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# GRUESOME TALES



WHAT  
COMES BACK!

*Oliver*

# GRUESOME TALES

# WHAT COMES BACK



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Herb sat on his porch, a bottle of whiskey in one hand, a revolver in the other. He knew what he had to do but wasn't sure he had the strength necessary. But he had to do this. It was his responsibility. His fault.

In states of distress, the mind often drifts back to better times and Herb was no exception. As he sat on that porch with an unimaginable task before him, his mind wandered to happier times.

Times he had spent with his best friend Rob and Rob's girlfriend Elizabeth. Herb had known them both separately and as a couple for years and cared deeply for both of them. Rob was his first friend and the only person Herb had ever felt comfortable talking to. And Elizabeth was like the rambunctious spunky little sister Herb had never had. Her smile was like sunshine, brightening whoever and whatever it touched. On weekends the three of them would go down to the lake and fish, or go to the bar and get drunk, or hang out in Rob's back yard, which faced the forest.

But then it happened.

It was a hit and run driver. Elizabeth's dog, Rover, was killed by a hit and run driver. Rover was a kindhearted dog who never barked and had belonged to Elizabeth's now-deceased father, the only thing he'd left her. Rover's death had devastated Elizabeth, and her smile, the light which brightened Herb and Rob's world, had disappeared. Rob had tried, but thought there was nothing he, Herb, or anyone could do to help her.

But Herb had known otherwise. And in a moment of weakness, he had called Rob and Elizabeth over to his house. When they arrived, he had brought them into the root cellar, and from behind a jar of rotted pickles he produced a book unlike any they had seen before. The cover bore no title, and everything written inside was transcribed in a language that none of them could read. But under those unintelligible words, written in ballpoint pen were translations.

The book was a secret Herb's grandfather had passed down to him, but warned him never to use. It was meant to be kept and passed down to the next generations until the extraordinary descendant it was destined for was ready to perform miraculous deeds with it. Herb did not know his grandfather very well, because Herb's father had broken ties with the peculiar old man after a quarrel which he had always refused to talk about to Herb. The only thing he had said was that one day, his deranged father would probably come to Herb with a crazy request. When that happened, Herb understood that the book and the unbelievable prophecy about it had been the reason for their discord. And understandably so, for within its pages, that book contained

numerous unnatural recipes, formulas, and magical properties, including a ritual to raise the dead.

Though at first hesitant, Rob agreed to the idea, hoping it would make Elizabeth happier. He missed her smile as well, even more so than Herb. Because while Herb looked at Elizabeth as one would a sister, Rob saw her as the woman he would one day marry. He'd known this since a week after he'd met her.

The ritual the two men orchestrated was itself too arduous and heinous to recall, but it had involved multiple acts that had disturbed Herb on some sort of primal level. But he had carried on resolutely, for Rover, and more importantly, for Elizabeth. So that she might smile again.

And shortly afterwards, Rover was back, and Elizabeth couldn't have been happier to see her beloved dog back.

This happiness wouldn't last and Herb would soon learn why his grandfather had forbidden him from using the book.

Rover's heart was pumping blood, his arms and legs were working in tandem, any medical test would have shown him to be alive and in good physical health. But something had changed. The Rover that had died weeks ago was not the one that now growled at Elizabeth and had to be locked outside at night. What had come back from that grave and was inhabiting Rover's body was not the sweet, kindhearted dog that had died weeks ago.

Rover's return to life would be cut short a little over a week later when he had viciously attacked Elizabeth, ripping open her arm so badly it would require four stitches. After Herb drove her to the hospital, Rob had been forced to end the dog's life with a handgun. He later told Herb he buried the dog deep within the woods near his house. Both men agreed to tell Elizabeth that Rover had run away.

And that should have been the end of it.

But then it happened.

It was a hit and run driver.

Elizabeth had never seen it coming.

Her body had been found splayed in a ditch the next day.

It had been a closed casket funeral.

The day after the funeral Herb had gone over to Rob's house only to find him still in his suit, staring out the window, an empty bottle of whiskey on the table next to him.

He had known right then what Rob had planned. But he tried to dissuade him. Herb had hoped his best friend, his oldest friend, his only friend would listen to him.

"It won't work." You saw what happened to Rover. Please listen to me."

He received no response and as he left the house quietly, leaving a broken man behind him. Herb didn't have the words to say more.

His hopes had been shattered a few days later when he had gone to lay flowers on Elizabeth's grave, only to find the dirt freshly shifted.

He'd immediately driven home to check the hiding place in the cellar. The book was gone.

That was six days ago. Multiple pets had gone missing in the surrounding area and a deer had been found eviscerated by the side of the road. Authorities blamed a mountain lion, but Herb knew better. He knew what had to be done. But he was afraid. Afraid of what he might find.

But he could put off his responsibility no longer. He downed the rest of the bottle, dropped multiple extra rounds into the pocket of his flannel coat and began the walk to Rob's.

He cut through the forest and snuck around the back and observed the house from a distance. Two lights were on. One in the kitchen and one in the upstairs bedroom. He entered through the back door, attempting to move silently as his boots creaked on the wooden floors.

"Hello, Herb." Rob called from the other room, his once cheerful voice devoid of emotion.

Some of the tension loosened from Herb's body and he made his way into the kitchen.

Rob looked like someone had hollowed him out. He wore a ripped and stained jacket over the once pristine white shirt and black pants of his funeral suit. The book lay on the table in front of him, next to a near-empty bottle of whiskey and a gun.

Rob didn't look up at Herb as he entered the room. Instead, he stared unfocused at the table.

For at least a minute, neither man said anything. Herb's grip on the gun was vise-like.

Finally, Herb broke the mute standoff.

“You know why I’m here,” he had declared solemnly.

“I thought it’d work.” Rob didn’t look up. He continued staring off into the void. “She wasn’t dead as long as Rover.”

Herb said nothing and for a moment there was another great silence until he eventually broke it.

“I’m sorry.”

It seemed as if Rob hadn’t heard him until Rob looked his friend in the eye and asked Herb “Why did you show it to us?”

No response.

“Why?”

“Because,” Herb tried to contain his expression as he struggled to put his emotions into words. “I love you. I loved her.”

“I love her too.”

“I have to do it.”

“I know.”

Another long silence.

“Goodbye, Rob.”

“Goodbye, Herb.”

Herb’s tear-rimmed eyes turned from his friend to the staircase upstairs.

As he ascended the carpeted stairs one by one, his grip tightened around the revolver’s handle.

He reached the top and stood for a moment, his stomach turning upon smelling the foul odor that came from down the hall. He walked softly down towards the room with a light on. The door wasn't fully closed. He opened the door slowly with his left hand while he removed the revolver with his right.

The thing that had once been Elizabeth was sitting in a chair in front of the vanity mirror. It had attempted to hide its greenish and bloated skin with heavy amounts of makeup that now covered its face like some perverted mask. Elizabeth's body was still wearing the white dress she had been buried in, but it was now sullied with the dark substances that oozed from her orifices and the dark-red gashes in her skin. It was attempting to brush the dirt and grime from her hair. As her shaking hands pulled the brush from her hair, Herb was horrified to see the bristles were caked in hair as well as blood, both fresh and dried.

“Hello, Herb.” The voice came out guttural, like water through an old pipe.

He hadn't made a sound. It had sensed him.

Herb's jaw ground and his teeth clenched. He could not allow this thing to wear the skin of the girl he loved any longer. Tears in his eyes, he raised the gun towards its head and pulled back the hammer.

A shot echoed through the still night.

Herb barely had time to react as the thing whirled and leapt across the room at him. The chair it had been sitting on toppled to the floor as it fell upon Herb in an instant. He tried to aim his still fully-loaded gun at the rotting thing but it batted his arm away. The revolver fell and bounced on the carpeted floor, landing just out of reach.

The thing screeched at Herb as it straddled him and tried to rip him apart. Herb sustained a slash to his right cheek before he managed to get his arms up. His heavy coat protected him from further strikes. Herb threw his arms forward, knocking it off of him and onto the floor. It regained its footing in an instant but before it could react, A still sitting Herb kicked up, bringing both of his work boots into direct contact with its chest. Ribs cracked and flesh tore and shifted as it fell backwards onto the vanity mirror chair. The metal legs tore through rotting flesh and bones and it became stuck, one leg protruding through its stomach and the other coming out between two ribs.

But still it thrashed about, desperately trying to claw its way free and attack Herb like some wounded animal. Reddish sludge flowed from the holes made by the chair legs and froth flowed from its lips. It howled and shrieked and cursed in tongues unknown.



Herb got up quickly and picked up the revolver. He aimed his still unfired weapon at the creature trapped before him and fired twice. The shots entered the creature around its left sternum and went straight through, splattering the gray carpet a disgusting red. And yet the creature continued thrashing about. He emptied the gun into its head. The last shot went through the girl with the golden smile's lips, littering the carpet with a mixture of shattered teeth and rotted brains. Slowly, like a winding down animatronic, the virtually headless thing slowed to a halt and lay there, slowly darkening the carpet.

After waiting just enough time to make sure it was really dead, Herb left the room. He had already seen enough to haunt him for several lifetimes.

He walked downstairs and smelt the gasoline as he descended the stairs. He didn't stop as his boots splashed in the pooled gasoline on the floor. He didn't stop as he walked past Rob's brains that now decorated the kitchen wall. Rob's corpse still clutched a smoking handgun that had fired one shot. On the table next to the bottle were an empty gas can and a diamond ring. He dropped his bloody and scratched jacket on the floor and took one of Rob's off the coat rack. He didn't stop till he was out the front door. Then he turned and took something from his back pocket.

He took a lighter from his pocket. It was engraved with his initials, H.W. and had been a gift from Rob and Elizabeth for his birthday two years ago. A flame sparked after two tries. Then he threw the lighter to the floor and walked down the rickety front porch.

The building lit like kindling and within minutes the whole place was ablaze. Herb watched from a distance. No one came to put out the fire. It was still night, and there was no one around for miles. Suddenly he realized he was still holding the revolver, and with one strong throw cast it into the nearby woods to rust.

Then he left.

Eight hours and one state later, Herb is sitting in the passenger seat of an eighteen-wheeler hauling logs down the highway. The older trucker had picked him up hitchhiking at the side of the road and while Herb had been polite, their conversation had been virtually non-existent for the past hour. Herb sat there, leaned against the door, head against the glass. The driver smacked his lips, trying to think.

"That town I picked you up down the highway from, you from there or passing through?"

"From there." Herb's voice came out raspy and quiet.

“You know I’ve stopped by there a couple of times on my route and it’s just pretty as a picture. Now why would you ever wanna leave a nice town like that?”

Herb stared blankly.

“There’s nothing left for me there.” He whispered.

The end

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