later. The task of hunting for food faded the memory of his sister, but the odor of the human would not be forgotten.

Winter passed and the leaves on the tree began to sprout. Spring had come. Near the edge of the den, the male watched a hawk float through the sky. A cool wind blew in his face and he closed his eyes.

A sharp crack and the male's eyes flew opened. His mother ran from the foliage and raced for the den. She scurried into the small den and he followed. Inside the den, she licked the blood flowing from the huge hole in her side. The male heard the crunch of dry wood and peered outside. A familiar figure stepped out of the brush and the odor was undeniable. The big man looked around but didn't see the den, and wandered around the mountain. The male laid at the entrance of the den as the red sun descended behind the trees.

His mother lay on her side, breathing in uneven huffs, struggling for air. Sometime through the night, she became quite. The smell of death hung in the air, and the male realized his mother was dead. He would leave this den, never to return.

On the way down the mountain, the male crossed the man's trail. The odor was strong. He had two choices, go down the mountain and disappear, or follow the odor. He was hungry, he would follow the odor.

The flicker of a campfire alerted the male that the man was near. He climbed up a large oak, laid on the branch, and peered down. The male was aware of the thunder stick that would bring death and knew he would have to be careful. Bright flames of the campfire silhouetted the man as he prepared his evening meal. Like a statue, cold and motionless, the male waited.

The man took his coffee pot and strolled to the stream. Slipping down the oak, the male came up behind him, hidden in the bushes. He watched as the singing man cleaned his coffee pot. Muscles in his leg quivered, ready to explode.

In a fury, he leaped, driving his claws in the man's shoulder and buried his fangs into the back of his neck. The unsuspecting man was driven down into the shallow water and savagely mauled. Blood mixed with water flowed downstream. The male felt strong now and would no longer have fear. His spirit soared as he stood over his victim. He would now take the initiative. He would no longer be the hunted...he would be the hunter.

Across the stream, a bullfrog croaked, letting the females know he was available.

* * *

"Thirty-three years later"

July 22, 1908

The old locomotive puffed black smoke as it climbed the steep grade up Tiger Mountain. Through the window I could see O'Brian's bluff, and below at the base was our old home place. It's been twenty-seven years since I've been there and I wondered if it's still standing.

My name is Toby Plenty, and tomorrow at noon, my father, Nathan James Plenty, will be buried beside my mother Kathleen, in Cedar Oak cemetery.

Across the aisle, a bearded man in a blue-striped suit was sipping coffee from a chipped porcelain cup. He took a puff of his cigar, blew it through his lips, and the blue smoke hung in the stale air like an early morning fog. Giant Iron wheels began to slip on the tracks and it caused a jerking-chain reaction through-out the cars.

The bearded man spilled the hot coffee in his lap. After dancing a jig and uttering a few obscenities, he sat back down and wiped his pants with the newspaper he was reading. I turned back to the window so he couldn't see the smile on my face.

The tall pine trees were so thick that the ground was barely visible, but the bright colors of the wildflowers were easily seen. The Iron wheels finally caught hold and crept along at a crawl the last fifty feet to the top and descended down the winding tracks heading for Porterville.

Porterville was a small mountain community of 28 people, not counting the folks who lived in the hills. Folks around here kept to themselves and minded their own business. Of course like most small towns, gossip flew around and everyone knew what everybody else was doing. The town had a general store, blacksmith, doctor, and a small hotel. Daddy had won the turkey shoot five years in a row. They put his name on a plaque and I saw it as the train pulled into the station.

After checking into the hotel, I strolled over to the house he'd lived in the last years of his life. I opened the knotted pine door, and the first thing I saw was a picture of Momma and Daddy on their wedding day, hanging on the wall. He had on a dark suit, almost as black as his hair, and she wore a white gown with ruffles.

In the kitchen, a small white table sat near the window. The view from the window pointed toward Tiger Mountain where our old home place stood. Nearby on a table set a picture album they said he was looking at when he died. I opened it up and memories came rushing out as if it were yesterday.

My grandfather, Seth Plenty, was Scot-Irish who migrated to America in 1810. Seth was a tall man with blue eyes, reddish-brown hair, and had an appetite for adventure. In 1812, he'd fought with General Andrew Jackson at the battle of New Orleans and was awarded eighty acres in the Appalachian Mountains for his service. He married an Indian maiden, Morning Dove, my grandmother, the youngest daughter of Cloud Chief, a respected Cherokee medicine man.

Seth was always kidding about the six horses it cost him to buy her and claimed they were the best horses in the county. But everyone knew he got the best part of the deal. She was gentle and quiet, but she did have a temper and proved that a few times.

Seth had an itchy foot, and before long they headed west and settled in the rugged Kiamichi Mountains in Indian Territory, now known as Eastern Oklahoma. He picked a place near Tiger Mountain where the ground was fertile, water pure, and built a stone cabin in the tall pines. In this

cabin, in 1855, on a cold winter night, my father, Nathan James Plenty, was born. He was dark-complected like his mother, and his high cheek bones, and dark eyes, showed his Indian heritage.

When Nathan was sixteen, the fever roamed through the territory and both of his parents caught it. They lasted three days and then they died. Burt Cooper, a childhood friend, tried to persuade Nathan to come and live with his folks, but he refused, preferring to stay in the cabin where he was born.

Nathan took a liking to tracking and spent all his early years hunting, and roaming these hills, until he knew them like the back of his hand. They say he could track a flea across a rock. Burt Cooper and he were always together. Burt was boastful; devil may care altitude, and had a loud mouth. He always seemed to involve Nathan in his mishaps, mainly his fighting, and that sometimes got them in a lot of trouble.

* * *

“The Beginning”

Kiamichi Mountains, Indian Territory 1880

The bottle came down hard on Nathan’s head and he fell to the floor. Charlie Murdock jumped on his chest and began to choke him.

“Wait a minute Charlie! Let me git the glass out of my eyes.” Charlie giggled and wouldn’t stop.

Nathan poked him in the eye.

“You poked my eye out!” Charlie yelled.

Nathan punched him on the chin and Charlie slid off of him.

Across the room, Slim and Homer Murdock, had Burt backed up in a corner and were giving him a good pounding. Nathan picked up a chair and broke it across Slim’s back and he fell. A kick to the groin and Homer’s eyes bugged out.

“That ain’t fair Nathan.”

“That hurts don’t it?” Nathan grinned as a full bottle of whiskey sailed across the room and smashed into his head. He stood still a few seconds and then tumbled to the floor like a giant oak.

A loud bang of a shotgun and the ceiling shook. Pieces of wood floated down.

"Alright! That's enough!" Frank Harris, the tavern owner shouted. "This is gonna cost you Charlie."

"I didn't start it. Nathan and Burt were the ones who threw the chairs."

"I don't care who started it. You and your brothers are the ones standing and you're gonna pay for all this damage. You owe me fifty dollars."

"I ain't got no fifty dollars."

"Then you better get it. I'll give you until Saturday. If it's not in my hands by then, I'll sic the sheriff on you."

"Awa Frank..."

"I want it in my hands by Saturday Charlie, or you're going to jail."

"Alright, I'll git you the money. Come on boys."

"Wait just a minute. Drag Nathan and Burt outside. They ain't gonna sleep in here."

"You heard him boys, drag em' outside." Charlie said. "I need to git something on my eye."

Slim and Homer, took them by the heels, dragged them across the floor, down the steps, and laid them by the well. Charlie came out of the tavern with a beefsteak on his eye.

"Where we gonna get fifty dollars, Charlie?"

"We'll sell our horses."

"We won't have anything to ride then."

"Did you figure that out all by yourself? I took you to school, taught you everything I know, and you still don't know nothing. I swear Slim, you're dumber than a rock."

* * *

Early the next morning, the heavy dew dripped from the leaves of the chestnut and landed on Nathan's forehead. One of his eyes opened as a drop splattered across his face. He rose up, and his head felt like it was going to explode. Burt was lying nearby snoring like a grunting hog. With the side of his boot, Nathan kicked him, and he rolled over. This stopped the snoring, but only temporarily.

Nathan got to his feet, staggered to the well, drew a bucket of water, and poured it over his head. It was ice cold, but it didn't help. The next bucket of water was poured over Burt, and he woke up. Nathan eased down beside him and rubbed his jaw. "I feel like I've been run over by a wagon."

Burt winced as he fingered the bruise under his eye.

"Nathan, we're gonna have to stop all this foolishness. My can do's can't keep up with my want to's."

Nathan gazed over at him. "Did we win?"

"I don't think so. If we did, I sure don't feel like it. One thing I know for sure, them Murdock boys know how to scat. I think I've been hit a hundred times." Burt wiggled his loose tooth. "Dat-burn it Nathan! Here's another one I'm gonna lose. If I keep this up, I'll have to gum all my vittles!"

"Maybe then you won't eat so much."

"You know what we need, Nathan?"

"No, but I'm sure you'll tell me."

"We need to get us a little woman, settled down and get hitched."

"That's all I need Burt, another mouth to feed."

"They don't eat much Nathan, besides getting hitched can't be all that bad, everybody's doing it. Wouldn't it be nice to have your breakfast waiting for you in the morning, your clothes washed, and your cabin cleaned... and your cabin needs a lot of cleaning."

"I pick up every once in a while."

Burt nudged him. "It wouldn't be bad to cuddle up to her on a cold winter night either."

"How come you ain't got a woman?"

In the 1880's a vicious Panther invades a small mountain community seeking revenge.

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