

Night of the Living Possum

It was a dark and stormy night. A strange sound woke me, a clawing, scabbling noise. I rose from bed and followed the sound to my workshop, where I discovered a danged possum dining on my cat's Kitten Chow. It immediately scurried into the safety of my lumber pile (I have a vast amount of oak and walnut for woodwork projects). Possums are pleasant little animals—always smiling—but rather than welcome him into my life as a new friend, I decided to eradicate the beast.

Wearing only my jammies and bare feet, I dug feverishly into the lumber, but could not find the little guy, until I looked up and discovered he and I were face-to-face. He had climbed up onto the window ledge and had been looking down at the top of my head while I dug through the lumber under the window. Well, let me tell you, you don't know a man till you walk a mile in his shoes, and you don't know a possum until you smell its breath. Suddenly, I understood possums, deeply.

If you can get past the unwholesome-looking pink skin and the pointy face full of pointy teeth, and if you can get past the bad breath issue, you will find, as I found in that instant, that possums are strangely familiar. They remind you of somebody.... To paraphrase Thoreau, I am now more friend than enemy of the possum. I realized that possums, (and perhaps also armadillos) are in fact human zombies. When people die with a restless heart, they must take the form of possums, and stalk the darkness of eternity. When I realized this, so many things became clear to me. All of a sudden, possums made perfect sense. I mean, movie-zombies are a physiological impossibility. But possums are not only possible; they are indeed a scientifically proven fact. Possums happen all the time.

Sometime, try looking a possum in the eye and you will see that they have not really figured out what's going on. They root around at night looking for food and friends, just like the rest of us, yet nowhere are they welcome. Unable to see, in a mirror, what they have become, the possumized undead cannot understand that they have changed, transformed, metamorphosed into something pointed at both ends. They smile a sickly smile, trying to be cool while scabbling through the darkness, desperately searching—so they believe—for their lost car keys. But the truth of their situation is more terrible than they could ever imagine. And the bad breath doesn't help.

This deep insight aside, I still wanted him out of my house.

Using boards, a workbench and old milk crates, I built a possum-path, clearing the way and walling-in a route that would guide the critter to the back door while preventing him from escaping into my basement. Then, with a broom, I herded him along that path until he came to the propped-open door to the outside. For all you preachers out there, it was perhaps not unlike Yahweh leading His people from captivity.

When my little friend came to the end of the possum-path and realized this wasn't a game but a dirty trick, he looked up at me, his wrinkled, pointy, pink face expressing a sad yearning for just a little more kitten chow. Then, with an air of determination, he turned and scurried into the night. Someday, no doubt, we will meet again. With my own restless heart, I know, now, what I have to look forward to....