

BIT'N File One



Thadd L. Wolfe

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Thadd L. Wolfe

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Die Laughing

Dedicated



to the loving memory
of my great-aunt,
Lydia Louise Wolfe.
May her soul rest in
peace, albeit in a
cold grave at Happy
Valley Cemetery.

Thadd L. Wolfe

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Prologue

My name is Thadd L. Wolfe. A plane crash killed my parents when I was two years old, leaving me an orphan. After my parents' death, I was raised by my great-aunt, Lydia Wolfe.

Aunt Lydia ran a newspaper in her hometown of Bump City, Oregon. It was aptly named *Bump In The Night*, but folks around here just call it *The BIT'N News*. The Wolfe family has owned and edited that paper since my great-grandfather came here in 1872.

Bump City is nestled in the foothills of the Blue Mountains. An odd ridge of rock some 200 feet tall forms a border on the north and west. The town is one of the oldest in Oregon. It was founded in 1868 by Otis Sutter, an organizer of wagon trains from Saint Joseph, Missouri. After taking 12 dangerous trips, Otis decided to settle at the site of the last stop on the long journey from the east. "This place," he often said, "stands out like a bump on a log." So he named the

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campsite-soon-to-be-township, Bump City.

As time went on, other folks joined Otis, and the town thrived.

Now, almost 150 years later, Bump City is a wonderful place to live. But only in the daylight, when you can see clearly.

When the sun goes down and shadows lengthen, things happen in Bump City that are hard to explain. Scary things. Very scary things.

For many years, local children have been singing a rhyme that goes like this:

*Do what you will
when in the light,
but never go out
in Bump, in the night!*

When I was growing up, that was a rule, not a rhyme!

I spent most of my childhood scared spitless—my mouth so dry my tongue would stick to the roof of my mouth. It was only by a sick twist of fate that I ended up with my Aunt Lydia, who lived in one of the spookiest places in

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town—Wolfe Manor.

My great-aunt loved everything that I loathed. She loved every scary, freaky thing about Bump City. Being a natural-born reporter, Aunt Lydia would personally investigate every story that had to do with things weird or supernatural. It didn't matter if it was a story about a ghost in the old Grimm building or about somebody messing with witchcraft out near Farragut County Park. As soon as she heard about it, Aunt Lydia would be there.

For over sixty years, she typed detailed notes about all the strange goings-on. Then she archived them in leather-bound folders etched with the letters "BIT'N." Each file was named after the case Aunt Lydia was working on.

I never read the files, not even one, though she often asked me to. I wanted nothing to do with any of the scary things that happened in Bump, in the night!

When I turned eighteen, I left Bump City, pledging never to return. I loved my great-aunt,

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but I just couldn't live in fear anymore. The University of British Columbia became my hiding place. There I received a degree in journalism, and after that a small newspaper in Alberta, Canada, offered me a job. That's where I've stayed safely hidden away for the past three years.

During that time, I called Aunt Lydia and wrote to her often. Whenever she traveled away from Bump City, I would go meet her, and we would spend a day or two together. Our visits always ended with her asking me to come back and involve myself in her research.

Admittedly, the idea of going back frightened me, even though I missed her terribly. And now, it's too late.

Aunt Lydia is dead!

A few days ago, I got a phone call from her attorney, David Stagghorn. He told me she had died earlier that evening under mysterious circumstances. And the Bump City Police Department was investigating her death.

I was shaken beyond belief.

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I told Mr. Stagghorn that I would fly out to Bump City right away. He had already made arrangements for the funeral. It was to be held at Grimm's Happy Valley Cemetery, out near Sutter's Mill.

Just thinking of old man Grimm, the mortician, sent chills up my spine. When I was a boy, Aunt Lydia told me stories about him that still give me nightmares. The thought of that scrawny, evil, old man handling my great-aunt's funeral did little to soothe my fears about returning to Bump City.

"At least it will be a short trip," I muttered to myself as I settled into my seat on the airplane. I planned to take care of Aunt Lydia's personal affairs, sell the newspaper and the old mansion, and return to Canada within the week.

But my wish for a short trip was not to be granted.

Fearful things come to those who are the most afraid!

Thadd L. Wolfe

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chapter 1

Do what you will
when in the light,
but never go out
in Bump, in the night!

Anyone who had ever lived in Bump City, Oregon, knew the rhyme. Since the little town was founded in 1868, children had been singing it while playing jump rope and other games.

Fifteen-year-old Cindy Finney knew the rhyme, and its rule, by heart. But now she was breaking that rule in the worst of ways.

It was nearly ten o'clock at night, and Cindy wasn't where she should have been—safe at home with her mother, watching television. Or even studying at the library, like she had told her mother she would be. Instead, Cindy was huddling all alone under the cold, scratchy hedge that bordered the old Wolfe mansion.

And she was miserable. A chilly drizzle had