

SCAREWAVES

BEYOND THE GRAVE

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SCHOLASTIC PRESS • NEW YORK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-1-338-82953-2

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 25 26 27 28 29

Printed in Italy 208
First edition, August 2025

Book design by Christopher Stengel



CHAPTER ONE THE LIGHTS

As Maddie pushed through the thick, thorn-studded brush of Marrow Trail, she began to second-guess whether this whole excursion was worth the pain and effort. Benjamin had assured her over and over that it would be, in the end. According to him, the Beacon Point lights were a phenomenon that, if you had the chance to see them, you didn't waste it—even if it meant trudging through the woods at night.

Supposedly, Marrow Trail had earned its rather ominous name by the sheer frequency with which hikers found the bones of animals in the dirt, the skulls and vertebrae of raccoons and rodents unearthed by the clumsy feet of those trodding by. Walking the trail now, Maddie saw no such thing. It was a normal path through the woods, one that had clearly been well maintained at one point in time, but those days were long behind it.

Now it was a muddy line that zigzagged steadily upward between clusters of wild vines and bushes in between towering pine and oak trees. The forest was slowly chewing the trail apart in jaws made of thorns and branches, and it was only a matter of time before it was swallowed up whole.

Up ahead, Benjamin glided through the moonlight, eager not to miss the show, as Maddie stomped clumsily through the greenery. It was as if the wild grass and roots somehow *wanted* to hold her back while Benjamin effortlessly slipped out of the forest's grasp.

"C'mon, Maddie, hurry up!" Benjamin shouted over his shoulder. "If you go any slower, I'm gonna die of old age before we see anything cool!"

"I'm . . . going . . ." Maddie muttered, out of breath, "as fast . . . as possible."

She swung her right leg out in front of her with enough force to pull a vine free, flinging it ahead of her as she hopped back on one foot. For one dizzying moment her balance was thrown off and she almost fell into the thorns, but she quickly caught herself.

Benjamin looked on in mock exasperation, shaking his head with a wry smile. "You're such a drip, Maddie." He continued without another word, leaving Maddie to rush to catch up.

Maddie had first heard about the Beacon Point lights from some kids at school. Vague stories about strange, unexplainable lights in the sky appearing over the last couple of months, always at night, and always over the thick woods around Marrow Trail and the clearing it led to. Everyone who claimed to have seen them said they were beautiful, though—like the aurora borealis right over their little town. She'd heard rumors that the lights were a

UFO and that aliens frequently landed up there to kidnap animals for weird experiments. Sometimes people, too. It was Benjamin who said he'd seen the lights most recently, and that he knew the best time to see them.

Maddie suspected that it might just be an excuse to hang out with her one-on-one, and she wasn't completely opposed to that idea, but if that was the case, she wished Benjamin had just told the truth. That way, she wouldn't be out on the side of a damp and smelly hill on the outskirts of town, stomping through mud while bugs ate her alive.

But if Benjamin wasn't lying and this was a chance to see this weird aerial phenomenon, she wasn't about to pass it up. According to the legend, the lights were a rare occurrence: They only showed themselves at certain times of the year, and they were hard to see from a distance. If you were lucky enough to see them, the lights always appeared unusually close to the tops of the trees, something more like huge fireflies dancing back and forth than an actual atmospheric occurrence.

"C'mon!" Benjamin shouted again, a little farther away from her on the path.

"S-sorry!" Maddie stammered, snapping out of her thoughts and back to the hike ahead of her. She hurried to catch up to Benjamin, and then they continued onward. From there, the path to the peak was comparatively free of snagging vines and roots, aside from the odd branch obstructing their march like a snake basking in the moonlight. Before long, though, the incline got more and more dramatic, until they were both struggling to continue. Maddie was about to beg Benjamin for a short rest when—

“Look!” Benjamin cried out suddenly. “There it is, up ahead! I told you I knew the way.”

“Did I ever say I doubted you?” Maddie responded, but Benjamin was already hurrying the final stretch to the rocky peak laid out ahead of them.

Whereas the hiking path up to the peak had been almost claustrophobically tight—with branches on either side reaching out like gnarled and bony fingers to snag Maddy’s thick, dark curls—all at once, the forest seemed to surrender and back away. The tight forest trail opened up and gave them room, becoming a flat, circular space of patted-down soil so fine it was almost dust. Jagged slabs of rock emerged from the ground at various points around the perimeter of the clearing, giving Maddie the sensation that they stood at the center of a giant bear trap, ready to spring shut on them at the slightest bit of pressure. There was an old firepit at the center, covered in the gray ash of countless teenage parties, and another ring of flat stones to sit on. The thick brush they had entered encircled the area with wild vegetation.

Benjamin took a seat on one of the flat stones by the fire and began prodding at the ashes with an old marshmallow roasting stick that someone must have left behind.

“Anyways, didn’t I tell you this place was cool?” he said happily. “Isn’t this such a great space?”

“Yeah, it actually is pretty great,” Maddie said, taking a long look around before brushing a lock of sweaty hair off her forehead. They sat quietly together, listening to the sounds of the forest around them. They’d waited out there for another forty minutes, Maddie slowly losing her patience, when finally she couldn’t take it anymore.

"I didn't hike all the way out here to look at some dirtbag teens' trash!" she yelled. "You promised me some weird light show. So where is it?"

"Patience is valuable and all that, right?" Benjamin said. "We'll just hang around for a little bit longer and see what happens."

"Patience is a VIRTUE," Maddie said, exasperated. "And I'm not sitting around here all night getting eaten alive. Either I see something in the next ten minutes or I'm—"

Before she could continue, Benjamin turned as if he had seen something in the woods behind her.

"There! A light!" Benjamin shouted. "I knew we'd see it if we came out here!"

Maddie scanned the tree line behind her but didn't see anything. "I don't know what you're talking about. All I see are the same old trees." But Benjamin was already striding past her, full of confidence in what he'd glimpsed.

"Wait here a second, okay?" Benjamin called back to Maddie. "I'm just gonna have a little look. I have to take a leak, anyways."

Maddie shuddered, disgusted. Another minute or two and she was out of here, lights or no lights.

What was she even doing going into the woods in the middle of the night with some weird boy? She'd always loved the aurora borealis, the northern lights over Alaska and Russia and other places like that. To see that in person, even if it was some lesser version, well, Maddie thought that was worth the time and effort. But as the minutes dragged on and Benjamin didn't return, she started to think all of this had just been a cruel joke to get her out here and then abandon her. Make her walk the trail back to town all by herself.

“Benjamin?” she called. “Are you still out there?”

A soft wind blew through the canopy of darkened trees in front of her, but otherwise the night was still and calm. Maddie tentatively made her way between the trees, deeper into the foliage. She took special care to avoid the snagging vines and bushes full of thorns as she looked for where Benjamin could have gone.

“Benjamin, come ON! I’m going to leave you out here if you don’t say something right now!” Maddie yelled, her voice cracking on the last few words.

She waited a beat and was about to call out again when she saw it for herself. Lights, not overhead but way back in the forest, and high up in the branches. The lights were faint at first, but slowly they gathered in power, like an invisible hand had grasped a dimmer switch and was slowly turning it up, until a row of glowing lights hung between the heavy tree trunks. They were uniformly white at first, but as she looked on, they shifted to a glowing, vibrant blue. Maddie gasped in shock, fixated on the eerie spectacle. She heard the sharp crack of snapping branches as something huge began to push through the trees toward where she stood, fixed in place. The lights grew even brighter as a massive bulk broke through the branches closest to her, high up on the trees. It was the vast rounded hull of a flying saucer, its surface a shiny black and studded at intervals with glowing lights. Maddie looked on in awe at the huge ship before her, refusing to believe what she was seeing. Suddenly, movement closer to the ground caught her eye and she shifted her attention.

There were things moving among the bushes, highlighted by the glow of those mysterious lights. The thick brush parted as



numerous figures walked and crawled through the forest in her direction, strange shapes against the light. Long limbs made visible and then hidden again by the shadows, glinting eyes in strangely bulbous faces locked on her. Maddie screamed and turned to run back to the trail, but her legs tangled up beneath her and she fell hard on the ashen dirt of the clearing. She had started to crawl back toward the path that would lead her home when those strange lights appeared suddenly overhead. Maddie looked up and saw a huge circular shape directly above, its lights impossibly bright. Before Maddie could move any farther, she felt herself being pulled into the air. Her screams went on for a moment but were suddenly cut short.

By the time the lights winked out one by one, the clearing was empty of all life once again.

Episode -
"The Beacon Point Lights:
Otherworldly Visitors?"
Partial transcript of the
BCON RADIO MYSTERY SHOW,
hosted by Alan Graves

Broadcast on --, -

[Start of broadcast]

[Generic spooky music plays]

[BG SFX: The lonely cry of an owl,
sinister laughter]

Alan Graves: Hello, all you listeners!
Welcome to the new souls just joining us,
as well as the old-timers who've been with
us since the very beginning. All of us here
at BCON Radio appreciate you! This is, of
course, the *BCON Radio Mystery Show*, and

I'm your constant host, Alan Graves, the only intrepid investigator willing to wrestle with the terrifying supernatural forces at work in your everyday life. I hope you'll join me as I shine the purifying light of truth on all the ghosties and ghoulies that call Beacon Point their humble home. You know they're out there, I know they're out there, and together we're a force to be reckoned with!

[Music shifts from cheap Halloween music and becomes more science fiction; there might be a theremin playing]

And speaking of lights, over the next couple of episodes we'll talk about some very specific ones. Why, you must already know what I'm getting at here—what the focus of our time together will be. If you live in Beacon Point, chances are you'll have heard your own version of the legend. Maybe from a friend, maybe from your father, or his father. The Beacon Point lights go way back, they say. Some say that they're alien invaders that have

chosen this patch of land for their territory; others say they're mischievous spirits trying to lure hikers to their death. But whoever is telling the story, they all agree on one thing: When the lights appear over the clearing at the end of Marrow Trail, people will start to . . . disappear.

**[Music crescendos dramatically
at this point]**

From the first sighting of the mysterious lights floating over those woods, there have been abductions. Those sent to investigate were often never seen again, and the few who did come back always had ludicrous stories to tell. Shapes in the sky, strange people lurking in the woods. My, my. It's enough to make your hair stand on end! It's a lucky thing that you and I are, how should I put it . . . experienced in such things, aren't we?

Over the next few hours, you and I will go through some notable incidents involving

the Beacon Point lights over the many decades that they've plagued this town. The strange animal sightings, the menacing figures among the trees, the ominously named Marrow Trail. And finally, the lights themselves—and the missing. They always go hand in hand. Are they UFOs? Unquiet spirits? Is it a cult at work, as some of the more . . . interesting eyewitnesses have testified? We just don't know. But why don't I lay out the facts, such as they are, and you, dear listeners, can shed some LIGHT on the subject . . . Stay tuned . . . Get it? Light? On the subject. We'll be right back.

[Sci-fi outro music plays]

[End of broadcast]