

Voice of Troy Cline:

The ancient art of storytelling has been used by almost every culture; as a way to teach, explain and to instill knowledge. I'm Troy Cline, and welcome back to another Sun-Earth Day podcast. Well to frighten things up this Halloween we have a very special treat for you... or is that a trick? We decided to invite our professional storyteller Jordan Hil to tell a creepy story about the aurora, and a spooky shack. So be afraid, be very afraid...

Voice of Jordan Hill:

Although it was summertime in the far north, and the sun was still shining up in the sky towards late evening, inside it was dark. Dark except for a single flickering candleflame. And by the light of that flickering candle the old man went swiftly from window to window checking that he had hung the blankets correctly in front of the window. Making sure that every last speck of light was blocked out.

When this was done he glanced towards the back of his cabin, and he nodded. Everything was in place. All he needed was a subject. And so he blew out the candle, he stepped outside of his cabin, and immediately he hunched his shoulders over; he made his body look as feeble as possible and he began hobbling towards the center of town. When he got there he eyed up and down the streets looking at all the passers on the main road. As he waited he then noticed a young boy coming up the sidewalk. The young boy was very curious. He was looking in all of the store windows, he was watching the birds fly in the sky, he was stopping to admire a single flower growing in the ground. The old man nodded to himself; he would do just fine.

And so as soon as the young boy came up next to the old man, the old man said, in his best feeble old man voice, 'Excuse me son, but could you help me back to my home? I fear I will not make it on my own.' And the boy, who is a kind spirit said, 'Absolutely sir.' And he got up, holding the old man's elbow he helped him slowly through the streets of the town towards that cabin on the outskirts. Once they got to the door the old man turned towards the young boy and said, 'Thank you so much for your assistance. And because you were so helpful I would love to share with you a treasure I have inside. Something truly remarkable.' Of course the young boy's curiosity was piqued and he said, 'I would love to see this treasure.'... 'good, then follow me'. And so the old man stepped into the cabin and the boy followed him and was struck immediately by the darkness inside.

The old man said, 'Keep the door open so I can use the light from outside to find the treasure for you.' And as the old man hobbled towards the back of the room the boy looked around the interior. He noticed that there were indeed windows but they were all blocked up for some reason, covered up by blankets. Curious as ever he went over to the nearest one and he lifted the corner, peeked outside, and seeing nothing of interest he dropped it back again. He didn't notice that a corner of that blanket had caught on a splinter in the window frame and a tiny little bit of the window was exposed.

The old man didn't notice either. He was too busy in the back pulling out a bundle of something from one of the cabinets. And then he said to the boy, 'Close the door now. I have it right here in my hands.' And so the boy went over and shut the door. The cabin was pitch black darkness. The old man was heard wrestling with something. And then suddenly a tremendous light filled the cabin, coming from.. coming from.. a jar that the old man seemed to be holding. The boy was transfixed. The old man gestured for a chair by a table in the center of the room. The boy sat down as the old man placed the jar in front of him. In that jar were all of these swirling lights and colors. The boy stared at them and asked, 'What is this? It's beautiful!' The old man looked down and said, 'Ah, this, this is part of the northern lights; pieces that I have captured.' Suddenly the boy grew nervous, 'But, but my mother always told me that the northern lights are the souls of dead people... you mean to tell me that you have

captured dead souls in this jar?' Suddenly the old man stood up straight; straighter than the boy had ever seen him stand. The old man got a big grin on his face and said, 'That's right, I captured them.'

In a flash before the boy even knew he could do anything the old man was behind his chair grabbing his hands and tying them up with a rope. The boy started to struggle and the old man just shook his head and said, 'Just as I captured these dead souls, these fragments of the northern lights, so too have I now captured you and your living soul... [laughter]' The young boy continued to struggle trying to pull his hands out of the knots as the old man walked to the other side of the table and began to wave his hands in a strange way around the globe of lights. 'What? You think I'm an old man and I can't tie a knot tight? Oh, those knots are tight and you will be staying there for some time now. And you might be looking at me now and thinking I am younger than you had first thought. But actually the truth is far different. For I am far, FAR older than you likely thought. I am nearly 2000 years old.'

The boy continued struggling and found that the knots were tight he realized that the man was speaking the truth. He looked up at the old man and said, 'What... what are you going to do to me?' The old man grinned and said, 'I am not going to do a thing. But these spirits in this jar will. They have been serving me well for centuries now; using their energy to take the spirit of the living and bring them into myself so that I can go on living. And boy, tonight it your turn.' And with that the old man began opening the top of the jar. As soon as he did so the swirling lights began flowing out, glowing higher and higher into the room. The old man's gestures became more pronounced as he waved his hands more and more. The boy watched on in terror as he saw these glowing things start to take form into the shape of three wraith like ghosts. The boy leaned back into his chair trying to move as far away as he could from them. But they came closer and closer. The old man is waving his hands as these spirits seemed to reach out towards the boy, closer towards him. He tried to push back in his chair but they reached closer as their sharp fingertips touched the skin on his chest. He felt their icy fingers going deeper and deeper. His heart was pumping. He was terrified. THIS WAS IT!!!... and then suddenly... they stopped.

The old man was confused, he waved his hands more and more, and then he noticed all of the three spirits were looking towards a window. There was a ray of light, a single beam of light coming through that corner where that blanket was stuck on a splinter. [gasp] Perhaps it's not too late the old man thought. He went running towards that beam of light. But as he was moving that light started to change color. It started to become yellow, and then green, and then silver, purple, red. The light FLARED UP. AND ALL OF THE SUDDEN THERE WAS A FLASH AND A BRIGHT DISPLAY OF LIGHTS IN THE CABIN!... A SCREECH!!!.. and then darkness and silence.

The boy, he felt himself and did a quick check of his body. He seemed to still be there. He looked into the darkness but he saw nothing. He listened but he could hear nothing. Perhaps this was his chance. He scooted his chair around the cabin until he found the corner of something. On this, he rubbed his ropes against until they broke free. He immediately jumped up, ran over to a window, and pulled the blanket down. Sunlight came streaming back into that dark, dark interior; he looked around and saw there on the table, the jar. The rim of it scorched. And there on the floor, where the old man had been standing was nothing but a pile of dust.

This was his chance! He ran from the cabin as quickly as he could, all the way into town. And when he got there he noticed that he was not the only one excited and agitated. Everyone in town was talking, there was great commotion as people looked up at the sky. And they were all saying, 'What has become of us? What is happening? Look!' They all looked up into the sky talking and pointing about a strange display of the northern lights as the Sun was shining. Something like that had never been seen before. And they didn't know why or where or how. But the boy put two and two together, and he realized that

through that one exposed bit of window the northern lights in the sky had spotted their fragments down in the man's cabin. The fragments that he had stolen from them. And that the northern lights had flashed down and taken back what had been their own; and in the process took back also, the spirits that old man had taken.

The boy went excitedly about telling everybody what had happened, he told them the story, but of course most people didn't believe him. They went on to form their own theories, their own speculations, as people are known to do. And they told these theories to their children, and their children would still recount the tale of the northern lights that appeared while the Sun was still up. But the people who did believe the story, well, they knew what actually had happened. And they went on to tell their children. And their children told their children. That story was passed down until finally I found it. And now I am telling it to all of you who are listening.

Voice of Troy Cline:

Sun-Earth Day is a program sponsored by the NASA Sun-Earth Connection Education Forum at the Goddard Space Flight Center, and at the UC Berkley Space Sciences Laboratory. This is Troy Cline signing off.