

# The Good the Bat & the Ugly

by Pam Grimes

*"Sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."*  
--Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Secrets. We all have them. Some secrets are closely guarded while others are meant to be shared, like the recipe for Tex-Mex dip or the secret to wearing low-rise jeans post-pregnancy. My Good Neighbor Nora had a secret, a zinger she'd reveal to me after a *night like no other*, a night of "firsts".

The summer night was sticky-hot, a rarity on the Oregon coast. My husband was in the city on business and I'd escaped, kids in tow, to our cabin for the weekend.

I'd just tucked my three boys into bed, and had curled up in our loft to watch CNN, when I was startled by something darting in front of the television screen.

Initially I thought that it was a moth...a really BIG moth. As the hair on the back of my neck began to rise, even the warmth and sincerity in Anderson Cooper's steel-blue eyes couldn't calm my fight or flight instincts. Never big on the fight--I chose flight.

I reached for a nearby blanket and yanked it over my head, burkha style, as I began snapping on every available light in the cabin. After all, nothing's scary when all the lights are on, right?

Wrong!

I'd just crept down the loft stairs when I spotted *it*. *It* was a fruit bat, about the size of a tennis ball, and *it* was hanging upside down, as bats will do, over my back door. Most likely it was looking for the nearest exit—smart bat.

Okay, so the bat wasn't that scary, it didn't have fangs that dripped blood or the wingspan of a pterodactyl. But it was still a *bat!* An ick-producing, disease carrying, flying rodent of the night.

The bat and I took stock of each other for a few moments. Then I remembered that I had feet, and used them to run in the opposite direction. Grabbing the cordless phone, I hurtled out the front door to put distance between myself and the bat.

I then did what every feminist would do faced with the same situation--I called my husband. After all, this was what men were good for, right? They signed on for the heavy lifting and the bug extermination. I had no doubt in my mind that bat expulsion fell under the category of "Job for Hubby".

He picked up after a few rings and before he could finish yawning, I'd launched into my story. "Honey," I whispered, near hysteria. "There's something flying around the cabin--and it's NOT a moth!"

Being the *good* parent he immediately asked if the children were safe.

Children? *What children?*

Still swathed in my blanket and clutching the phone like a lifeline, I darted back into the cabin. My eyes were drawn immediately to the bat. As if disapproving of my presence, he twitched and defiantly dropped two pellets of bat guano onto my hardwood floors.

I fought down the tiny shriek building in the back of my throat, checked the kids' door, and scuttled back to the front porch. While doing an icky-dance on the porch, I described the guano flinging incident to my husband.

Hubby calmly proceeded to point out the obvious, that it was late at night and he was two hours away. He couldn't help. I was on my own.

Just me...and the bat.

Then I remembered Good Neighbor Nora next door. She too was on her own with her kids for the weekend. Perhaps she and I could battle this foe together. Girl power!

Still clinging to the phone, I picked my way through the bushes between our homes and barreled up the front steps of Nora's cabin.

I don't know too many people who'd welcome the sight of a crazy, burkha-clad nut-job, banging on their door at midnight while screaming about bats, but Nora didn't seem to mind. By the time she opened the door I'm certain that I was talking in tongues, but Nora managed to grasp the situation.

"You've got a bat trapped in your cabin? That is a problem, let me get my broom!" she announced rolling up her sleeves.

The cavalry was on its way!

Brandishing a weather beaten O-Cedar broom, Nora stepped onto the porch, a gleam in her eye. "Let's go get that bat," she suggested slinging the O-Cedar over her shoulder, bayonet style.

After promising to call back with an update on the bat situation, I disconnected from hubby and took off through the bushes with Good Neighbor Nora following in my wake.

We cautiously entered the cabin, me cowering under the blanket, Nora fearlessly wielding her O-Cedar. We crept toward the bat, who'd obviously decided to show his dominance by depositing an impossible amount of bat guano onto my floor. I wondered if the Murphy's Oil Soap people made a product for guano removal.

I'd need to Google it.

We quickly decided that one of us would open the back door while the other used the broom to sweep out the unwanted visitor. Nora had the broom, so it was up to me to open the door.

My house, my door, my bat.

I screwed up my courage and told myself to be brave. "You can do this! You've given birth to three children," my inner voice coached. "You've endured feathered hair, cowl-neck sweaters and disco! You've even sat through Barney in concert! *You-can-do-this!*"

After giving Nora's hand a sweaty squeeze I nodded and cinched my burkha tight. "I'm going in, cover me," I croaked.

I crab-walked toward the door; fumbled with the lock and finally flung the door wide. The bat squeaked, flexing its leathery wings in protest. I shrieked like a three-year-old, threw up in my mouth a little, and staggered backwards toward Nora.

Wielding her broom like a warrior princess, Nora spun the O-Cedar over her head and in an elaborate kung-fu move, swept the creature out the door.

And yes, it did fly *left* as it exited my house.

Afterward, Nora and I bonded in my kitchen over a box of Krispy Kreme donuts. We needed something stronger, a couple of straight shots would've

been nice, but greasy pastry was all I had on hand. Besides, Nora had never had Krispy Kreme and I'd never had a bat in my house. It was a night of "firsts".

The following morning Nora revealed her secret to me; she was a witch. I don't mean that in a judgmental way, I mean it in the pointy hat, warty nose, cauldron stirring way. She told me that she owned a ritual robe and hat and even belonged to a coven. The whole enchilada.

I'd never met a witch—*another* first.

In retrospect, I realized the signs were there; agile with a broom, good with bats. I should have known. Of course I'd heard of the Wicca movement. Who hasn't? I understood it to be a philosophy that venerated earthly elements. I was sure that Nora wouldn't levitate in front of my kids or spin her head in a 360 degree rotation...well, I was *pretty* sure she wouldn't.

No, my instincts told me that Good Neighbor Nora was just that, *good*...not evil. Besides who was I to judge? If Wicca worked for Nora, then more power to her!

Personally, I couldn't see myself in that outfit. All that black would wash out my complexion, not to mention the pointy hat would wreak havoc with my hairdo!

Once the initial surprise wore off, I realized that living next door to a witch had its advantages. If I ever needed an amulet, toe of frog or eye of newt, I'd know just where to go. Perhaps Nora could whip up a spell to rid my thighs of cellulite! And who better to purge one's belfry (or cabin) of bats than a dyed-in-the-wool witch?

We've since sold our cabin and I no longer see Good Neighbor Nora. But I do have fond memories of our *night of firsts*. Wherever Nora is, I hope she's happily flying high on her trusty O-Cedar. Harry Potter can keep his Firebolt, I'll take Good Neighbor Nora's bat sweeping broom any day of the week.

Oh, it turns out that Murphy's doesn't make a guano remover. However, a little eye of newt mixed with Rosemary elixir water will leave your floors looking shiny clean and spanking new!

Trust me...I Googled it.

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