

*In the Graveyard*  
By Danny Cove

There was the sound of a police car in the distance, but Rebecca Stinson didn't hear it. She was too busy listening to the ghost story being woven by her closest friend, Ashley Cormack. She also didn't hear the powerful boom from far distant, although she felt the vibrations from it reverberating in her chest and out toward her fingertips. If she'd been less enraptured by the tale that Ashley was telling her, she may have thought it was thunder, hinting at a storm coming their way. Ashley, however, faltered in her story as she heard the rumble, tripping over a few words and losing her steam. She quickly recovered and finished the story, then was about to begin another one but noticed that the rumble had caused their lone candle to fall over, the melted wax dousing the flame and spilling onto the fresh-cut grass around them. She sighed. She knew setting it precariously on a rock had been a bad idea. Better to relight it and set it on the tombstone instead.

You see, the two young ladies were in the middle of the cemetery, and it was dark. In the nocturnal absence of light, there were no shadows, only that seemingly impenetrable darkness, not even lit by starlight on account of the odd cloud cover of which neither girl took much notice. Quickly, Ashley pulled the lighter out of her denim purse and relit the candle, then set it on Jonathon Warbly's tombstone. Neither girl knew who Jonathon Warbly was, or why he'd left behind no memory except for a short and stubby block of granite.

While Rebecca was dying to hear another story from her friend, she didn't want to be completely silent the whole night, nor did she want to ignore the potential dangers she'd heard about. "You heard about that freshman that disappeared, right?" Ashley simply looked at her with that *Are you serious?* look of hers. "I heard he was out here the night he disappeared."

"A ton of kids were out here that night," Ashley responded. "That Barnes kid was just the new kid in town, caught in the crowd when the police broke up the party and everyone ran off. He was bound to get lost, especially in this place."

"But he was gone for three days," Rebecca pressed, turning her gaze to the black barrier of trees that marked the border between the graveyard and the forest. "No one knows where he was that whole time." She turned back to her friend. "This is where he disappeared. What if there's something here, something which messed with his mind?"

"He spent three nights out in the woods, by himself," Ashley said, seeming less than impressed, and frankly a bit annoyed that the fear in her friend's voice wasn't her own work. "But he's nice and safe in the hospital right now. Sure, I've heard he's crazy, but he was probably like that beforehand, for all we know."

Rebecca sighed and looked around nervously, then readjusted her position and faced Ashley again, indicating that she was ready for the next story.

"Okay, this story is called *The Girl Who Stood on the Grave*," Ashley began. "It goes that this girl was at a party one evening, just she and her friends, and they were telling ghost stories and legends, much the way we are tonight. So during the course of their stories, her brother tells this legend about how you can never stand on a grave at midnight or the person *in* the grave will reach out and grab you. Of course, this girl didn't believe her brother, but, wanting everyone to know just how brave she really was, she agreed to go and do it: to stand on a grave right at midnight. Her brother – and all the rest of them – didn't believe her, of course, but they were also too scared to follow her and make sure she really did it. So they came up with a plan. He gave her his pocket knife with the idea that she'd stick it right into a grave, and when they checked the

next morning, that would prove that she'd been there. Now I don't know why she didn't just take a selfie, but I'm assuming the story is that old.

Anyway, the girl leaves her house and heads out into the night, making her way by candlelight to the nearby cemetery. She chooses a grave much like this one, a new grave with a newer corpse buried beneath it."

Rebecca wanted to point out that there was nothing remotely new about Jonathon Warbly's grave, but she didn't want to ruin the story, so she kept quiet. Ashley, however, again faltered as she felt another of those strange rumbles. This time, however, it felt as if it were coming from deep beneath the ground, like thunder from far distant, or perhaps the tiniest tremor of an earthquake. Trying to skip over the interruption as flawlessly as possible, she continued her tale.

"So the girl stood on the grave and checked her watch as the minutes ticked by. Then, right as her watch struck midnight, she plunged her brother's pocket knife deep into the earth, then stood motionless for another five minutes. Nothing happened, no corpse rising from the grave to capture her, just the gloom of the dark cemetery beneath a darker sky. Then, at 12:05, she decided to leave, but after only a foot or two, she felt something stuck, something keeping her in place, holding her captive. She pulled at her long skirt, but something seemed to be holding it, grasping it at the end. The more she pulled, the more she felt like something was pulling her back toward that horrible grave. She turned to look at the grave, but all she could see was the gloom of the tombstone, which seemed to glow a shiny black as the girl fell over, the fear taking over her."

As Ashley continued to talk, Rebecca felt herself pulled away from the story. Something was beginning to seem off about the graveyard. Finally, she realized that it was the ground. To Rebecca, it felt...odd...funny, in some otherworldly way. It was almost like the grass and dirt on which they sat had been replaced with something that was pretending to be grass and dirt, but while Ashley seemed to have taken no notice of it, Rebecca could feel the difference. She made no remark on the odd sensation, however, not wanting to ruin Ashley's story, and wanting even less for her old friend to come to the conclusion that she'd lost her mind. *It's just the story*, Rebecca thought before refocusing on her friend's words.

"So the next morning, the girl's brother and their friends come looking for her, since she never came home from her midnight trip. They look all over the graveyard and finally find her, laying on top of the highest grave at the top of a nearby hill. The ground is still soft from the recent burial there, but more terrifying to the group is the girl's dead body splayed on the soil. She'd died of fright, believing that the dead person had crawled up out of the ground to pull her back under with him. And saddest of all was what had really grabbed her that night. You see, as she stood on the grave, she'd stabbed her brother's pocket knife into the dirt, accidentally stabbing it *through her own skirt*. It had been the knife that convinced her the dead had risen, and the knife which had scared her to death." With that final flourish of words, Ashley began to giggle, her morbid laugh echoing across the tombstones as Rebecca still stared, her eyes wide in fear and astonishment.

"Oh, come on, there's nothing to worry about," Ashley said after a moment of Rebecca's quivering silence. "The dead don't really climb out of their graves at midnight. I mean, do you really think old John here is gonna-"

Before Ashley had a chance to finish, there was the unmistakable sound of earth being shuffled aside and something dark and black slithered up out of the ground right beside Ashley's left hand, wrapping itself tightly around the girl's exposed wrist. She screamed and tried to pull

away, but more of the tendril slithered out, and some flecks of white flashed in the light of the candle, revealing the solid limb attached to that which held her firm. It was a *hand*, a dark, rotten *hand* which had pierced the surface of the grave and grabbed the normally braver of the two friends. With an unexpected strength, the corpse-hand retreated back into the earth, dragging the hand and then arm of the screaming, squirming girl with it. Rebecca jumped to her feet and was about to grab Ashley, to pull against the dead thing, when the ground shook and the grave began to collapse inward like a sinkhole, a depression appearing in the center and falling lower and lower, the soil at the periphery starting to fall inward. Ashley, unable to free herself, began to sink into that depression, and Rebecca – safe along the periphery – was unable to reach her without falling in herself. The dirt began to flood and pour downward until it began to resemble some black waterfall, the center of it opening up like the maw of some subterranean beast, like a mouth obscured by the influx of soil and dirt. Rebecca could only watch in horror as her friend's legs, then abdomen and torso sank into that chasm. Rebecca ran around the tombstone, hoping to be able to reach her friend from the other side, but by the time she got there, only Ashley's arm and part of her face remained, and as Rebecca grappled for that flailing arm, the last bit of her friend sank down into that chaotic darkness, pulled down by the rotting beast which had rested below them during their stories.

Rebecca backed away, her heart racing, as the tombstone shook violently, enough to topple the candle sideways, pouring dark wax on the surface of the granite marker. The flame miraculously remained lit, but only long enough for the candle to roll sideways into the waterfall of dirt and disappear, the last bit of light vanishing down into the ground. A second later, there was a slight shriek, as if the candle had burned the dead which lay without rest beneath the sinkhole of a grave.

Rebecca spun around in the darkness, scrambling away from the grave of Jonathon Warbly and colliding against other tombstones in the blackness of the night. In a few seconds, her eyes began to adjust and she could begin to discern other forms in the cemetery. The young girl realized with dread that Jonathon Warbly was not the only corpse active this night; all around her, more forms were beginning to appear from the empty patches of grass before the tombstones. What looked like hands and arms, in one place a white, round skull, were all breaching the surface of their graves and rising like zombies, dragging the dirt and sloughing the soil from themselves in an odd bid for cleanliness.

She spun around, looking for some way out among the graves, and she saw lean shapes standing at great distances away, thin, black forms that stood taller than any human should. Were these the dead who had already freed themselves from their coffins? Or were they other, stranger, more terrifying things whose presence literally woke the dead? Rebecca had little time to dwell on these things as her eyes settled on the dark mausoleum nearby. At twilight, she and Ashley had passed by it, noticing that it wasn't locked, that anyone who wanted to could simply walk right in and pay their respects. But it had been built with an iron gate on the entrance, a gate meant to keep those entombed within from being defaced by graffiti artists or grave robbers. Noting an open path to the mausoleum, Rebecca sprinted in the dark, narrowly avoiding a few grasps from dead bodies that were almost entirely free from the earth.

She hit the mausoleum's gate with a clatter and tore it aside, spinning around and closing and then latching the gate behind her. There was no padlock, but there was a latch that allowed it to be locked from within, and the panel on which the latch was inlaid was large enough that no one could simply reach in between the bars and unlock it from the outside. From her temporary safety, she looked outside and noticed the dead bodies walking and shambling toward the

mausoleum, their white eyes almost glowing, their bones flashing and shining despite the lack of moon or stars in the sky. And behind these remnants of human beings, those tall, dark shapes still waited, as if watching everything happen. But as she looked back at them, they seemed to take notice and begin gliding toward her, their thin heads and shoulders disappearing into what looked like the silhouettes of black cloaks which blended into the darkness which seemed to cover the whole floor of the graveyard.

Then something far more horrifying appeared out of that darkness. Rising on unsteady legs and then quickly finding balance, Ashley rose up. Her skin was much paler than it had been before, almost glowing in the darkness that seemed to surround the mausoleum now. Her eyes were black and there were odd lines – almost like stitches – moving across her face. But most terrifying of all was the crooked smile she wore as she walked casually up to the gate of the crypt in which her friend had barricaded herself.

“Rebecca,” Ashley croaked out in a distinctly non-Ashley voice. She tried again, and this time the voice was much closer to her old one, albeit with a dark tone and a steady creak to it. “Rebecca,” the former Ashley called out. “There’s more to the story which I never told you. Another ending.”

“Stay away from me!” Rebecca screamed through the gate as she backed deeper into the crypt, away from the corpses which pressed themselves against the entrance.

“I never told you about the shadows that the girl’s brother saw floating around the graveyard,” the thing which had been Ashley continued. “There were shadows which grew tall and strange, taking the forms of skeletons and giants. These shadows blocked out the sun and brought darkness on the boy who had sent his sister to die. These shadows raised the dead, seeking the life of the boy who had sent his sister to die. And at last, the sister herself arose, filled with the dark malice of those shadows, empowered by the dark force of the graveyard. And do you know what they did to that boy, and to the friends he’d led in the search for his sister?”

“Go away!” Rebecca cried, her cheeks wet with tears. “Go away!”

Ashley pressed her face against the door of the mausoleum, her dark eyes blinking slowly as they settled on Rebecca. Then the whites seemed to return, giving her a slightly more human appearance, though that crooked smile remained. “The graveyard swallowed them whole,” her voice creaked.

Suddenly, there was a clatter as huge, stone name plates crashed to the floor around Rebecca. The cubicles which held the bodies of those rich enough to be interred in this crypt were coming alive like those in the graves. Before they could reach her, Rebecca began climbing, using the remaining covers as footholds in order to clamber up five, ten, fifteen feet until she reached the ceiling of the mausoleum. But there was nowhere to go from there, and the grasping hands of the dead quickly gripped her ankles and yanked her back down, where the stink of rotting flesh filled her nostrils as the cold and grimy hands held her down.

From outside the mausoleum, a faint cry could be heard, and then Ashley and the dead that were with her backed away, toward the dark and swirling shapes that still waited at the periphery of the graveyard activity. With eyes glowing red in the darkness, they watched as the earth began to swirl around the crypt, and the entire structure started to sink beneath the earth, soon swallowed up by a waterfall of dirt and soil. When all trace of it was gone beneath a fresh level of sod, the shadows disappeared, taking Ashley and the dead with them, leaving nothing but toppled tombstones and the empty patch of earth which had once housed the bodies of the dead.