Spokesperson for the Dead

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A man finds himself investigating an abandoned cabin when he is accidentally locked inside. He reluctantly uncovers his past through a series of events.

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On that day I was hiking this trail out by Richardâ s ridge, named after the dude who owned the Rich Mining Company, Richard Brigham. Personally, I think his abbreviated name, Dick, was more appropriate for his accomplishments. Like every tycoon, when the town was depleted the company up and left, selling the land to the city for environmental restoration. Much of the equipment, now rusted, was tossed into empty fields and still remains a memento of darker, coaly times. The mine was permanently sealed and the small town where workers lived nearby, simply abandoned. Local kids, Iâ m told, call it â Coalvanyia,â paying homage to the rumor that itâ s haunted by Vampires spawned by those who died of coal lung, etc. Me, well, I donâ t bend over to such juvenile-fabricated hogwash.

Currently there are trails that encircle the former land. A few weave between the neighborhood and some old warehouses. No matter how much nature retakes, nobody can escape the eeriness conjured by such derelict structures. And yet folks come from all over the state to see them, Iâ m sure.

I hiked the trail on that November day to get away from civilization and think. It was chilly outside, so cold that every other footstep my warm breath gave me the impression that I was being harassed by ghosts. Moisture clung to the floor of dead leaves in the woods, permeating a moldy scent about the air. With the sun nowhere to be seen, the fields were grayer like the sky and brown-black clusters ofdefoliated treesgreeted me in every direction. And, every field I came upon opened my ears to whining crows it seemed. I had hiked Richardâ s Ridge twice before on two of the most popular trails.

However, this time around, since I was bored of the same scenery, I strayed from the path on to this thin dirt trail littered with mud puddles. I followed it for some time as it went up and down, passing all sorts of stickily shapes, finally coming to a thicket of trees opening to a field where a two story cabin sat by the distant tree line. My phone vibrated annoyingly in my pocket. It hadnâ t stopped all afternoon. To prevent the agitating reminder, I removed the battery.

From where I was I could see the no trespassing sign posted near the door, the letters in bright orange, and a black backdrop framed their stark message. But, nobody was around to enforce that sign. In fact, it seemed as if everyone had deserted the park entirely. I guess it was the day before thanksgiving after all, and the weather was inhospitable.

I looked at the orange letters, then around the field, and proceeded cautiously toward the cabin. I wanted a challenge that day. I lightly stepped up to the door, examining the lock, when I noticed it was hanging loose; somebody had forgotten to lock it. I looked around once again before sliding the chain off and placing it next to the lock, on the ground.

As I opened the door the wind caught it and slammed it ajar; the noise seemed so unnatural that I jumped. Clearly I was nervous. I probably was an awfully silly sight to some squirrel or deer if they had watched. But, I was inside. I admired the cabin which smelled akin to the few barns Iâ d explored. The floor had a grey film of dust and the windows were blurred by the moss and vines which had ravaged the exterior. Nothing significant was kept on the first floor save but for a large stone fireplace that yawned in the corner, waiting for some light to contain. A couple of old trail signs were spread in an open closet; perhaps the place was used for storage. I winced upon seeing the staircase in its utterly poor condition, with heavily dilapidation and missing steps. I thought twice about trying to go upstairs. Then I wondered if Iâ d ever get this chance again. With some careful footwork, by transforming into a household acrobat, I zigzagged my way up the deteriorated spots.

Upstairs had some old furniture in the arrangement of an office. Albeit, I doubted the office had been used recently. Yes, when I first saw it I was a bit perplexed. *Who would want an office here?* The office was one of two rooms on the second floor. I shifted about the furniture and into the second room. Nothing but a closet and an abrupt noise were in there. I paused when I heard the noise, for it sounded like someone was standing right beside me, shifting their weight between feet. The boards creaked with each step. As I waited nervously to see if it would repeat, I heard it again.

Had someone noticed the door unlocked? Were they coming up the stairs? In the next room? I wasnâ t sure where the noise was coming from.

I rushed to the window that overlooked the front of the house, seeing nothing but a stormy horizon and an empty field to my relief; then another fearful thought crossed my mind: what if they locked me inside?

No, I would use one of the desks to break the window once theyâ re gone, I reassured myself.

Stop. Stop it! I told myself. My nerves were awhirl.

I listened for the sound once more, but found only silence and the wind outside. Gusts were gaining strength, trees shook violently. Right then I figured it was the wind that had induced the creaks in the first place. After all, the door was opened downstairs. Over by the window was a stool which I claimed as I sat and settled down. I was that kid that never got in trouble in school, and even though trespassing isnâ t a big deal, I would be so upset with myself if I got caught. While I was in the middle of my thoughts, staring out the window, a voice interrupted my concentration.

â Hello?â mumbled someone. The voice was loud and deep, like that of an old man who is slightly deaf and doesnâ t realize his own volume.

Damn it! Why didnâ t I leave when I had the chance?

â Is anyone in here? â ¦ Locking up,â echoed the manâ s warning up the stairs.

I almost replied, but my instinct was to remain silent. Instead, I kept reassuring myself that I could get out when he leftâ that it would be better for me to escape rather than be caught.

Outside the cabin a camouflage-colored golf cart was parked in the field, confirming my fears.

I watched the man in hunting clothes leave before going downstairs to assess my situation. The door was locked and the windows were covered in moss and vines; it would be a messy exit if I were to try it. I went upstairs and took a seat on the stool again. Noticing the blue swirls were closing in on the cabin out of the corner of my eye, I scrambled back to the window and saw columns of rain advancing on the meadow, with the golf cart gone.

â We donâ t go outside much â ¦ the light is much too bright ya see.â I practically leapt back into the office when I heard the voice. I frantically scoured the dark and dust, and the drear the window trapped, but there was nothing to confront.

Was I hearing things? I panted and rested against the wall. Just paranoia, thatâ s all it is.

â Have you heard of us?â the voice asked.

â Of who?â I replied, in an angry tone.

â Nameâ s Clarence â ¦ Donâ t think youâ ve probably heard of me. Most of my clientele are about six feet under the weather, so I get that a lot,â the man said, cracking himself up.

The muffled voice was emanating from the closet. I crept over and peeked through the keyhole. I couldnâ t see a damn thing in the stored dark.

â Sayâ ¦ bud, why donâ t you do me a favor and open the door?â

â Who in the Fuck are you?â

â No need to be hostile, just let me in, Iâ ll explain.â

â Bullshit.â

â Fine, have it your way,â the man said, slipping what appeared to be his business card underneath the door.

I picked it up. â Clarence Izzley, Spokesman for the Dead.â

Scenarios pummeled my head. *Was he a clairvoyant hobo?* Rain made the sound of thrown gravel as it pattered the roof, blurring the window as I considered the manâ s request.

â Are you still there?â

â Yes,â the man eagerly replied.

â Why should I let you inside? â ¦ Tell me.â

â Look sonny, Iâ m here to help one of my clients.â

â Better yet, how did you get locked in there?â

â I cannot enter the light,â he proclaimed.

â Thereâ s light out here. Why?â

â Yes, I know. You would need to put something against the window.â

â But why?â

â I am not living â ¦ you see,â he said. I laughed at his bullshit.

â One of my clientâ s whereabouts was never discovered by the living. She yearns for the truth to be revealed. It has been so long, and nobody she associated with has closure.â

By then I was sure the man was some crazy hobo on drugs.

â Really? Sir, what are you on?â Yet the man continued to ramble, ignoring my question.

â It was the man who ruined this place, a tycoon of terror, who killed her and left her where she remains,â added the man.

â You mean Richard Brigham?â

â Tis him I speak of â ¦ yes â ¦ he murdered her and buried her under this very cabin!â

Outside it was getting darker. I peeked at my watch; it was 4:00 pm. Soon it would be a dark maze of mangled woods out there. The last thing I wanted to do was let this guy die while Iâ m here. I tried to think of a plan that would allow me to escape, but still let the crazy guy out.

â You donâ t believe me!â the man said, sighing. â I feared this. You are a doubter.â

â Or perhaps Iâ m not gullible.â

â I hear her voice, her plight, her fury â ¦ she will appear to you!â

Before I could reply, the closet swung open. Shrieking gusts pushed me across the floor. Neon green clouds of smoke enveloped me. I crawled around trying to find the doorway. Then I blacked-out for a time. Iâ m unsure of how long, but I have no memory of it.

When the clouds finally dispersed I was hanging dizzily in the branches of a tree forged of charred bodies, with a small hut constructed of mud, seeping blood, perched among the branches farther up the tree.

Seeing that I had nowhere to go, my curiosity impelled me to climb up to the cabin. I was especially convinced up was the right way upon looking downward. Fog swirled in ghostly rapids at the foot of the tree. Beyond the tree were black swamps, endless and uninviting, wherefrom periodic confessions emanated in the form of painful whispers.

I climbed the branches one by one in disgust. Faces of death, of decay, stared back at me and I wanted to close my eyes. Within time, I reached the hut safely. Lovely cinnamon aromas filled the air about it. I slipped through the curtain of beads in the doorway, laying eyes on a table, a small black stove in the corner, and a lady with her back turned. Her clothes were tattered and twigs and leaves were tangled in her hair, and her skin was unusually pale.

â Been waiting for you,â she said, without turning to face me.

â You have?â

â Oh, come on,â she laughed quietly.

Not sure what to say or do, I asked about the place.

â So where are we?â

â Thatâ s fine white clothing youâ re wearing, whereâ d you get it?â

â What does it matter to you?â I said.

â Tell me, where did you get those white clothes?â she pressed. â At Northlawn, didnâ t you?â

â I was told I was supposed to meet a lady, are you her?â

â Do you remember me?â

â No, of course not. Iâ ve never seen you before!â

â She looks much different now than in life,â interjected a voice from behind me. I recognized the voice as that of the spokesperson.

I wrenched agitatedly around in the doorway. Head to toe in a gray pinstripe suit, awkwardly stood a man with wavy gray hair, combed of course, sticking up in the air like heâ d used mousse. Across his face was a natural frown, while his eyebrows looked like piles of nails in the shape of crescent moons. His skin was pale gray and neck had a bluish, frozen look, like he was a mobster whoâ d been whacked and dumped in a freezer.

â It is my job to make sure my clients are able to move on in the afterlife.â

â Yeah, soâ ¦â

â This can only be done with your help. You see, that lady inside there was killed by a ruthless man and buried underneath that old cabin you were in.â

â Is that so?â

â It is.â

â What do I have to do then?â

â Why donâ t you ask her?â the spokesperson said.

I headed back to the lady, still making something by the stove.

â Gee, youâ ve been working for a while, why donâ t you take a break?â I asked.

â Iâ ve waiting too long.â

â Say, what are you making anyway?â

â A knife.â

â Why in the hell do you need a knife?â

Suddenly she faced me, with a white face of deep cuts and a reddish-purple line across her throat.

â So they come looking for you, Richard.â

Red slash, a bleeding gash.

â Rest in Hell, Richard Brigham,â the last line read.

* * *

â Frank.â

â Yeah.â

â Take a look at this.â

Frank calmly strolled over and saw the etchings as he approached the desk. Gary was suspended over the markings, reading, a puzzled look on his face.

â Death note?â Frank asked.

â No, a story,â Gary said. â He went all out on this.â

â What do you mean?â

â Thereâ s dialogue, characters, everything.â

â How do you know it was â ¦â Frank paused as he looked at the initials at the bottom which matched the escapee.

â By God â ¦R.B,â he mumbled.

â Richard Brigham,â Gary said aloud.

They exchanged suspicious glances.

â Shit, this just keeps getting weirder.â

â And check this out,â Gary ran his finger along a scratch in the table. â Remember that scratch we saw downstairs that circled in the middle of the floor? With the big X?â

â Yeah. What about it?â

â I bet it starts right here.â

They both looked down and saw the scratch on the side of the table, on the floor, and heading downstairs.

Frank knew Gary and his skills well enough to detect that he was on to something big, so he put a call into the Forensics Unit.

As soon as he hung up, Frankâ s phone vibrated. He answered.

â Any news on the Brigham case?â he asked.

â Yeah, we spoke with Janet, Mr. Brighamâ s daughter. Apparently he has been depressed lately, refused to go home from Northlawn for Thanksgiving. She said she tried to reach him the other day but the number was abruptly cut off.

â Uh huh.â

â You found anything there?â

â Gary found a story of some type carved into the desk. Believe it or not, it seems Richard may have written it, but no sign of him.â

â Found him Frank! Heâ s in the closet. I had wondered where the stench was coming from.â

â Iâ ve got to go; Gary may have found Mr. Brighamâ s remains here.â

* * *

Frank closed the door behind him and sat, coffee cup steaming a thin spiral that warmed Janetâ s face in the cold, padded room.

â Hi Janet, Iâ m Detective Frank Kurson, we are glad you could come down here. Iâ m sorry about your father, but there is something you should know â ¦ I promise to keep you updated as the investigation unravels more.â

Janet nodded distraughtly. Her arms gripped the arms in the chairs as if they were holding hands.

â Upon finding your father in the upstairs closet of the cabin, another hunch led us to search underneath the first floor wherein we uncovered a shallow grave with a series of skeletal remains, female remains that is, inside.â

Janetâ s eyes grew wide, stunned by the premonition. In her teenage years her mother had disappeared, and many clues at the time pointed to her leaving the US for the Caribbean.

â Now we are in the process of obtaining your motherâ s dental records, with the task of comparing them to the remains,â Frank said.

â He killed her didnâ t he?â Janet asked bluntly, with watery eyes and returning visions.

â At this point it is all speculation; we have a lot of missing pieces to sort out. However, given that your father died so close to the other remains, there is a possibility that they were killed by the same person, too.â

Teary eyes had already overtaken Janet, hunched and sobbing. Frank could barely continue, but he felt she needed to hear the last piece of evidence.

â â because we did find a business card at the scene, belonging to a Clarence Izzley. There is a possibility this may have been left by someone involved.â

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