

Concealed Ghouls

The strobe lights filled the dark forest with glaring red and blue as the police car skidded coming to a halt, kicking up a cloud of earth into the air. The driver side door flew open even before the car came to a complete stop.

“That’s his pick-up truck!” Officer Hall shouted as he jumped out of the car, and unholstered his gun. He dashed into the hiking path leading into the trees. “Dick, move your butt!”

“Hall, calm down!” Officer Dick called after him as he moved to catch up. “We have no proof he’s the killer.”

“Are you kidding me?” Officer Hall said between heaving breaths as he maneuvered the path with only the narrow beam of light from his flashlight. “He’s an old kook that lives by himself in a cabin in the woods where the victims gone missing.”

“That’s not evidence!”

“Ten years ago, the old kook was also the one who found the bodies of the very first victims. I looked it up. He has been missing the last few days, and now that he’s spotted being back, three other people go missing!” Officer Hall’s

voice was full of derision. “I can’t believe those useless detectives failed to put two and two together! Well, all the better for me...I mean us. We can be the hero—”

Officer Hall stopped abruptly and Dick almost ran into him. “What are you doing?” Dick asked.

Officer Hall bent down to the path. “Look. It’s blood.” He touched the blood trail with two fingers and held it up to Dick with a smirk of satisfaction. “Fresh blood. You still doubt me?”

Officer Dick unholstered his gun, a frightened look on his face. “I’m...I’m calling this in.” He reached for his radio but Hall snatched his hand.

“No! Dick, this is our chance!”

“We need backup!”

“He’s an old man, we can take him. You call this in and we lose our payday. Think about it – press coverage, promotions, pay raises, T.V. appearance fees...women! Do you want to continue writing traffic tickets for the next five years? Trust me, Dick. This is the best thing to happen to our careers.”

“I...I don’t know. It’s dangerous.”

“Let me add another incentive,” Hall said with a sly look in his eyes. “This old kook comes from money, a rich family. After we snag him, we go search his cabin before we call it in. Split what we find 50/50. You may even be able to buy that Mustang GT you wanted. Yeah?”

Dick remained silent with a furrow brow, and then nodded. “Yeah. Yeah, you’re right. Let’s do this.”

They followed the blood trail and before long, they spotted the shadowy figure of their target. The old man walked with a labored sideways limp. A huge lump rounded his back making him look like a hunchbacked ogre. On closer look, they discovered it was a large canvas sack slung over his shoulders, blood streaming out of it as he moved.

“Stop where you are!” Officer Hall demanded. Bang! The gunshot echoed loud and hollow in the night.

The old man collapsed to the ground with a cry of agony. “My leg!”

Officer Hall seized the man on the ground, flipped him onto his stomach and, with a knee dug into his spine, handcuffed the old man’s hands together. “We got you now, you old fart!”

“What are you doing?” The old man cried out in agony and pain.

“What do you think?” Officer Hall said. “Arresting you for murdering all those kids that came into the woods.”

“I didn’t kill them!” the old man cried.

“You think we are stupid or something?” Hall argued.

“You come back to town and kids go missing.”

“I was in the hospital for a bad ticker, the past two weeks!” the old man replied, wheezing hard and trying to catch his breath. “If you done some...due diligence... you would’ve...known.”

“Oh really? We caught you red-handed! What’s in the sack, old fart? One of your victims?”

“Hall! Over here.” Officer Dick called to get his attention. “You need to see this.” He was shining his light into the opened sack.

Officer Hall got off the old man and looked into the sack. It was bloody and gruesome, but not what Officer Hall had wanted. “What is this?” he shouted angrily to the bound and bleeding man on the ground. “Why do you have a deer carcass in a sack?”

The old man, panting hard, could barely speak. He gestured with his head to the right.

“What? Speak up!” Officer Hall shouted and shined his flashlight toward the direction where the old man gestured. “Over there? That cave? What about that cave? Talk!” Officer Hall was getting more and more irritated. “You buried your victims in there, didn’t you?”

“If...if...you don’t,” the old man wheezed out, “...if you don’t... feed it... it comes out to hunt.”

A deep rumbling growl came out of the black hole inside the rock face. The two police officers raised their guns, hands trembling. A pair of iridescent eyes, amber surrounding reddish brown orbs, appeared out of the darkness. Then pale flesh snaked out of the blackness, two unearthly gigantic arms covered in boils and scabs.

As unconsciousness overtook the old man on the ground, he heard the rapid fire of gunshots, followed by screams of the officers, terrifying and nauseating. The last sound the old man heard was that of bones breaking, reminding him of the meal he had that evening before getting to the forest – the fried chicken and the bones he crunched, sucking on the marrow.

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