

The Rattler

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A silly little horror tale that owes more than a nod to the master, Stephen King



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Iâ€™d like to tell you the story of the day I almost died. No guff. I almost did. I will try to keep it brief as well as clean (you never know if young ones will ever read it or if any ladies are in the crowd!)

Yâ€™see, I am not exactly young anymore. Iâ€™m what young folks call â€™old in the toothâ€™. I never understood that expression. What makes teeth older than the body in which they live? The fact that they can identify a person from their teeth after they have died? Maybe so, I dunno. Anyways, Iâ€™m old now, got those brown oval dots on my hands the docs call â€™liver spotsâ€™. Donâ€™t know what that has to do with my liver, but thatâ€™s the term. My knuckles are all gnarled up like an old oak tree. The docs call that â€™osteoarthritisâ€™ but to me itâ€™s plain old rheumatism. Million dollar words for five cent ideas.

But, that stuff doesnâ€™t have hell or high water relating to my tale. No people, my story begins a long time ago in a bar called â€™The Bone stripperâ€™s Bar-Be Queâ€™. No guff. Best darn hash joint in the mid west. Was Sioux City, Iowa to be exact about fifteen years ago, give or take.

I had finished my shift from the Salty Cod/Tuna Processing plant. See, what we did was, we would take fish, all kinds, and put them through this processor, kind of like a meat grinder and me and boys would sift through the pieces, some flaked; some solid, to make sure there were no rotten pieces or hunks of god knows what other than fish in â€™em. Once that was done, we would assemble them into little piles and then put them in cans. A machine would then put oil or water inside the can (to preserve freshness and moisture, you see) and then another machine would affix the lid and seal it and then whammy! Off to the latest Safeway or Tops or Piggly Wiggly grocery store (remember them)? I would come home reeking like fish which drove my wife Beth to hell and back. Canâ€™t say I blamed her.

Anyhow, after an 8- 10 hour shift depending on if overtime was available, me and my friend Dave Heightman would go down to The Bonestripper for a Bud and some grub or just to shoot some stick. I wonder what happened to old Dave. Allâ€™s I know is that he got his pension from the plant and then fucked off (sorry kids and ladies) to go spend the rest of his life catching fish again, this time in High Uplands Lake. Havenâ€™t seen him in goinâ€™ on ten years, but I sure do wish he is happy. He deserves it. Good guy.

On this particular night as our story unfolds, Dave had the opportunity to work late and I didnâ€™t. I was a bit pissed off â€™cause me and Beth coulda used the extra dough (forgive me for rambling, I am old now as I said).

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So, because olâ Dave was workinâ I went to The Bonestripper by my lonesome which in hindsight was the worst damn thing I ever coulda done as you will soon find out.

It was a typical Iowian night, dry as a bone and my asthma was aggravated so I had to take a coupla good hauls off my Ventolin inhaler. The bar was busy, but not so busy that you had wait in line outside like you had to on Saturday nights. The air was mostly warm with the slightest hint of chill to remind you that winter was approaching but was not quite here as of yet.

I sauntered into the restaurant and immediately heard the familiar strains of honky tonk on the rust coloured jukebox in the corner. I had consumed a sandwich, my usual, pulled pork smothered in bar-be-que sauce with a side order of baked beans and coleslaw when I decided I wanted to play me some darts.

I grabbed one of the darts, them long ones with the blue feathered ends and pointy tip and took my best shot on the target board. Wasnâ t nobody else playing otherwise I probably wouldnâ t have on account that Iâ m not the best shot at the best of times.

I missed the target by a mile (what else is new?) and then I immediately felt a rumbling sensation in the old gut. I didnâ t feel nauseous, that would be an overstatement, but enough of a rumble to warn me that maybe nature was callinâ if catch my drift.

Could it have been the pulled pork sandwich this soon? Jesus I just finished it 10 minutes ago! Not likely. It was probably Bethâ s Cajun meatloaf from last night that she likes to make with all that paprika and chili powder that can make hair grow on a pre-schoolerâ s chest.

I ignored it at first and focused on my game, but sooner than later I knew I couldnâ t withhold the urges any longer to save me some public humiliation.

I put down the darts and made my way over to the menâ s room that was marked â cowboysâ and â cowgirlsâ over the more traditional â hisâ and â herâ sâ .

I gotta hand it to The Bonestripper, the washrooms were fine clean. I mean spotless. They even had a board on the wall where a patron could read the last time the lavatory was checked and what was done. Mighty impressive, if you ask me.

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So, I go into the washroom and I always do a preliminary search to see if anyone else is in there. I mean, if I have to pass gas (forgive me ladies) even though I know itâs only for guys, itâs still embarrassing and I would prefer not to do it. Here I am ramblinâ again. Sorry.

I couldnât help but notice some of the more humorous graffiti aligning the walls and stalls of the men room. Some were downright entertaining to the degree that you never forget âem. Like the one written over the slot of the condom dispenser where the product comes out? Some joker wrote âinsert dick hereâ . Once again, sorry ladies, but I had a darn good chuckle from that one.

I make my way into a vacant stall, undo my belt buckle, drop my drawers and have a seat. I could still hear the muted country strains from the jukebox conveniently situated a stoneâs throw from the restroom area.

Iâm not one of those types that wipes the seat beforehand. If I donât see nothingâ on it, I trust the good folks at The Bonestripper that they have done their job at sanitation. Confident with the hygienic situation, I sat and waited. And waited.

After about what seemed to be a good solid five minutes of waiting, I heard the rattle. Not like type of rattle your car makes as it warming up on a winterâs morning, but Iâm talking a *rattle*, like an infant with one of them toys that doesnât know when to stop.

Funny thing was, the rattle came from *within*. Itâs hard to describe. It was not from the pipes by the sink or from the one slider window that was ajar..no sir, this was a rattle from deep within the inner sanctum of the sewage system.

I sort of shrugged it off and chocked it up to nothing, just some excess water banging through the maze that was The Bonestripperâs underground pipeline. But then the rattling got *louder* and *stronger*. Like something was coming *closer*.

I was spooked, I gotta tell ya, but not to the degree that I would jump off the potty and drive home to do my business there. No sir, I was determined that I had to complete my mission here and now and my gut was in full approval of that sentiment.

Then just as soon as it had come, the rattle stopped. The eerie echoing of vibrational sounds deep below the toilet on which I sat had ceased entirely. Well, that certainly relaxed this old redneck! I was now fully able to concentrate on the task at hand. Until what came nextâ !.

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Back in those days I was a rather portly fellow and I rarely if ever was able to see my own private parts on account of the large belly I had. But as I sat there on the crapper in this sparkling clean washroom, I noticed this black object emerging from the bowl underneath my legs. I actually did a double take at first thinking that no way it could be my private parts, this thing was in the water coming up through the drain pipe. Well folks, you guessed it, sure enough it was a mean old venomous black rattlesnake, worst kind. How it got into the sewage system and why he picked the route to my particular stall is anyone's guess, but man, oh man, I was scared stiff.

I couldn't move. I was paralyzed with fear. I felt like that black guy from the Lethal Weapon movies. Remember the one where he can't get off the john because it is rigged with explosives? That's how I felt only I didn't have Mel Gibson to help me off.

I figured any movement might set it off and it sure as hell was a lot faster than my flabby ass. I couldn't shout for help, couldn't leap off the seat and I certainly couldn't do my business all over it. Then I started thinking, well when people are scared, I mean *really* scared, don't they just lose bowel and bladder control? That's the last thing I needed with my private parts dangling mere inches from his glassy filmed eyes.

I started to sweat as my brain frantically tried to come up a solution. I could see the snake inching forward so that its black slimy head was out of the water and onto the white porcelain of the bowl. Much to my horror, a bead of sweat dropped from my brow and landed into the water in a bowl with a *plink* sound.

The reptile whipped its head around in the direction of the noise and that was when it looked me dead in the eyes. I'm not kidding. It was as if it *knew* me or something. My breathing became labored and I still remained paralyzed in my position.

It was then that I heard the god-awful rattling again. The rear of the snake was still in the pipe, making the unnerving noise even more pronounced. Then something strange happened.

The snake started arising from the bowl. Like I was some sort of Indian shaman seducing it with a flute or something. It crept slowly upwards between my legs, taking its time and prolonging my agony.

When the snake was about level with my protruding waistline, it looked up at me and if a reptile could smile, well I swear he had the biggest grin on. I stared at it with rapt attention, my mouth frozen into the shape

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of an â Oâ .

Then the snake opened its jaws wide, real wide exposing two of the longest, nastiest fangs you could ever imagine. Worse than the kind you see on those nature shows like â predators gone wildâ or something like that.

A whirlwind of ideas raced through my brain which was sensing its imminent demise. Almost on instinct, in the blink of an eye I grasped my two hands that were resting on my thighs around the creatureâ s neck and squeezed for all I had.

The beast immediately began thrashing and snapping the air rapidly as I crushed its windpipe. I could see its forked tongue snap outwards to my nose. I yanked my arms and body upwards, dragging the remainder of the snake out of the bowl, its tail end rattle spastically vibrating. I was in a standing position at this point, my drawers around my ankles. It felt like hours until the thing finally succumbed to my onslaught. I was applying so much pressure around its neck that my knuckles were blanching. The snapping of those dangerous fangs became less and less frequent and intense until finally, the mouth closed forever. I tossed the carcass of the four foot long snake into the corner of the washroom where it lay in a curled mess.

I immediately ran to the sink and pumped my hands full of liquid soap and scrubbed for all I was worth. I then doused my face in cold water and glanced back over to make sure the blasted thing was really dead.

To no one in particular I said aloud, â Youâ ll make a great pair of boots for someone somedayâ .

I hoisted up my pants, slipped my belt through the notches of my jeans and took some hauls of Ventolin to bring my breathing down to regular cadence. I then stepped back out to the restaurant and told my waitress Nelly that there was a mess in the menâ s room.

She looked at my kinda funny and asked why my skin was a shade paler than what it was when I first came in. I preferred to remain quiet and let the evidence speak for itself.

I left The Bonestripper a proud by frazzled man. I never encountered a snake again in my life apart from whatâ s in the pictures and television. When my grandson was born, I bought him a jack-in-box, not a rattle.

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THE END

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