

SKULLDUGGERY

“Please allow me to introduce myself

I'm a man of wealth and taste

I've been around for a long, long year

Stolen many a man's soul and faith.”

Sympathy for the Devil –Rolling Stones

So now you're here, let me tell you about my plight. I love shopping. Even better, I love shopping for things of a slightly odd nature. So when I came across the advert on line selling a 'cursed human skull,' I thought, great, that will look wonderful on the mantelpiece. Now I know, too late, that you should never buy *anything* from an internet marketplace with the words 'cursed' in the title.

I got an inkling that I'd bought something I shouldn't have when I ripped open the box in a flurry of excitement and found that the skull had eyes.

And it was staring at me.

I dropped the box on the floor in shock and watched, horrified, as the skull tumbled across the carpet and rolled behind my television set. I remember just standing there like an idiot, unsure of what I'd just seen. I was sure the picture on the advert hadn't shown it as having eyes.

“You can't just leave me here, woman. Come and pick me up!”

The voice was coming from behind the television. My God, the damned thing was talking to me.

“You're a skull,” I heard myself saying. “You can't talk.” I felt ridiculous even voicing the idea.

“Actually, I'm a demon, and as you can hear, I can most definitely *talk*. So stop loitering around over there and *pick me up!* I'm wedged.”

“You can bloody stay wedged too!” I snapped back, my voice wavering slightly. This was ridiculous. Someone was trying to wind me up. There must be a tape recorder or something hidden in the skull. But I couldn't forget those eyes I'd

seen staring back at me when I'd opened the box. They had looked disturbingly real to me. I didn't like this at all!

I stood there, rooted to the spot and clueless as to what to do next. When I finally managed to get my feet working again I edged out of the lounge and shut the door firmly shut after me. I stood there for a moment with my hand on the door handle, my mind strangely blank. What was I going to do now?

"Hey!" I heard the voice call. I ignored it. Skulls do not *talk*. "I know you're still there, I can hear you. *Hey!*" The last shout was so loud I was worried the neighbours would hear. I threw open the door again and rushed in.

"Shut up! Just... *shut up!* Stop *talking!*"

"Have you *any* idea what's living behind your television? It's disgusting. Do you humans not clean these days? Get me out so we can talk properly. Human to demon." I stared at the gap between the sofa and the television. What was I going to do? I couldn't leave it lurking behind the television, I'd never get a moments peace. "I ain't going to go away, lovey," the voice cooed.

"Alright!" I hissed. I got on my hands and knees and, before I could think twice, I thrust my hand between the sofa and the television and began gingerly fishing around. I could feel bits of carpet fluff and a couple of DVDs I'd thought I'd lost and then I found it.

"*Ow!* Get your finger out of my *eye!* I ain't a bowling ball you know!"

"Oh, shut up. Do you want me to get you out from there or not?" I pulled it out and dropped it roughly onto the carpet in my haste to let it go. The skull rolled and then righted itself. I crouched down to look at it from a safe distance. The lidless eyeballs stared around the room for a moment before coming to settle on me.

"Well, helloooooo sweetie! Which heavenly cloud did you fall from?" I blinked in disbelief. I couldn't believe it. A skull with eyeballs was resting on my front room carpet and it was... it was trying to chat me up.

"How is it possible that you can talk? Who are you? How did you end up getting sold on the internet of all places?" The skull rolled its eyes to the ceiling.

"Oh, not another one who does nothing but ask questions. In the days when I had a body, women were seen and not heard."

"In the days when you had a body I bet men carried clubs and communicated by grunting. Now, what the hell's going on?"

"Baby, I'm a demon, what more can I say? Have you got a chicken?"

“What?”

“I said have you got a chicken? If you could just slaughter a chicken for me and drizzle its blood on my head I can bust out of this skull and we can get down to some reeeeeeal fun.”

“Yeah, like that’s going to happen,” I cringed.

“Hey, come on, gimme a break here,” the skull complained. “I’ve been trapped in here for two hundred and thirty seven years. Can you imagine going that long without a shag? It’s just not funny anymore.”

“*How* long? Just how old *are* you?”

“Old enough to know a hot woman when I see one, now come on and get me a chicken.”

“Forget the chicken!” I shrieked. “Have you any idea how crazy this all is? I thought you were just some sort of replica skull when I bought you. There was no mention of you having eyes and being able to talk! I’m going to e-mail the guy I got you from and tell him I want a refund.” I started to get up.

“No point.”

“What?”

“I said there’s no point in trying to contact him.”

“Why not?”

“He’s dead.”

“*What?* How can you know that?”

“Because I killed him. I told him not to sell me. See what happens when people upset me?”

“Oh! Right! This has gone far enough. If I can’t give you back I’m going to... to... bury you!”

“Bury me? That’s a new one. I’ve been left in many places before but never buried.”

“Well there’s a first time for everything,” I snarled. I grabbed the box the skull had come in and just as it started to roll away from me I dumped it on top of the skull, stopping it in its tracks.

“Hey!” I heard the voice cry. “It’s dark in here!”

“And it’s about to get a whole lot darker you... you disgusting thing.”

The evening was drawing in as I got a spade from the garden shed and began hacking away at the soil in one of the flowerbeds. I managed to carve a hole big enough for the box and I booted it in with my foot.

“Easy! Easy!” the skull groaned. “I won’t be staying in here for long you know,” it snapped.

“Well *I* won’t be digging you out again!” I retorted as I began dumping clods of earth on top of the box. I ignored the maniacal giggling that started coming from the ground and, after whacking the soil down as hard as I could, I went back inside.

I couldn’t stop thinking about the... the *thing* I’d buried in the garden all evening. Surely it couldn’t get out of the ground again by itself. What could it do – chew its way out? Ridiculous. The whole thing was ridiculous. I snorted with disbelief as I climbed into the shower. As the hot water cascaded down my back the incident with the skull seemed more and more crazy, like a dream.

“Stupid!” I scolded myself. “I must have imagined the whole thing. I must have eaten something that disagreed with me...”

*“Please allow me to introduce myself
I'm a man of wealth and taste
I've been around for a long, long year
Stolen many a man's soul and faith.”*

I snapped the shower off and listened.

*“And I was 'round when Jesus Christ
Had his moment of doubt and pain
Made damn sure that Pilate
Washed his hands and sealed his fate.”*

My God. The damned thing was singing a Rolling Stones song. And very loudly too!

I leapt out of the shower, skidding on the tiled floor as I went. I grabbed a towel and headed for the stairs.

*“Pleased to meet you
Hope you guess my name
But what's puzzling you
Is the nature of my game.”*

I had to get to it before it broke into the louder and more raucous chorus. I flung open the back door and rushed out into the chilly night air.

“Stop it!” I shouted at the flowerbed whilst pulling my towel tightly around me.

“Hey, you’re back. I knew you would be.”

“Stop *singing!*”

“I like singing.”

“You’re going to disturb my neighbours!”

“Demons don’t care who they disturb darlin’, that’s why they call us demons.”

The disembodied voice began to break into another rousing chorus. I dropped to my knees, my half washed hair hanging in my eyes, and started scrabbling frantically at the dirt. From the corner of my eye I saw my neighbour’s kitchen light flick on. This was not good. I wrenched the box from the ground and ran back to the house, slamming the back door just as next door opened theirs to see what on earth was going on. I shivered from the cold night air and dumped the box on the side. Clumps of earth dropped onto my kitchen floor as I roughly tipped the skull out onto the kitchen worktop.

We eyeballed each other with mutual distrust. The skull was much better at eyeballing than me, what with it not having any eyelids. Eventually I blinked.

“Okay. I can’t sell you. I can’t bury you in my back garden. What the hell *can* I do with you?”

“If you’d just fetch me that chicken...”

“No! *No chickens!*” I growled through gritted teeth. “What have other people done with you in the past?”

The skull’s eyeballs rolled to one side as it thought about my question.

“I’ve been used in black magic rituals, I’ve been a door stop...”

“A door stop?”

“Not as bad as it sounds, actually. If I didn’t like the look of someone who walked past, I’d scream and curse them.”

“Delightful. What else?”

“I’m a really good listener. One guy I used to own had so many problems – mainly because of me, I have to admit – he always needed someone to talk to.”

“And where’s he now?”

“Committed suicide.” I covered my eyes with a muddy hand. “Don’t worry, darlin’, you and I are gonna have *lots* of fun together.”

“I’m never going to buy anything from the internet ever again!” I moaned into my hand. The skull just stared at me with its horrible unblinking eyes.

* * *

And so here I am, three years later, and the damned thing is still sitting on my mantelpiece. I put it elsewhere when I have visitors over, usually in the garden shed, but I can’t leave it there for long. When it’s not shouting for a chicken it’s singing that damned Rolling Stones song.

So, if there’s anyone out there who knows how to get rid of cursed skulls without getting the owner killed, please let me know. You’ll make me a very happy woman.