

# Nightrider part of mountain Halloween legend

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Legends, old-timers say, are born in the mountains, especially when the shadows of the forests entice one's imagination to absorb the

unbelievable. This story takes place during the depression, when a majority of the mountain people were struggling to survive. The nightrider—faceless, dressed in black and riding a

stallion the color of midnight—stalked the back roads, terrorizing travelers that dared to venture out at night.

Although the rider can be seen on any given night, he will at times vanish for months on end. But when fall comes, the presence of the shadowy figure is constant, especially on Halloween night.

On this particular Halloween night, Henry Droughton, a rich lumber baron from the East, decided to flaunt some of his wealth on his newly-wed bride.

He had leased a two-story rustic lodge in Rhododendron, and had hired the services of a maid, a butler, and a cook. In addition, he hired a woodcutter, named Jess, to keep fires burning in the structure's massive fireplaces.

Droughton and his wife, Bess, had left Portland earlier in the day, and their

journey was magnificent, until they reached Zigzag. The road to Rhododendron was blocked by downed trees from a freak windstorm from the night before. It would not be clear for a couple more days.

"I'll not be intimidated by the wrath of nature," the Baron shouted angrily at the storekeeper in Zigzag. "Is there not another way to the lodge?"

The storekeeper said that there was another way, but that it would cost him \$25 because no one was anxious to make the trip.

"It's Halloween," the storekeeper pointed out. "The nightrider is sure to be on the back roads tonight."

The Baron was outraged, but was not a man to let money stand in the way. He also agreed to one condition. The driver and coach must be allowed to head back to Zigzag long before midnight.

The road to Rhododendron was in ill repair, and the Baron was very cranky by

the time he got to the lodge. He began drinking heavily, and nothing the servants could do would satisfy him.

When he wasn't complaining, he was bragging about his money.

Finally, the woodcutter, who was an old fellow with a slight build, approached the Baron. "Baron," he said, "we must return to Zigzag now, or else we'll be out on the road at midnight."

Once again the Baron was outraged. "You superstitious fools," he said. "Old man, there is no nightrider. What's more, I'll prove it to you. I'll bet you \$500 I can walk from here to Zigzag without running into the nightrider."

The woodcutter had nothing to bet, except for a gold watch that had been handed down through the family. He was so tired of the ranting and raving of the Baron, however, that he made the bet.

"And what about your wife," the woodcutter asked.

"Take her with you to Zigzag," the Baron said. "If I don't show up a little after midnight, you can marry her. She'll be a rich woman if the nightrider gets me." The Baron laughed out loud at the very idea.

"What is the story behind this nightrider," the Baron asked as the servants and his wife got in the coach.

"He was a farmer here," the woodcutter said. "He was robbed of a wagon of hay, and stabbed with his own hay hook. They say he rides these roads to avenge that death."

The Baron began walking as the coach rolled off into the dark night. He hadn't gone far when he heard hooves. He hid on the side of the road, but they stopped.

"I mustn't let my imagination get away from me," the Baron said aloud.

This happened again, and then again.

"It's just my imagination," the Baron said out loud, over and over.

By now he was sweating, and running at times.

The pounding of hooves kept getting closer, but he didn't see the nightrider.

Then, as he rounded the mountain, in the moonlight, he saw the nightrider, swinging his hook, his horse rearing up.

To this day no one knows what happened to the Baron,

who for the first time had found himself alone, in a place where his money had done him no good.

Some say the woodcutter rode that black stallion to get even with the Baron. Others say the Baron died of his own imagination.

Others, that claim to have seen the nightrider, are sure of what happened.



Drawing by John Hollaway

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