

Malevolent Maine

Episode 38: The Devil's Knocker

Malevolent Maine is a horror podcast, and may contain material not suitable for all audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

INTRO:

LUCAS: Only two more episodes left this season and we've got a new discovery and a shocking twist coming up. Hey everyone. It's Lucas. Thanks for supporting us. We couldn't make this show without you. If you haven't already, make sure to follow us on social media. We're on all the major ones. Just search Malevolent Maine. Don't forget our Malevolent Mob on Patreon. All six episodes of *The BBlack Tarot* are available and we're hard at work on our next side story which should begin coming out in a few weeks. That's patreon.com/MalevolentMaine. Thanks and remember to keep sending us your stories. We believe you.

The unmoving face stares at you with cold eyes. Nevertheless there seems to be some life in them, maybe hiding just beneath the surface. Its gaze seems to follow you wherever you go. Its horns curve dangerously up from its head, and the ring that hangs from its mouth beckons to you, begging you to knock. But if you do, who... or *what* will answer?

This is Malevolent Maine.

Guys, what was that?

I saw it with my own eyes

No, seriously, what was that?

It's just not scientifically possible.

I can't explain it.

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God.

This stuff is wild, man. It's real wild.

But... what was that?

Knock, knock MMers. Today's story takes us to the coastal town of Camden. Located in Knox County, just north of Rockland, Camden is a resort town, whose population of 5,000 nearly triples in the summer months with a heavy influx of vacationing out of staters.

It's a picturesque town that often serves as the sort of visual people form in their minds when they think of Maine. It's home to the Camden Yacht Club, and several movies, including *Carousel* and *Peyton's Place* in the 1950s, and in the 90s *Casper* the film about the friendly ghost and the adaptation of Stephen King's novel, *Tinner* were filmed there.

We recently got a call from Keith Schneider who was cleaning out his father's storage unit when he found something that he thought would pique our interest.

Keith just turned fifty in April. He assured us that's a young fifty, and when we met him we had to agree. He didn't look much older than thirty-five: tall, in good shape, square-jawed, and sharp-eyed. He told us he runs five miles every day, rain, snow, or shine, even holidays. He has a deep voice and a loud laugh you couldn't help but echo.

He told us that it was his wife who turned him on to our show. She's been a listener since season 1, though he admitted he's only listened to some of the newer episodes. He said his father, Albert, who is ninety-five, recently suffered a minor stroke. Keith and his wife decided it was time for Al to move into an assisted living facility for better care. Up until this summer

Al had been living in the house Keith grew up in in Camden, but that neither had moved south to Saco decades ago.

Anyone who has dealt with an aging parent knows how difficult the transition can be. Often our senior citizens have amassed an entire lifetime's worth of things, let alone the memories and emotions that go with living a long life. Giving up some of that autonomy can be difficult for the senior, and navigating these changes can be just as stressful for the family.

When Keith decided to sell his childhood home, he had no idea how much work it was actually going to be.

"To be honest," he wrote to us in an email. "I thought it would be a lot easier. I didn't realize how much stuff my dad had collected."

Decades worth of items filled the spare rooms, basement, and shed on the property. By no means a hoarder, Al Schneider had simply amassed nearly 80 years of living. It was while going through all of his dad's things that Keith learned his father had a storage unit, one he had apparently been renting for nearly three decades.

"I asked Dad about it," Keith told us, "and he said it was just full of stuff, old tools, motorcycle parts, stuff he had inherited from *his* father and didn't know what to do with."

It was in that storage unit that Keith found a curious wooden box. It was about a foot long, a few inches less in width. It was old, with a rusted padlock keeping whatever was inside secret. Thinking it might hold some old valuables, Keith tried to find the key, but when nothing turned up, he used bolt cutters to snap the lock off.

Inside, Keith found a stack of paper, folded in half on top of another, similar, but smaller locked wooden box. The papers were notes, written in precise, confident script. It took Keith a moment to recognize his own grandfather's handwriting. There

were page after page of these notes, twenty-three in all, and at first glance, Keith couldn't make much sense of them. They seemed to be instructions and also some sort of story or family history. He set these aside and turned his attention to the smaller box.

The wood was darker, maybe stained with a different color, but to Keith's eye it looked as if it had been burned or singed. Again, there was no key for the lock, so he used the cutters to clip it off. Inside was an object wrapped in soft purple cloth. It was heavy and felt like metal.

When Keith unwrapped the object he had no idea what it would be, and yet he was still shocked to see the face staring back at him when he removed the final cloth covering. It was the face of a man, or more accurately a man-like thing. Stern eyes looked out from heavy brows, and hair or what looks more like horns curve out from the top of its head. A heavy severe nose and a heavy mustache dominate the lower half of the face, with a large heavy ring dangling from its mouth.

The piece is small, maybe six inches from the tip of its horn to the bottom of the ring, but it's heavy. It appears to be cast iron, though most of the face has darkened to nearly black. It's clearly a door knocker, the kind that used to go on the front of a door so that a guest could announce their presence in the time before electronic door bells, but there's something so unsettling about its countenance that Keith said he nearly dropped it when he first saw it.

"It was staring at me," he wrote. "I wasn't expecting that, of course. I wasn't expecting a face looking back at me, but it felt like it was looking directly at me."

Keith said he stared at the knocker for a few minutes, horrified, but seemingly transfixed. Finally, he was able to tear his eyes away from it and turned his attention back to the notes his grandfather had left behind.

Keith's paternal grandfather, Wilhelm Schneider, was born in 1910 in Munich, Germany. By 1939, when he emigrated to the United States, he was twenty-nine years old, working as a lab assistant in a medical research facility. The knocker, apparently, was Wilhelm's, one of the only possessions he brought with him when he sailed for New York.

Students of history know that the 1930s and 40s were a tumultuous time in Europe, Germany in particular. Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany in 1933 as the head of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, better known as the Nazis. Under his direction, the Nazis began the systematic destruction of all those deemed undesirable, starting with, but not limited to the Jewish people. An estimated 17 million people were killed by the Nazi genocide campaign, before Hitler's reign was brought to an end by the Allied Forces during World War 2.

Many people left their homes in Poland, Germany, and the rest of Europe for a new life in America. Wilhelm Schneider was no different. Disgusted and afraid by what he saw in his home country, Wilhelm sailed first to New York, before moving on to Boston, and then eventually Portland, Maine.

Keith had only vague childhood memories of his grandfather, who had died when Keith was seventeen. Still, he says, he immediately recognized his grandfather's handwriting, and found himself drawn to the first page. It was a note of sorts, or perhaps a letter, and it was addressed to Keith's father, Al. We've asked Mark to read the letter:

MARK [in studio]: Albert, If this letter finds you, then you know I have kept a terrible secret from you. The item in this accompanying box is a dangerous thing, a perilous thing. It has been in my possession since 1937, and I have done my best to keep it locked away. It is my deepest desire, that you will keep its secret now as well. I sincerely regret this burden has fallen to you, my son, but in my long lifetime I have found no way to destroy this thing and fear what would happen if it fell into the wrong hands. You will find the story of how I came into

its possession and all that I know of it in the following pages. I have done my best to pass on everything I know about the cursed artifact called the Devil's Knocker in my hope that you will find a way to erase it from this world. What kind of father leaves his son such a terrible hardship? Please know, I would have kept this from you forever if only I could. But such was not my fate. Forgive me, my son, and keep this blighted thing in the deepest, darkest place you can find. Your father, Wilhelm Schneider.

The Devil's Knocker.

While the name sounds a little absurd, one can't help but feel its weight when looking at the object Keith had discovered in the wooden box within a box. There's something just a little sinister in the name, written in capital letters, like a proper name or title, and when face to face with the artifact it's hard to deny its inherent menace.

On the pages following Wilhelm Schneider's letter to his son, was a history of the artifact as Wilhelm had known it, and how he came into its possession.

Wilhelm claimed that one day while working in the medical facility where he had been stationed, a man came into the lab, gravely injured. The staff attempted to treat the man's injuries, but it was apparent he would not live much longer. Wilhelm would later discover the man was a long lost brother or cousin to one of the local Jewish rabbis in town, but this was only after the man had passed and they had to search for his family.

Wilhelm wrote that the man was dressed in rags, old torn strips of gray cloth, layer upon layer, that hid the true shape of the man's emaciated body. As he lay dying, the medical staff working feverishly around him, the man began muttering something in a language Wilhelm did not understand. He said the man reached into a fold of his tattered robes and pulled something out. He pressed it into Wilhelm's hand.

Here's Mark again, reading another passage of Wilhelm Schneider's notes:

MARK: His eyes locked onto mine. They were like deep, chestnut pools, and for a moment I felt like I was drowning. At first I thought he was grabbing my hand, looking for comfort in his dying moment. But he pushed something heavy into my hand, wrapped in a strip of dirty cloth. He held it there for a moment then said to me in a low voice only I could hear, "I regret this burden has fallen to you. Keep this in the deepest, darkest place you can find. Never use it. Destroy it if you can." Then his hand fell away. His eyes lost their intensity and he was gone.

At first Wilhelm Schneider thought the man's final words were the inane ramblings of a dying man, but he couldn't deny the clarity with which he had spoken them, the look in his eyes, and the strength he had pushed the object to him. While the others around him tended to the dead man, Wilhelm pocketed the object, determined to study it later.

The Devil's Knocker, so called because it bears the supposed face of Satan is an obscure artifact that only appears a few times in history. It would have been unknown to Wilhelm at the time it came into his possession, though he appears to have accumulated quite a bit of knowledge about the object since it came into his possession.

According to Wilhelm's notes, if the knocker was affixed to a door, any door, and the correct number of knocks was issued, that door could be opened to anywhere the possessor desired. This transportation was nearly instantaneous, though Wilhelm claimed that the one who knocked would have to travel through a fiery realm for several seconds before emerging at their desired destination.

Instantaneous teleportation sounds far-fetched. It has long been the means of travel in science fiction and fantasy stories, but it does, in fact, exist in the real world. In a sense.

Quantum teleportation is the means of transporting not physical matter, but information encoded on entangled quantum particles. In fact, scientists have been able to teleport photons almost 900 miles from Earth to the Micius **[Mish-us]** satellite in orbit around the planet.

This isn't exactly the kind of teleportation that Wilhelm is talking about. He's talking about physical transportation - walking through a door in Munich, Germany, and coming out on the other side of the world. It sounds impossible, but Wilhelm had good reason to believe it was possible - he claimed to have done it himself.

We had Tom look into the history of the Devil's Knocker to see what he could discover about this mysterious artifact.

TOM: So, I did some digging and the earliest reference I could find to anything called the Devil's Knocker or something with a similar description, was to a Benedictine monk from the 17th century, Bernard de Grenaille **[du-Gren-I]**. He was a member of the Order of Orcus and lived in a monastery just outside Agen **[Ah-jsh-un]**. In a journal he kept, du Grenaille described a dream he had in which he saw Satan's fall from grace. In this dream, which he believed was a vision, he saw that as the Devil fell, he carved for himself a secret door, hidden from the eyes of God, so that he could sneak back into the world. The archangel Michael saw this last transgression and closed that door, placing a knocker on it so the angels would hear any time the Devil tried to reenter the world he had been exiled from.

Bernard du Grenaille went on to write in his journal that he was shown the location of this Devil's Knocker in his dream. It is believed the Benedictine monk found the knocker and returned with it to Agen, though there are no concrete records to back this up.

What is known is that in 1643, three years after Bernard du Grenaille received his vision, he threw himself off the top of the monastery, a rope with one end tied around his neck, and the other tied to the church's steeple. His body hung there for hours before his fellow monks, returning from a long day working in the fields, discovered his lifeless corpse. There is no mention of the Devil's Knocker being discovered in any of his possessions.

Nowhere in Bernard de Grunaille's writing does he claim the knocker has any sort of magical properties. He does not describe its ability to transport the user, nor any sort of fiery, hellish dimensions one might have to cross through.

It is possible the monk never used the knocker, merely kept it tucked away, and might have been unaware of its astonishing properties. Then again, he may have known and instead chosen to keep it secret, taking it with him to his grave.

It's an interesting story, and one that seems to align with Wilhelm Schneider's own story, possibly explaining the strange object's origin. It does beg the question of who sent du Grenaille the vision then. Was it sent by God or one of his angels so that the monk could keep watch over the cursed artifact, or was it sent by the Devil himself, in an attempt to open the doorway once again? And what caused du Grenaille to throw himself from the top of the monastery? Was it guilt he felt over something he saw or did?

What is known is that the Devil's Knocker remained lost, or perhaps kept secret until 1736 when the scientist, and devout Christian, John Hales discovered the Devil's Knocker in the basement of his father's estate.

TOM: John Hales was an astrologist and geologist, but when he discovered the Devil's Knocker, he devoted the rest of his life to understanding the metaphysical nature of this object. While a firm believer in God and the Devil, he was also a renowned scientist, who took a much more logical approach to the knocker. His are the first recordings of the knocker actually being fixed to a door. Here's a passage from the first time he inadvertently used the knocker:

"When I found the odd looking thing in the basement of my father's home, I knew not what it was, but I found it so curious that I placed it upon the door to my study, thinking it would make an interesting piece for conversation or contemplation. I had it in my mind, one morning to grasp the ring in the mouth of the horned face and knock sharply before entering, a bit of a joke with myself. When I opened the door, it was to my surprise that a great con-flauh-gray-shun stared back at me. I first believed my study had caught fire, but upon closer inspection, I saw none of my normal accouterments within, but instead an endless blaze and perpetual gloom. I knew then I was looking into the very depths of Hell."

According to his notes, Hales slammed the door shut, and when he opened it again, his study, completely unharmed, lay before him. At first he passed it off as a momentary hallucination, but Hales could not get the fiery imagery out of his head. The more he thought about it, the more he became convinced what he had seen was real. His analytical mind began working on the problem - what had he seen hell when he had opened the door to his study, and he concluded that it had to do with the knocker.

He began running a series of tests, opening the door at different times of the day, using the knocker sometimes and not others. It was on his twelfth attempt that he reopened the doorway to hell. He concluded that the specific knock he had done that morning was the requirement.

TOM: John Hales did the exact thing you'd expect from a man who had just opened a portal to Hell. This second time, he stepped in. Now, just a quick note about Hales. He was a heavy user of diethyl ether. He was known to drink ether, then known as Anodyne, and to breathe in the fumes as well. He believed that by taking this substance, he was opening his mind to the world around him, and allowing a more direct connection between the word of God and the world of Man. It is unknown if he was high on ether when he stepped through his study door into the fiery realm on the other side, but according to his notes, he suddenly found himself in his favorite apothecary.

A discerning mind might believe that Hales, under the influence of his drug of choice, simply imagined his hellish experience, blacked out, and wandered to his drug dealer. If we are to believe his written accounts, however, this was not the case. His travel from his study to the apothecary, some three miles away, was nearly instantaneous.

Here's Tom again, reading the passage from John Hales notes about his teleportation.

TOM: "I stepped across the threshold, fully suspecting to feel the lick of the flames. It was as if a tempest had enveloped me and I found myself whisked away from my study. Verily, I could feel the heat, radiating out towards me, but the deadly fire never touched me. I felt pulled and had but a moment to study my surroundings, but I have no doubt it was the depths of Hell, itself. Ever brighter flames danced all around me and for a moment I thought I could see the tortured souls of the damned, trapped there forevermore. Then I was standing on the firm wooden floors of the Bell Brothers apothecary. The heat and flames were gone as were the devilish sights that had assaulted my eyes. Curiously, the strange knocker was in my pocket, no longer attached to my study door."

Hales repeated this experiment numerous times, at first appearing in his own bedroom, in the gardens, the basement, and even once in his actual study, before learning of his

destination. Hales concluded that whatever location he had in his mind, whatever place he pictured in the moment he knocked, was where he would arrive once he stepped through the portal. He even claimed to have stepped through the door of his study in London and exited in his family's holiday estate in Bath, 115 miles away. Always the knocker would appear somewhere on his person when he stepped through, and neither he, nor his starting or ending point were any worse for wear.

All told, according to his journals, John Hales experimented with the Devil's Knocker 213 times before believing he had learned all he could from it. In the end, he determined that it was a marvelous artifact and a useful tool. He claimed to use it often in his daily life, especially when taking long trips across the country.

If the Devil's Knocker was simply a magical, or perhaps advanced technological, transporter this story would likely have had a much different ending. John Hales died in an unfortunate ether accident. The ether he was attempting to smoke exploded and the resulting fire consumed both Hales and his home.

The Devil's Knocker disappears from records again before being discovered by Father Samuel Martin in 1853. Martin, a Catholic priest, maintained that he discovered the knocker while walking in a field near Troyes [Twah], France. It is not known how Father Martin discovered how to activate and use the knocker, but it is possible he had or gained access to John Hales notes. Either way, Father Martin writes extensively in his journal about his use with the Devil's Knocker. Here's a reading from one passage:

"I gave the appropriate knock and opened the door only to find myself staring into the very depths of Hell as described in the Bible. I knew it instantly for what it was, and knew what I must do. I mustered my courage, and with my faith to protect me, I stepped through the doorway, a clear image of the small lake just a short walk from the abbey. It felt like a small whirlwind filled my body as I crossed into Hell. All at once I heard a

roaring sound that I at first thought was wind, but came to know was a deep, menacing growl. Just before I was deposited out of that damned realm, I heard a dark and venomous voice in my ear. "Soon..." it whispered. And I knew it was the Devil."

It is curious to note that neither Bernard de Grenaille nor John Hales ever mention a growling voice anywhere in their notes about the knocker. This appears to be the first time that anyone using the knocker's power has had any interaction with anyone or anything in the nightmarescape through which they pass before arriving at their destination.

Father Martin came to believe that Satan was preparing to use the Devil's Knocker to return to Earth, and from there to storm the gates of Heaven itself. His theory was that every time the knocker was used, he was one step closer to being able to use its power, himself. He came to the conclusion that the Devil had a specific number of uses before he would regain the power. That number, of course, was 666.

666, also known as the Number of the Beast, is most famous for appearing in the Bible's Book of Revelations, about the end of the world. The number has long been associated with the Devil or the Antichrist.

Samuel Martin believed this number was the combination that would allow the Devil to unlock the doorway back to Heaven to continue his war with God. When the Devil's Knocker was used 666 times, it would literally unleash hell on the Earth.

And the worst of it was, there was no way to tell how many times the knocker had already been used.

As we previously stated John Hales recorded 213 instances of using the knocker, but it was known he used it many times after that. Similarly, we know Bernard de Grenaille had the knocker, but not whether or not he ever used it. Father Martin limited his use to just three times, but according to the diary he kept,

he believed that the number must be approaching the Number of the Beast, which was why the Devil was whispering in his ear.

One has to wonder why father Martin, a deeply religious man, would use the knocker more than once, especially knowing the Devil was expecting him to. Satan is often depicted as a wily one, seducing humans to sell their souls or join his dark crusade. Is it possible the Devil's Knocker, like some sort of real-life One Ring from *The Lord of the Rings*, calls to its keepers, enticing them to use the knocker again and again?

There's also the peculiar fact that everyone who seemingly possesses the Devil's Knocker dies in a horrific manner. Bernard de Grenaille threw himself off the top of his monastery. John Hales lit himself on fire in an ether smoking accident. Father Samuel Martin was no different. The priest was found in his room stabbed over fifty times. Investigators concluded that at least half of them were self-inflicted.

Which brings us back to Wilhelm Schneider, the man who brought the knocker to America. Wilhelm claimed to have received the knocker from a dying man who was terribly injured. There is no indication in Wilhelm's notes why he was chosen over the others. The dying man could have had a reason or Wilhelm could have been chosen completely at random. What is known is that Schneider inherited the knocker and over time learned how to use it.

We don't have any evidence that Wilhelm Schneider ever read the works of Bernard de Grenaille, John Hales, or Father Samuel Martin. It is possible he may have done his own research into the item and come across their writings. What is known is that somehow Wilhelm discovered the coded knock and did, in fact, use the knocker.

MARK: "I placed the knocker on the door to my old shed, knocked, and when I opened the door, I saw it. I saw hell. And when I stepped through into those flames, I heard the Devil laughing at me. I swore then and there that I would never use it again. That

I would do what the dying man asked, and destroy it forever. But of course, I was wrong."

Wilhelm's letters to his son Albert indicate that after using the Devil's Knocker one time, and feeling an overwhelming sense of evil, he swore to hide it away forever. But there was no way of knowing the evil that was rising in Germany. Not of a supernatural kind, but of a far more human nature.

MARK: "Can you imagine, my son, if Hitler and his Nazis had gotten ahold of this thing? What evil they could have done? Munich was becoming a scary place, scarier each day, and I knew I needed to get out. But by then I had no job, I had no money. I could not afford a ticket. So one night, while a mob stormed up and down my street, I did the unthinkable. The thing I knew I should never do... I knocked."

Wilhelm claims he used the knocker to walk out of the bathroom in his home in Munich and reappeared in an alleyway in New York. He claims this time, he could actually *feel* the heat of the hellish flames, as if they were growing in intensity. The mocking laughter he had heard grew to a deafening scream, and he felt he would be driven mad before he was deposited half a world away.

We did some research and we could not find any records of Wilhelm Schneider arriving in America through customs. That's not to say he didn't use a false name, or someone made a mistake with the paperwork, but it certainly lends credence to his story of using the Devil's Knocker.

From there, Wilhelm locked the knocker away in the wooden boxes and swore he would never use it again. He writes that he tried to destroy it several times, first by attempting to smash it bits, and later by trying to melt it down. All attempts failed. The Devil's Knocker remained intact, seemingly impervious to damage.

At some point, Wilhelm Schneider came to the conclusion that the knocker was going to outlast him. So he began compiling his notes, a dark memoir of sorts, of everything he knew and had learned about the cursed artifact. He intended to explain it all to his son, Albert, in person but tragedy struck before he ever could.

In 1976, while working at the Great American textile mill, Wilhlem Schneider, then, sixty-six years old, fell into a carding machine used to mix fibers into a continuous thread. It took over three days to remove all of his remains from the machine before it was subsequently destroyed.

Albert, either never truly believed in the knocker or was able to resist its temptation, and as near as we can tell, never used the knocker. It sat in the locked wooden nesting boxes for almost fifty years. Al Schneider is in no condition to talk about the Devil's Knocker. The stroke that forced him into assisted living and the onset of dementia has rendered any memories of the knocker gone forever.

As far as Keith Schneider, son of Albert, and grandson of Wilhelm, he has no desire to keep the knocker.

"I read Grampa's notes," he said. "I held that...that thing. I'm not saying I believe any of it, but... but there's just something unsettling about the thing."

Keith donated the Devil's Knocker to us to store in the Malevolent Maine office. We're considering whether or not we should display it on the walls with many of our other artifacts, or if its temptation would be too much. For now, we're keeping it in the wooden boxes it came, with brand new padlocks keeping it securely hidden away.

While the ability to scientifically document teleportation is tempting, we're not sure we are prepared to unleash Hell on Earth, quite literally. If the Devil is trying to sneak out of

his prison, we don't think we want to be the ones to let him out.

Stay safe out there, Maine.

Malevolent Maine is Lucas Knight, Tom Wilson, and myself, Chris Estes.

If you'd like to read more about our investigations check out our website at malevolentmaine.blogspot.com/

While there, don't forget to check our merch store. And, if you're so inclined, support us on Patreon at patreon.com/malevolentmaine

Thank you for listening to Malevolent Maine.

And as always, stay safe out there, Maine.