

April Ghouls: Just a Series of Normal Exorcism Stories With No Unifying Theme

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Well hello there, you mischievous little goblins. It's us again, as you might have expected, with something new, something fresh, something right out the incubator.

This week we thought that we'd challenge ourselves a bit with the stories we drip drip drop into your ears. How exactly? Why, with writing prompts! Three stories, based on a random assortment of two-word phrases; three tales, generated by the forces of chaos. How exciting!

deep sigh.

Unfortunately though, Sinjon, our foolish, chattering intern, only wrote two words into said randomizer. The word "Bear" and the word "Exorcism." Don't worry, Sinjon has been appropriately punished, and skinned. Or rather de-plated, I suppose. If only we'd discovered his blunder sooner our current predicament could have been avoided.

In any case though, a challenge is a challenge, and it's far too late to back out now. So, we now present you with three fiendishly crafted and totally **sigh** "randomized" yarns.

First off, a real doozy. It's called "Bear Exorcism."

It was cold, cold, too cold, thought Father Brebeuf as he huddled his way between dark pines after dark. He was so used to sweltering beneath the starched layers of his black cassock, his white collar, but now, though Spring had come, the chill of winter still lingered underneath these tall, dark trees. Was something moving there, in the dark, beyond the fence that ran among those trees? He did not allow himself to stop and find out: he did not want any answers.

Down the path, half seen through the dark trunks, a little cabin stood. A man waited for him, silhouetted by the single lightbulb in the cabin, crossing and uncrossing his arms against the cold. Jason, Jason. A good man. A good father. A good Catholic.

"Father," Jason said, as the old Jesuit stumped up the cabin's wooden steps. "Father, come in and warm up. It's cold."

"Yes," said Brebeuf. "Too cold, in these woods."

He went straight for the radiator in the kitchenette and began to warm his hands above it.

“Ye-es,” he said, feeling the life come back into red fingers. “Too cold indeed, Jason. It is one of the signs.”

“Then you do believe me,” said the young man. He ran fingers through his yellowish hair, and flung himself down into the battered sofa that took up one wall. “I was worried that you didn’t. I was worried I looked crazy, and that you were just humouring me.”

“No, Jason.” Said the old Jesuit. “I was not humouring you. Right from the beginning, when you told me she had begun... stealing things. Right from then, I was suspicious. There is a list of signs that the Vatican acknowledges. In this case, I have been able to check many off the list. The cold that surrounds her... The cutting, biting, and scratching of the skin. The unnatural body postures and changes to her face. The expulsions of... unknown fluid. The frenzies and rages. Yes, Jason... I am very far from humouring you in this.”

The Old Jesuit could feel Jason looking up at him: could feel the hope in his expression, but kept his back turned. Whatever hope the young man felt... Father Brebeuf did not share it.

“Then you’ve been to the Bishop?” Said Jason.

“Yes, Jason. I have been to the Bishop.”

“And he has approved the Exorcism??”

The Jesuit looked down at his hands. The life had returned to them, but how long, how long now before he had to return to the cold?

“No, Jason.” Said Brebeuf. “He did not.”

“But you said-“

“The Bishop does not believe me, Jason. The Church has grown... uncomfortable with the practice of Exorcism, even under ordinary circumstances, which... this is not. I sometimes think they have also grown uncomfortable with my Order. Perhaps we are a relic from another time. Perhaps we are no longer needed...”

“Father, that isn’t true,” said Jason. “You’ve seen her. You said it yourself. You’re needed more than ever before. Here, you’re needed most.”

The old Jesuit hung his head. More than anything, the young man’s faith was hard for him to stomach. His anger, his disappointment: Brebeuf could have handled those. But his faith... his faith was like a fist in the gut to an old, doubting sinner.

“She is possessed, Father. Only the Church can save her now.”

“No,” said Brebeuf, finally turning to face him. “The Church has turned its back. It no longer truly believes there are such things as demons and possessions. The church will do nothing.”

His shoulders sagged.

“But I,” he said. “I will do my best.”

Just then, the lone lightbulb in the cabin exploded, showering them both with glass, and plunging the room into bluish darkness.

Outside the cabin, beyond the fence, a heavy footstep fell upon the ground.

Brebeuf looked up, and saw the fear in Jason’s eyes.

“She is here,” the Jesuit said. The room had grown cold. Bitterly, freezing cold.

Reaching into his pockets, the old man produced an old, black, leather-bound book. He said,

“It is time.”

And with his heart pounding, he muttered a prayer for strength, and stepped to the door.

Outside, in the moonlight, he could see the outline of her, hunched against the base of a tree. There was a sound of retching, and a sound of vomit splattering over the ground. Brebeuf had seen this vomit on his last visit. He knew that it would be black and thick as tar, but veined through with streaks of pallid, vile white.

“Beverly?” Said Jason, with a quiver in his voice. “Father Brebeuf is here again. He’s going to help you, okay?”

She shifted in the darkness, looking up, and the nonsense words she had written on herself with white scar tissue stood out in the moonlight.

A deep, female voice spoke, and the sound sent a thrill of terror up Father Brebeuf’s spine.

She was muttering in Latin; who had taught her Latin? Who had taught her how to *speak*? He could not recognize all the words, but the ones he knew sent shivers through his bones. She spoke of fevers and the Gods below; of a Black Pig, of sending wasps to snatch away a heart; she spoke of things going like Salt and Water. He clutched for the cross around his neck with white fingers. It had gone as cold as the tomb.

As she spoke, she stood, and lumbered toward the fence, all eleven hundred pounds of fur and teeth and muscle.

The moon fell across her face: and the eyes above that scarred muzzle were solid black.

She smiled at him: oh God, oh God, to see a bear make a human face.

Her head tilted, and kept tilting, a full spin, three hundred and sixty tendon-cracking degrees, as she spoke.

“Bless Me Father, For I Have Sinned.”

Goodness me, you'd have to hear it to believe it. Moving on, we have an absolute bone-chiller. It's titled, and let me just check this... ah yes, “Bear Exorcism.”

It was the Wolf's Hour, and the smoky purples and oranges of the sky were fading away to black. The stars were just beginning to peek out from their hiding places behind the moonlit clouds, still deciding whether or not they would emerge—though they most assuredly would, as they did every night.

Nevertheless, it would be hours still until the Owl's Hour, when those stars would hang high and bright, and many hours more until the Time of the Lark, when they crept back behind the clouds to sleep.

Old Crack Tooth sat on his haunches, taking a last tired moment before what was sure to be a long night. Looking up and considering the stars, he hoped that the business at hand would not last until the Time of the Lark. For that was no time for a ritual such as this.

But all hopes aside, the night would go as it would go, and it was time to begin. The clan was assembled, waiting for their elder; waiting with anticipation, nervous optimism, dread. Crack Tooth himself felt a similar mix of emotions.

He knew well the spells he was to cast this night: the words, the postures, the lines of thought. He was versed, as all those predestined to become elders are, in the magics and runes of Father Claw, Mother Maw, The Sister, The Fisher, and The Great Sleep.

Still, it had been some time since he had performed such magics. Crack Tooth did not care to rely on such things. He believed that whatever could be done with tooth and claw and might

should be done. An over-reliance on magic would make a people weak; the weasels came to mind, now a race of small and slender tricksters.

And what more, magics were not so stable as they once were. Not since the rise of the man-creatures, those odd hairless beasts that seemed to have a way of bending nature to their will. In more recent years, as they had begun to build their strange tree boxes, tear up the land, use smoke and fire, and build better spears with the shiny grey-stone; they had begun to throw the natural order out of balance.

That was perhaps more so the reason that Crack Tooth had not practiced the ways for many seasons. But whatever the reason for his reticence—stated philosophy, or anxiety—he put it all aside. Magic was needed that night.

The old grey-fur made his way over to the place of the ritual, a flat stone in a clearing with the moon's light shining down unobstructed. Half Ear was bound down to that stone, writhing and screaming gibberish. It pained Crack Tooth to see him so; the young hunter was so often a font of wit and smiles, a natural leader now reduced to this pathetic state.

Half Ear's sanity, his life, his very soul were in the elder's paws that eve, all resting on his success in performing the Exorcism. Crack Tooth assessed the bear for another long moment, and then turned his gaze to the pitiful creature lying beside him.

A man-beast, a tiny scrap of a thing. Pale, lanky, bare but for the scraggly white mane that came from its head, and utterly still.

They called themselves druids, as Crack Tooth recalled. Man-beasts who eschewed smoke and fire, and shiny spears, and tried to "commune" with Nature through the Ways.

Crack Tooth simply called them "fools."

Nobody quite knew what had happened. Just that Half Ear had been scouting ahead on a hunt when his companions heard his shouts and saw a quick green flash in the distance. When they arrived the man creature was crumpled and empty and Half Ear was in a madness, trying to walk on twos and make impossible mouth sounds.

Crack Tooth had heard of similar things happening. That some of these druids were able to take those of the forest as slaves. Wolves and other small things were easier, but a great powerful bear was a prized catch to these men.

And *sometimes*, a man creature would be skilled enough to jump into the mind of another beast and assert dominance over its body. That was the terrible circumstance at hand. Half Ear's soul now hung in the space between spaces. Neither one nor two, half nor whole, here nor there.

But Crack Tooth was determined to save him. It was time. Time for the Ritual. The Exorcism.

With a swipe of his claw and a mighty tug, Crack Tooth cleanly tore one of the man-thing's arms from its body. Half Ear's head tilted to this sight and as the Druid saw this sight through Half Ear's eyes, a look of the utmost anguish came upon the bear's face. This look of anguish ratcheted steps further, and was joined by muffled roars of protestation, as Crack Tooth began to shove the arm down Half Ear's throat, and as he grabbed the young bear's jaw and forced him to crunch and chew.

To remove a loose soul from a foreign body was a thing beyond Crack Tooth or any bear's power. No... to remove a soul, you must make body and soul one again. Even if that needed to happen deep in the gut. Then, with the right spells, and with a few herbs to speed along the process, a more natural egress could be encouraged.

Crack Tooth looked at Half Ear's already bloodsoaked face and bloated stomach, and gave a tired sigh as he tore off another arm.

It was going to be a long night.

Wow. I sure didn't expect that. Did you?

Last but not least, we have something utterly terrifying, completely mortifying, and truly unique. It's a little story that the author has simply titled "Bear Exorcism."

Cardinal Lewis stared down at the large ruby that glinted from the Vatican floor like a blood red eye. An old man, even by Cardinal standards, Lewis couldn't bend low enough to grab it, so, grimacing at what he was about to do, he hiked up his vestments and gave the ruby a gentle kick toward a nearby staircase. It spun down the marble hallway with a nauseating skitter, as if the priceless Papal gem would crack at any moment, before settling near the edge of the stairs. He shuffled after it.

Cardinal Lewis took three steps down putting the jewel at just about eye-level. Carefully, he lifted it to the less cloudy of his two corneas. As he suspected, it was the same ruby that crowned the Holy Father's favourite ring. It had been pried loose, but who would be so careless? Who, in fact, had the strength?

The Cardinal shifted the ruby from one hand to the other as he continued his walk. Only now did he realize that the halls were unusually silent. Only now did he realize that something might be wrong. So Lewis did what he always did when faced with a vexing question: he made his way to

his favourite statue, a full-length marble representation of Augustus Caesar, where he could ruminate in peace. It was his one friend in this nest of vipers they called the Vatican.

Ahead, Cardinal Lewis could make out Augustus' blurry outline, and a smile of familiarity spread across his face. Then his expression froze. The familiar statue seemed amiss, somehow, but because of his cataracts it was only when he stood right beneath the marble pedestal that he could see the cause.

Someone had knocked the Emperor's head clean off.

Cardinal Lewis stumbled backwards as if he'd been punched in the . The head lay on the floor nearby, resting in the small crater it had made in the tile when it fell. Cardinal Lewis leaned in as close as his ancient knees would allow. A sticky, golden substance had been splattered across the marble features. Honey.

That's when he heard the growling.

Though his vision was poor, the Cardinal saw a small form clothed in white and gold emerge from behind the pedestal. It walked on all fours, hunched, and seemed to waddle back and forth with a bulk that was mismatched to its diminutive size. It approached him, and as it drew near, the Cardinal felt the growl boil into his ears and vibrate through the old bones in his chest.

Then the mitre came into focus.

"Is that you Holy Fath-?"

That was all Cardinal Lewis could say before his throat was torn out. Torn out by the same hands he had knelt before and kissed hundreds of times.

The small figure threw the still living Cardinal to the ground and a wheezing gasp escaped his lungs as fingernails of inhuman sharpness raked along his torso. From where he lay, Lewis could see Augustus's flat, empty eyes staring into his. My friend, thought the Cardinal. And then he died.

As the Pope tore at Cardinal Lewis's rapidly-cooling innards, three other Cardinals rounded the corner. Two of them froze, the colour draining from their already grey faces, but the third, who held a large open jar of honey, merely frowned and crossed himself in an irritated fashion.

"God forgive us," said Cardinal Villeneuve, before turning to his companions. He handed one of them the jar of honey. "Cardinal Sodano, Cardinal Cassidy, please lure the Holy Pontiff back into his cage."

Beneath one of Raphael's frescoes, Pope Ursicinus II lay supine and struggling on a mahogany table. The thick leather straps that criss-crossed his arms, legs, and torso creaked as tendons bulged from the muscles that were so impossibly strong for a 76-year-old man. The doors were sealed, not just to keep out prying eyes, but also to muffle the Pope's roars. Nearby a group of Cardinals huddled together, trying to make sense of the situation. They had only agreed on one thing.

Something was very wrong at The Vatican.

Cardinal Villeneuve stood apart, organizing his war room with crosses, holy water, and annotated bibles. Oh yes, it would be a war. He had seen this before as a young priest in northern Quebec. In fact, he still bore the scars: physical and emotional. But this time, with the stakes so high... this time would be different.

Quickly, he briefed the elderly prelates of the situation, of the particular kind of exorcism that was to take place. At first they scoffed, but Villeneuve was slowly able to argue them into a corner. His logic was inescapable. The Pope had a bear inside of him and it was their job to get it out.

One by one, the Cardinals stepped forward and arranged themselves around Ursicinus's writhing form. They would hold their positions for the next 72 hours. The ones that survived, anyway.

They chanted blessings. The Pope responded with blood-curdling growls.

They sprinkled his flesh with holy water. The Pope's fingers left claw marks in the soft wood of the table.

They laid their hands upon Ursicinus. His skin shuddered at their touch, as if he were shaking off horseflies.

The Pope escaped his bindings more than once over the course of the exorcism. Many Cardinals fell as he opened scarlet wounds in their chest, far too deep and wide to have been made by human hands.

Yet, even as his friends fell around him, Cardinal Villeneuve's faith anchored his boots and he stood his ground.

But, in the end, the exorcism was not a success. Inside the Pope, the bear had found a place it was comfortable and it is nearly impossible to move a comfortable bear.

So Villeneuve did the next best thing. He tamed it.

Over the following decades, Pope Ursicinus II and the bear lived in peace within a single body. Together they oversaw the resurgence of the Catholic Church. His policies became kinder and more generous. He became a fierce advocate against climate change so he would still have winters to sleep through. He opposed the violence of the fur trade. Abusers within the church were excommunicated with the ferocity of a mama grizzly protecting her cubs.

“A Pope for the people” the media called him, and they were half-right. He was, after all, a Pope so his occasional, un-Popely rages were forgiven. Nobody questioned the high turnover rate for Cardinals, nor the new man-sized flowerbeds that were planted, often in the dead of night, behind the Vatican.

Cardinal Villeneuve remained his closest advisor until his death at the ripe age of 90, and when The Pope cried over his body he was crying both man-tears and bear-tears.

Pope Ursicinus passed away in his sleep at the age of 102. His last meal was his favourite: the host, topped with a smidge of honey-glazed salmon.