

The Bell Witch

John and Lucy Bell had created a nice life for themselves in a quaint plantation hemmed in by dark woods and the sluggish Red River. As rural, scarcely educated farmers, they had a ton of children and slaves to help maintain their plantation and give the patriarch John feelings of entitlement over others.

For this reason, he strategically entered into business with his elderly, widowed, and slightly senile neighbor Kate Batts. He would lend Dean, a human being, out to her during the winter months, when this person whom he saw as an object was of little use to his plantation.

However, the contract they entered upon was considered unscrupulous, as he was lending his property at an illegal interest rate. Every time John would collect, he would collect more and more. By 1817, Kate Batts could not afford to pay and had to surrender her family's land.

“You're an evil man, John Bell. While I have no moral qualms about slavery, your interest rates are evil and untoward. I'm telling the Pastor at the Red River Baptist Church, and I will do everything in my old hag power to get even with you.”

John just laughed at the old woman and took her land. That night, his family celebrated with whiskey, dancing, and general merrymaking at the widow's expense. John's youngest daughter Betsy, a Capricorn born on the same day as him, had natural vocal talents and improvised a cruel song mocking Kate Batts.

At midnight, the house woke up to the sound of banging on the wall of Esther and Betsy's bedroom. The girls claimed to have seen a figure in the room, but no one was there.

Days later, the Bell family learned that the Widow Batts had died. When the Pastor went to her home, he found the evidence of John Bell's crimes and a note saying that he had broken her heart. John had not killed the widow, yet The Pastor found that his actions had led to the stress that killed the elderly woman.

The Pastor found his predatory interest rates unconscionable and ordered his slave to draw up the paperwork necessary to expel John Bell and his family from the church. In 1818, the Bells were excommunicated from Red River Baptist Church. They were rejected, humiliated, and outcasted.

The air in the Bell family home was stifled and oppressive in the muggy summer heat. The children were on edge. Ever since the death of Kate Batts, they heard the banging on the walls at night and scratches on the windows. Betsy, in particular, experienced these encounters the most, but the sounds in the house had grown to the point where John and Lucy couldn't ignore that something was happening.

Young Betsy had been in the barn tending to the cows, per usual, when she first heard the whispers. She ran to get her father, but again nothing was there. In the coming weeks, the whispers spread throughout the house. Everyone in began hearing Bibles scriptures.

Milk churns were spilled, eggs spoiled overnight, and menstrual diapers went missing. The Bible verses became threats, which became violence and poor Betsy began showing bruises and welts. Seeing this, her handsome schoolteacher Richard Powell pulled her aside to discuss her home life.

Betsy was so scared that she cried in her teacher's arms as she confided in him what her family was experiencing. While he was just trying to comfort his student, Betsy nuzzled against him and breathed in his musky manly smell.

Rumors permeated the small town, and the Bells began to experience more and more supernatural occurrences. The sounds in the walls intensified, livestock was slaughtered, and the stench of decay would randomly fill the air in the home.

The whispers had developed into a distinct disembodied voice, who was able to interact with the Bell family, often through disparaging comments and insults. One evening, the family in their home, doing provincial things like sewing and praying and whittling, when the voice spoke.

“Hey, bitch.”

The voice was right by John Bell's ear.

“Evil Spirit, why are you here?”

“Oh, you don't already know why I'm here? You don't have any theories? You haven't seen the 2006 movie *An American Haunting* and aren't trying to apply that twist to what's happening right now?”

“Who are you?”

“I am the spirit of Kate Batts, here to bring about the end of the Bell family.”

“Then why do you torture my youngest daughter?”

“Because she's the prettiest and most talented.”

From then on, Betsy would wake up screaming in the night, slapped, thrown across the room, and pricked with invisible pins. She began sporting injuries, and the town couldn't contain their excitement. What a curious experience! A ghost in the town! Violence against a young woman! How fun, how dramatic! I wonder what she did to deserve it.

One evening, a family friend James Johnston and his wife, Jane Johnston, paid a hefty amount of money to spent a night at the Bell home. That night, Kate's voice spoke to them.

“James Johnston, you are old, out of shape, and you leer at young women even though you can’t get an erection. Also, your wife is ugly and fat, and even she isn’t attracted to you.”

Just then, the covers flew off the bed! It felt like pins had been pressed through the mattress. The Johnstons jumped out of bed as something began banging on the walls. The couple ran out of the house, convinced of the spirit’s existence and cementing the Bells as local celebrities.

In the honorable spirit of Capitalism, John began conducting ghost tours throughout their home. Visitors would experience the shifting sounds in the walls, random stench of decay, the disembodied voice of a vengeful spirit, and hopefully even their own encounter with supernatural assault.

The Spirit of Kate Batts haunted the Bell family for years, causing a sharp decline in John Bell’s health. He developed gout, lupus, and angina. But the townspeople took the greatest pity on poor Betsy Bell. Betsy had recently turned seventeen but would still sport bruises from the witch’s attacks. She’d become quiet and withdrawn, giving her a somewhat glamorous air of mystery and tragedy that made all the boys love her and all the girls hate her.

Her most ardent suitor had been Joshua Gardner, the son of a wealthy politician with a penchant for wrestling and bodybuilding. One autumn day, she was leaving the schoolhouse when he finally

“All right, Besty, when are finally gonna let me take you out?”

“Joshua, we’ve been through this before. I just don’t think you’re serious enough.”

“What?”

“Joshua—”

“What?”

“This is what I’m talking about. You’re not serious, Joshua.”

“Not serious? How am I not serious? Betsy Bell, I love you! And that’s the bottom line!”

“You just don’t know what I’ve been through. This witch has been torturing me for years. I haven’t known peace in my own home.”

“Betsy, I will protect you from this witch that your family has made a fortune off of. I will kick that piece of crap out your life for good. Because I am, without a shadow of a doubt, the toughest and roughest damn champion you’re ever gonna meet! And that’s all I gotta say about THAT!”

Betsy was so moved. She knew Joshua would be a good protector and provider, but she never expected such poetry. A crowd had amassed and, among the onlookers was her teacher... Mr Powell. She stroked Joshua's goatee.

"Joshua Gardner, will you buy me a ticket to one of my family's haunted dinner parties this weekend?"

"Oh, hell yeah!"

The crowd applauded, and Joshua kissed her hand before departing.

Betsy slipped into the forest and began sprinting. She'd been following Mr. Powell home for years, so she knew a shortcut that would put her in the perfect position to be found. Mr. Powell smoked weed when he walked, so she'd have plenty of time to get into place. She was just excited, a little nervous too.

Betsy sat on a rock partially obscured by foliage and primped her hair. She fanned out her dress and adjusted her cleavage. When she smelled Dr. Powell's dank smoke approaching, she began sobbing. She used her vocal abilities to carry the sound, make it sound melodic and captivating. She thought of herself as a siren from Greek mythology.

Betsy focused on the pain that the Bell Witch had inflicted on her to produce tears, and she wasn't sure how much time passed until she heard his voice.

"Betsy, are you alright?"

"Oh! Mr. Powell!" She tried to hide her face. "I'm sorry, I thought I was alone."

"Why are you crying, hon? You just got a date with one the most eligible men in town."

"I know, I know. I should be happy. I suppose I'm just so traumatized by my experiences with the witch. Mr. Powell, can I confess something to you? The Witch speaks against Joshua Gardner. She always has. That's why I've turned him down. I didn't want to upset her, but I'm an unmarried seventeen-year-old and beginning to feel like an old maid."

"Betsy, now you've always been my brightest student. Even if you don't marry anyone, you're not gonna be an Old Maid. You could be a lawyer's secretary or a nun, they get to read. But I think you should follow your ambition, Betsy. Earn a title of a brilliant woman as brilliant as you: a politician's wife."

"What about a schoolteacher's wife?"

"Frankly, Betsy, I've known you since before you had your monthly blood. I can't imagine thinking of you like that."

Betsy forced a shy smile. “Of course. I-I didn’t mean to be so forward. Are you coming to the dinner party this weekend? Governor Andrew Jackson will be attending. He’s heard stories of the Bell Witch and will be stopping by while visiting his plantation.”

“Of course, he’s been Americanizing that new state. What was it called again?”

“Florida. What a stupid name. They should have started by Americanizing that.”

They laughed and Mr. Powell agreed to attend before escorting Betsy home.

Betsy had no problem hiding her anger at Mr. Powell’s rejection. In fact, it fueled her to become, even more, exactly what she believed her crush wanted and needed from a woman. Because she was going to be it.

The Bell Witch became particularly vocal in the days leading up to the party. The Witch had learned that Joshua Gardner would be escorting Betsy and began insulting her by calling her a whore and slut. She asked Betsy if she was going to let Joshua fuck her up the ass, which was completely inappropriate. As a result, Betsy withdrew into her room.

The Bell family knew that a spirit haunted their home. They had interacted with the voice and seen the trauma inflicted on Betsy. They’d felt the pinpricks and nighttime disturbances themselves. But there was no way to make it consistent. It was the vengeful spirit of Kate Batts, and it did not want to see the Bell family thrive.

So, John Bell had to find a way to make things happen. The voice would speak regardless, so he just needed to ramp up the immersion. The family used a series of hidden wires to manipulate doors and windows. They developed discrete mechanisms to make sounds and manipulate temperature in certain spots.

It wasn’t dishonesty, just an attempt to provide consistency and engagement for an eager audience, and having Governor Jackson as guest was a huge public relations move. He was even poised for presidency. What family wouldn’t want it to go perfectly? What kind of entertainer would not want to entertain?

To ensure things went smoothly, John Bell and his second eldest son Brother hatched a plan to exploit Joshua Gardner’s attendance.

In the Bell family’s favor, there was a lightning storm the night of the dinner, which was amazing ambience. Andrew Jackson and his entourage arrived, complaining about Florida and the Spanish, as well as Native Americans and probably slaves too. It went beyond divisive, and Betsy had to step in to better navigate the course of conversation.

“Governor Jackson, it’s an honor to meet you. I’m Betsy Bell.”

“Ah, wonderful figure. Betsy Bell, you said? The victim girl?”

“Um, well, yes. But I’m lots of other things too.”

“Our Betsy is an extraordinarily talented vocalist.”

“Would you like for me to sing to you?”

After a beautiful ballad, Betsy began singing a faster tempo folk tune and them all to dancing. Everyone was having a wonderful time until... BANG!

The music stopped. Bang! Bang! Bang! A painting fell from the wall and shattered. The crowd looked around nervously. Betsy, who had been performing minutes prior, turned pale and silent.

Unbeknownst to her, these were the machinations of her father. John watched, feeling schadenfreude, as his daughter retreated in fear into the shadows and knew that they were in for a profitable night. His other children set motions for the next deception, manipulating air flow through vacuums to drain the heat from the home.

The banging stopped on cue, and Esther Bell pricked her finger with a pin to draw blood. She hid the pin and screamed, drawing the room's attention.

“It's so cold now.”

“I'm catching a chill.”

“Did someone spill petrol gas?”

“That girl's bleeding.”

“The witch is here!” Esther screamed, anticipating Brother's next deception.

“Yeah, I'm here,” The Spirit delayed Brother's cue. “I'm always here, always watching. Watching the evil Bell family do their evil Bell family thing. Speaking of evil, hello Governor Jackson.”

All eyes turned on Andrew Jackson.

“What's your quarrel with me, Spirit?”

“Aside from your crazy, whack-ass bushy eyebrows? Your reliance on slavery to fuel your plantation? Cheating on your wife? Or your Anti-Indian sentiments that pose a threat to the indigenous people of this country. With potential to actively destroy the lives of 60,000 people and countless subsequent generations with your liberal attitudes.”

People who agreed with the spirit's political stance vocalized their sentiments, much to Jackson's upset.

“You hypocritical Republicans are so predictable with your conservative attitudes, clinging to the relics of how things have always been. Progress requires moving forward, so let the past go. Only a stupid, poor, uneducated, and unlearned Republican would prefer a country

covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive, progressive Republic.”

Just then, lightning flashed, and Besty Bell screamed.

The crowd turned to witness Betsy being pulled by her hair by an invisible assailant. The Spirit lifted her into the air and thunder crashed as she was pulled into the shadowy second floor.

Betsy’s siblings ran to check on her, but the voice rang out.

“Leave her! Or I’ll—”

Just then, a lady’s stylishly full skirt caught blaze from an ember from the fireplace, igniting the woman on fire! While the guests squashed the flames, the Bell daughters ran to care for Betsy and Brother took his position for his ultimate deception.

Just then, Joshua Gardner took control of the room.

“Alright, Kate Batts. You witch, you evil spirit. You had the nerve to injure my date? I’ll tell ya what, I’m gonna stomp a mudhole in you, and walk it dry! That’s right! And I’ll tell ya why, it’s because Joshua Gardner Says So! Can I get a hell yeah?!”

“Hell Yeah!” Rang throughout the 1821 plantation home.

Meanwhile, Esther found her sister Betsy escaping a cruel trapping machination from her father’s house of horrors. While Betsy initially refused help, she sat with her sister for comfort her. Downstairs, Brother stood against Joshua Gardner.

“I am the spirit of Kate Batts possessing the body of Brother Bell to challenge you to a wrestling match!”

“I’ll take that challenge, and I’m going to whoop your ass!”

Then Brother charged Joshua, knocking him through the front door and into the stormy night. The dinner party followed, chanting, “*Fight! Fight! Fight!*” and surrounded the wrestlers in a circle.

Joshua pushed himself off the muddy ground. When Brother charged, he strengthened his stance and held out an arm and clotheslined him. When he was on the ground, Joshua hit him with an elbow drop!

“Ooooo!” Went the audience.

Joshua stood in the center of the crowd, rain pouring down his baldhead as a grin spread across his face. Brother Bell staggered back to his feet, clutching his ribs from Joshua’s last bone-rattling move.

“Alright you evil spirit. I’m gonna hit you with the Stone-Cold Stunner, and you’re going to leave my new girlfriend Betsy Bell alone forever.” Joshua said, raising both arms, middle fingers ready to salute before delivering the final spinebuster.

But just as Joshua lunged forward, Brother Bell’s hand struck his abdomen. A sudden crackle split the air—*BZZZT!* Joshua’s body jerked violently as the hidden taser struck him. His eyes widened in shock, his muscles locking.

Joshua collapsed, twitching in the mud. The crowd erupted in both cheers and screams of disbelief, the chants turning to a thunderous roar of outrage. Brother Bell tossed the weapon out of sight, dropped across Joshua’s chest.

Andrew Jackson counted, “One! Two! Three!”

Ding! Ding! Ding! John Bell rang the victory bell.

Governor Jackson raised Brother Bell’s arm in victory, but only for him to collapse.

“W-what happened? Where am I? Why are we outside?”

John Bell’s ruse worked out better than he could have hoped, but he couldn’t forget the sight of his daughter being pulled by her hair like that. It had never been so violent. Perhaps because of this, John’s health began to weaken.

“Your days are numbered, John Bell.” The Witch said to him one night. “And after you, it’ll be Betsy.”

Despite losing the wrestling match against the witch, Joshua continued to date Betsy, who didn’t relent in her distaste for the man. Perhaps to compensate for this, Joshua showered Betsy with lavish gifts.

One winter night, after Betsy had given her father his medicine, Joshua Gardner stopped by.

“Betsy, I love you. You’re the smartest and hottest and most famous girl in this town,” he said, “and I want to take you out of this haunted house. Will you marry me?”

Betsy hesitated. The whole room went silent. All eyes were on her.

“Yes, I will marry you, Joshua Gardner.”

Everyone cheered as the couple kissed. Then Joshua ripped off his shirt and began to celebrate, when suddenly...

“John Bell will die for that.”

The celebration stopped immediately. That night, John Bell died in his sleep.

The Bell family buried John without incident from the witch, but at the wake Betsy announced that she could not marry Joshua Gardner. She left in tears, and the town had no choice but to sympathize with her heartbreaking circumstances.

The Witch left that day and never spoke to the Bell family again. In her place, was a heavy silence. Betsy had lost her father, her fiancée, and was struggling to cope with a lifetime of supernatural abuse. Most sympathetic to her was her old teacher and mentor Richard Powell, whom she confided in most.

It took two years for him to finally propose, but Betsy agreed in an instant. They left the town and lived a quite, happy life without a plantation or slaves. Late into their marriage, after raising several children, Richard Powell found his wife's old diary.

The diary journaled her adolescent crush on Richard, which turned to obsession. Betsy chronicled her progress learning ventriloquy and throwing after voice. After all, Betsy had always been an exceptional vocalist. She wrote about planting mice in the walls to make the noises, engineering the devices her family used for their haunted house, and devising realistic injuries on her body.

Betsy had masterminded everything. She had been the voice of Kate Batts all along.

“Oh no, I've been caught.” The Spirit's voice rang out.

Richard looked around for Betsy, but she was hiding. He didn't have time to react before she covered his head with a bag and clung to him until he lost consciousness. She then fed the same herbal concoction she gave her father years ago.

On that day in 1838, Richard Powell suffered a stroke that left him totally under Betsy control. She cared for him for ten years until his death. Betsy herself died 50 years later in the home of her loving daughter, who found her mother's diary.

She read the cold, calculated entries exposing one of the biggest hoaxes in Tennessee history. What a shame. Her mother was so brilliant, but so sloppy to leave such incriminating evidence behind. The Bell Witch had done many services to her family that she decided to honor the tradition. She started a fire and burned the evidence.