

NAUGHTS WELL

Written by

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Based on a Short Story

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EXT. ELMSWOOD - MAIN STREET - LATE AFTERNOON (1947)

The town of Elmswood looks like a postcard from a dream. Kids in knickers play stickball. A 1946 Ford Super Deluxe idles outside a pharmacy.

HENRY MILLER (45) stands on a ladder outside "MILLER'S HARDWARE." He's a block of a man, face lined with the quiet exhaustion of a B-17 pilot who saw too much of the Ruhr Valley.

He's hammering a loose shingle. *THWACK. THWACK.*

Across the street, MARTHA (22), a bright-eyed woman with a Leica camera around her neck, waves.

MARTHA
Fixing the world one nail at a
time, Henry?

HENRY
Just the parts I can reach, Martha.

SILAS (55), a grocer in a stained apron, steps out of the shop next door, wiping his hands on a rag. He looks up, squinting.

SILAS
Sun's gone funny.

Henry stops hammering. He looks up.

The sky isn't turning blue to gold. It's turning a bruised, necrotic purple. A shade of violet that feels... wrong. Chemical.

The birds go silent. All of them. At once.

Suddenly, a LOW FREQUENCY HUM vibrates through the soles of their shoes. Window panes rattle in their frames.

Martha points toward the ridge. Her jaw drops.

MARTHA
(A whisper)
My God...

A massive IRIDESCENT SILVER SAUCER (UFO)—three hundred feet wide—crests the tree line. It doesn't fly; it slides through the air, displacing the purple light like a stone in a pond.

It stops directly over the town square. It is silent now, save for that bone-deep HUM.

The whole town is frozen. Silas drops his rag. Martha, hands trembling, raises her Leica.

CLICK. WHIRR. CLICK.

Henry stands on his ladder, level with the impossible. The silver surface of the craft reflects the entire town back at itself, distorted and shimmering.

For three minutes, the world stops turning.

Then, BOOM! A silent shockwave ripples the air. The saucer vanishes into a pinprick of white light.

The sky snaps back to a dull, dusty orange.

[BEAT] Silence. Then everyone starts screaming in panic at once as they scatter. Many head for the town hall.

INT. TOWN HALL - DAY (TWO DAYS LATER)

The room is packed. Sweat and cigarette smoke. The walls are lined with men in crisp, olive-drab uniforms.

At the front stands COLONEL VANCE (50s). He has the eyes of a shark and a voice like dry gravel. Behind him, a chalkboard shows a diagram of a weather balloon.

COLONEL VANCE

A rare meteorological anomaly.
Temperature inversion, combined
with a high-altitude research
balloon from Project Mogul. The
purple sky was the result of
refraction by the ionosphere.

The room erupts.

MARTHA

(Stands up)

I have the photos, Colonel! I saw
the metal. It wasn't silk and
wicker!

COLONEL VANCE

Miss... Dalton, is it? We've seen
your negatives. They show a blurred
lens flare. Highly suggestive, but
scientifically void.

Henry sits in the back, arms crossed. He watches Vance. He knows this man. He's seen him in briefing rooms in London. Vance isn't a scientist; he's a janitor.

HENRY

(Deep, resonant)

What about the vibration, Colonel?
My floorboards are still hummin'.

Vance looks at Henry. A predatory recognition.

COLONEL VANCE

Major Miller. You are, no doubt, a hero of the 8th Air Force, and I salute you for your service to this country, Sir. That said, I imagine your ears took quite a beating over Germany. Many soldiers have suffered the same symptoms as a result.

HENRY

My ears are fine, Colonel. My eyes are better.

COLONEL VANCE

National security is a delicate ecosystem, Henry. It requires... stability. This mass hysteria is a gift to the Soviets. Are you a gift-giver, Henry?

The room goes cold. The "Red" card. The ultimate silencer.

INT. MILLER'S HARDWARE - NIGHT

Henry is closing up. The DOOR BELL RINGS. Silas enters. He looks haggard.

HENRY

Sorry, Silas. Closed.

SILAS

They came to my shop today, Henry.
Two men. Suit and tie.

Henry pauses.

SILAS (CONT'D)

They talked about my liquor license. Then they talked about my son. He's up for a promotion at the post office in Philly.

(MORE)

SILAS (CONT'D)

They claimed "delusional
tendencies" run in families.

HENRY

What did you tell them?

SILAS

(Tearing up)

I broke. I told them it's possible
the sun caught a cloud, and maybe
it was a balloon. I signed the
paper, Henry! My credibility's
shot!

HENRY

(Hard)

So... you lied?

SILAS

I have a mortgage! I have a life!
This whole wild goose chase is
going to get us all burned! I just
thought, as a long-time friend, I
at least owed you the truth.

Silas storms out. Henry looks at the floor. In the center of
the room, near a loose floorboard, he sees a faint, pulsing
GLOW.

He kneels. He reaches into a gap between the boards and pulls
out a SHARD OF METAL. It's the size of a silver dollar,
jagged, and warm to the touch. It's a piece of the UFO.

HENRY

(Whispers)

Naw! This ain't no weather balloon.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

A bare bulb. Henry sits across from Vance.

COLONEL VANCE

Martha Dalton lost her job at the
newspaper this morning. And now, it
appears her landlord found her
apartment... unsuitable.

HENRY

Really? Is that all you got? You're
a coward, Vance.

COLONEL VANCE

I'm a realist. Let's be reasonable, Henry. If the American public thinks we've lost control of our own airspace to... others, let's say... that panic would do more damage than any bomb. And you know it!

Vance leans in.

COLONEL VANCE (CONT'D)

You have a reputation in this town. If you recant, the others follow. If you don't... I'll see to it that you're labeled the local loon. "Crazy Miller." DO you really think anyone buys hammers from a man who sees ghosts in the sky?

HENRY

I flew twenty-five missions over hell. DO you really think I'm scared of gossip... or being lonely?

EXT. ELMSWOOD - MAIN STREET - DAY

Henry walks down the street. He's older, graying. He carries a tattered bag. People cross the street to avoid him.

Silas, standing outside his thriving grocery, watches Henry pass. He looks away, guilty, adjusting a sign that says "PROUDLY SERVING ELMSWOOD FOR 20 YEARS."

Henry says nothing. He walks with his head high, a pariah in his own home.

EXT. HENRY'S BARN - NIGHT

Rain lashes the wooden structure. Inside, the air is thick with the scent of hay and old oil.

Martha is there. Her eyes are red-rimmed, but her jaw is set. She hands Henry a small bundle wrapped in oilcloth.

MARTHA

You're the only one I can trust. These are the real negatives. The ones they didn't get.

Henry places the negatives into a HEAVY LEAD-LINED BOX. Beside them, he places the metal shard he found in the store. It pulses with a soft, rhythmic light, illuminating their faces.

HENRY
And the affidavits?

Martha nods. She hands over a stack of papers.

MARTHA
Only twelve people signed. The rest... they're too scared. They call us "Believers" like it's a dirty word.

HENRY
Everyone's entitled to their own beliefs. They have their truth, and we have ours. That's the only word that matters now.

Henry takes a pen and writes on a piece of parchment:

THE TRUTH OF ELMSWOOD. JULY 7, 1947.

He places it inside and locks the box.

He picks up a shovel. In the corner of the barn, beneath the heavy shadow of a thresher, he begins to dig.

HENRY (CONT'D)
We'll call it the Naughts Well. Because, as far as the world is concerned, there's naught a thing here... in this well.

MARTHA
How long, Henry?

HENRY
Until the world is ready.

Henry places the box into the hole.

EXT. HENRY'S BARN - DAY (1982)

The town is "1980s Modern".

The barn is a ruin. The roof has caved in. The farm is overgrown with weeds and history.

A young man, SAM (20s), wearing a flannel shirt and jeans, clears away some debris.

Sam finds the spot. The corner near the rusted thresher.

He strikes the earth with a shovel. *CLANG.* Hits the box.

He digs frantically. He pulls up the lead-lined box. It's heavy, corroded, but intact.

He pries the lock.

As the lid creaks open, a FAINT VIOLET GLOW spills out, reflecting in Sam's wide eyes.

He pulls out the metal shard. studies it in his hand.

He looks at the photo negatives. Even in the dim light of the barn, the silver saucer is unmistakable-majestic, terrifying, and all so real at the same time.

Sam looks out at the town of Elmswood in the distance. The sun is setting, but for the first time in thirty-five years, the shadows aren't so dark.

SAM
(A whisper)
Thanks... I see you, Grandpa.

FADE OUT

THE END