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Dead Birds

By Simon Barrett

-Morning, Miss Shaw.
-Good morning, Seth.
Halt.
Prepare to dismount. Dismount.
-May I help you?
-Manager in?
Back there.
Well, go get him.
-Yes?
-There's a soldier out here to see you.
Ma'am...
You MacCready?
Yes, I am.
Fred MacCready's the name.
How may I help you gentlemen?
Cpl. Smitherman says
you have a place where we can put this.
Did the corporal
give you a message for me?
Hey... Look at that.
Well, now, who are they?
I don't know.
Well, everything seems to be in order.
Sorry I had to check,
but you understand security these days.
Is there a safe we can take this to?
Best one in the state.
But you'll have to sign for it.
Sure.
Now, where are you men from?
Camp over that way,
about 20 miles to the east,
near a swamp.
Is that right?
Who's y'all's lieutenant over there?
We ain't got a lieutenant right now.
Captain Lewison's around, though.
What are y'all doing here in town?
We got some business at the bank.
I'm afraid you're gonna
have to wait a few minutes.
No...
Can't wait.
Now, you hold it right...

Nobody move!
I don't think so...
Hey, there...
Did you get that teller, Annabelle?
I didn't even see that.
The bags heavy, Johnson?
Hell, yes!
It's about time.
Here they come.
Stop right there! Halt!
Wait up, little brother.
Shit.
Y'all ride on ahead.
We got a ways to that Hollister place.
-How many do you think'll be after us?
-Not many at first.
Those'd be the only ones
who could catch us.
-You're hit.
-Yeah, I know.
It's just in my shoulder.
I can move it around.
It's not close to the bone or anything.
Which way now?
This way.
William, tell us we ain't lost.
We ain't lost, Clyde.
We got a couple more miles of this
and then we'll be there.
Hey, old man...
You get you some deserters?
Eight... today.
We was lookin' for
that old Hollister place.
Hollister...
Never heard of it.
You sure about that?
Should be a large farmhouse
right past the creek.
There are no creeks around here,
not for miles.
I've seen servants upon horses,
and princes upon the earth...
You best be moving on.

We'll keep heading this way.
Can't be more than a couple miles out.
He ain't got the slightest notion
where we're going.
Yeah, well...
another good plan, huh?
Shoot. Crazy old man.
Do you see a pathway up to the house?
Must have grown over.
-Is that it?
-I said it'd be here.
Hey...
Come look at this.
Looks like a man.
Doesn't look like no scarecrow.
Do you want me
to take it down, Miss Annabelle?
No, it just scared me a bit.
Let's move on, shall we?
Good shot, Sam.
What the hell is that?
Jesus, Joseph!
Somebody shaved
the skin right off that boy.
It don't look like any kind
of mountain cat I ever seen.
It looks like a wild boar or something.
Let's get to that house.
The sooner we get inside, the better.
Big storm coming in tonight, William.
Listen up! Let's get that gold inside.
And bring your lantern.
We head out for Mexico in the morning.
-Who'd you say runs this house?
-No one.
-No one?
-It belonged to a soldier I knew,
but he's dead now, so...
the place is empty, I reckon.
The place looks deserted.
No shit. I think we got that figured out.
What the hell?
I just stepped on a bird.
Yeah? Come on.

I wanna get that bullet out of you
before it gets infected.
Yeah, all right.
Dog!
Oh, hell...
What's going on?
It's probably just some tramps.
Let's look around and find 'em.
There's only two of 'em.
All right, but let's all be careful.
It's real...
It's real.
Don't chew on the gold, Joseph.
You and Clyde go look upstairs.
Todd and I will check this floor.
I ain't never been in a house this big.
So many rooms.
Whoever built it
must've been pretty damn rich.
I guess we're richer
than him now, though.
We ain't richer than nothin'.
Not yet, anyhow.
How do you mean?
Don't hurt yourself trying to think,
but right now, that gold's downstairs.
-That ain't mine until it's in my pocket.
-That's for true.
I'm gonna feel a lot easier
when we're in Mexico holding our shares.
If William thinks we're taking
the same share as that nigger,
he's got another thing coming.
You check that room,
and I'll look in this one.
You hear me holler,
you come running, get it?
You, too.
Todd?
I think I heard something.
-You can't get it open?
-No, it's stuck good.
No knob turning. It ain't locked.
Well...

We'll find something to pry it open.
Let's come back to it.
Anyone here?
Come on...
Come on, get out!
Why'd you do that?
I like to breeze
through the trees, Corporal.
Is there anything in here?
No. Did you find anything?
Just some clothes.
Looks like a guest room or something.
The bed's still made.
Let's check the barn out back, nance.
Yeah.
There.
You're done.
Goddamn it, Annabelle!
That'll do.
You could've told me
you were gonna do that.
-Stop whining.
-Ow.
What is this place?
Slave quarters.
There's a book over here.
Any of this mean anything to you?
They're spells, for raising the dead.
How much you figure our share'll be,
lookin' at that gold?
Less than it should.
Sure would be easier if
we was to divide it by two, instead of...
We got...
That kid already got a bullet in him.
I reckon you could
take care of our lady friend.
-Did you find anything in here?
-No, it's empty.
It's not a bad time for a storm.
It could wash away any tracks we left.
Ground'll be muddy tomorrow,
leave tracks that'll last for days.
You hear me ask your opinion, boy?

'Cause I didn't.
Ain't no boys in here, speculator.
I wasn't speculating on you.
I wouldn't have no use for you.
None at all.
I don't see any pine trees
for you to hide behind up in here.
I'll knock those eyes
straight in your head.
Shut up, the both of you.
I wonder how they got up in there.
There ain't no ladder.
This place is gonna
turn me into a little girl.
Well, if there was anyone here,
they're long gone by now.
Come on.
...ante up over there.
That's it.
I swear...
They said there were
some beds upstairs.
I'm gonna go lie down for a while.
What is it now?
Three...
Another three.
My bet.
Joseph, come on now, boy.
Do you remember the hospital
where we first met?
First time we talked after you woke up?
And you, me, Jeffy Hollister...
And he told us about this place.
Did he ever say anything about
the folks that he inherited it from?
Yeah, some great-uncle or something.
Had he ever been out here?
I don't think he had.
-Carried around all those maps.
-Mm...
It was awful watching him go.
He called me "Belle."
I wanted you the first time I saw you.
Annabelle...

I think I killed a kid in town today.
Did you see it?
I'm out. I'm done.
Wise decision, nance.
Wiser than our friend here
who'll lose his share of the gold
before he gets to count it.
You know, Clyde,
you'd be a lot better at bluffing
if you played it down a bit.
See your three.
I'm up five.
Hell, I best get these horses in...
...before that storm hits.
You do that.
I bet you're as tired as I am.
It's been a rough day, hasn't it, boys?
Nothin' to worry about,
now you're in here.
Storm ain't gonna hurt you none.
You did good today, Passion.
I'm gonna get you all fed
and watered now.
I guess you don't need this.
I do.
Be right back.
Please, help me!
Is somebody down there?
Please, mister. Hurry!
Let me out of here!
-Can't see you.
-My daddy threw me in here!
Well, hell!
My Lord!
-I'll throw a bucket down to you.
-Hurry!
Damn!
Hurry! I'm cold!
Just grab hold on it.
-I'm gonna pull you up out of there.
-Hurry!
You got it?
All right. Grab hold, both hands.
Come on.

Well, damn!
Hurry!
Damn! What...?
You OK there, Sam?
I don't know...
This thing is itching me.
It means it's healin'.
I guess so.
How long do you think
Joseph's been gone?
Belle...
I'll be back for you, Jeffy.
Isn't she beautiful?
I think she's the most
beautiful girl I've ever seen.
As soon as I heal up and get out of here,
we're going to get married.
She told me so.
Bastard...
Bastard!
-What is it?
-Joseph's gone.
-What do you mean, he's gone?
-He disappeared.
He went to take the horses to the barn
and hasn't come back yet.
We're all out lookin' for him.
I'll be right down.
Todd and Clyde are out back.
Are you comin'?
Yeah, I'll be along in a minute.
Dog!
Joseph?
You seen him?
I thought I heard Dog in the field.
I went after him, but...
he must have gotten turned around
in there or something.
You couldn't find your way out there
in daylight,
much less at night with a storm coming.
Joseph?
He'll either come back or he won't.
Let's all keep our pistols handy.

I gotta take care of something.
I'll be around in a minute.
We shouldn't leave
the gold unattended again.
We've been lucky so far,
especially with those two around.
Do you think they're
planning something serious?
Things are different now.
From now on, one of us three
stays with the gold at all times,
no matter what.
At least until we figure out
what's going on here.
-Got that?
-Yeah.
All right.
Dog?
Hey... Hey, now.
Stay with the gold.
-What is it?
-There was a boy in here.
-A boy?
-He ran out.
You all right?
Yeah, I'm fine. It just...
It just scared me, that's all.
Maybe it was the light.
-Was it a young kid?
-Yeah, he was young. He was small.
If there was a boy here,
Sam will find him.
We're the only ones on this floor.
-Could he have gone out a window?
-I don't see how.
He didn't go downstairs.
We would have passed him.
-Sure you weren't dreaming?
-No! He could've gone out another way.
-If there was a boy...
-It wasn't a dream.
-Sam?
-Sam? Sam...
On your feet.

-You all right?

-Yeah, I'm fine.

I just got queasy after running up
all these goddamn stairs.

-You need to lie down and rest.

-I'm OK. Just give me a minute.

-Lie down.

-Come on.

Annabelle...

I believe you about the boy.

Get some rest.

-I didn't say I don't believe you.

-No, you just said I had a bad dream.

Oh, Christ, Annabelle.

Sam's wound is infected.

He won't be in a condition to ride
if it gets much worse.

All right, fine.

You got any suggestions?

It's just that...

There's something wrong with this place.

There was something awful
about that boy upstairs.

-Why can't we leave now?

-There's no chance of leaving tonight.

We can't just leave Joseph here.

He could be passed out somewhere.

What have you been doing?

Did you see Joseph come by?

I could've sworn I saw him
moving around in there.

You sure it was him?

I saw a head and shoulders
moving through the rows, but...

What?

Then I didn't see it no more.

It's either him

or something pretty big.

Our Father, thou who art in heaven...

My parents used to lie in this bed.

This is where my mother was
when the consumption took her.

Though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death

I will fear no evil...
I had to do it.
I put the children
where they'll never be found...
...by anyone.
I tried to bring my wife back,
but they tricked me.
They changed my children into demons.
Who are you?
Where is my wife?
Where is she?
Where is she?
Clyde here says
he saw Joseph and Dog.
At least it was some kind of animal.
Planning on keeping
this gold out all night?
We'll stand and watch over it. Why?
I say we divide it now,
so we're each carrying our own shares.
Seems safer.
And I said we divide the gold up
when we get to Mexico. Not before.
Doesn't make any sense, William.
Joseph's missing, we don't know where.
-The way it is, Clyde.
-Part of this gold is mine.
You'll get it when we're out of the country.
It's the way I say it is.
That's final.
Doesn't make any difference, I guess.
I'm gonna go get some rest.
You do that.
Sam!
Sam!
Please...
Who's there?
How'd you get in here?
Hey?
Listen, kid...
You need to tell me
if there's someone else in this house.
Did something happen?
How did you get in here?

Help me! Please help me.
Please let me go! I didn't do nothing.
I won't tell nobody about the others.
The others? Did you run away?
I didn't see nothing.
I didn't see nothing.
Hold tight. They used rawhide on you.
Oh, God, it hurts!
Yeah, I know. I know.
-Please help me. Hurry!
-Hold tight. I'm gonna cut this off you.
-Oh, God. He's here!
-What?
He's here! Oh, God, he's here!
He's here! Oh, God, he's here!
-Help me!
-I don't see anything.
Hold on. Just hold on.
Hold on.
Who did you see?
Joseph...?
Sam...
The gold.
Clyde.
Clyde!
You stay here with Annabelle. Understand?
Sam...
Where's William?
Where is the gold?
Will's taken care of it.
What's that?
A door.
-A page from that book.
-What are you talking about?
It's no door that you would understand.
It's for sacrifice.
First, all the slaves...
...all the cheap ones
and the females past their prime.
You have to follow certain rituals
to be heard.
Most think of them as spirits and ghosts.
But they have always been here.
They exist in a world around our own.

They wanna change what's in this world.
They wanna... torment us.
I don't understand.
Annabelle...
This really hurts.
I think something's wrong.
All right. Let me look at it.
What is that?
I don't know.
We have to get you to a doctor.
You have some sort of an infection.
I may be able to
get you something for the pain.
No.
It don't hurt no more, Belle.
What?
What did you just call me?
I wanna show you something.
Here.
Come on.
Don't you wanna see what they did?
You were shot. I was there, remember?
No! Preacher said
shooting's too good for me.
-They left me to rot for what I did.
-Sam, what are you talking about?
Sam?
Sam...
Sam.
-I can't see...
-Stop calling me that!
-Stop this!
-Where did you put the bodies?
-Where are your children?
-Where they belong!
Hoist him up there!
I've opened the door.
They're here forever!
Fine. We'll see you get
a taste of hell in this world
before you pass on to the next.
You'll see!
Just wait!
-Come on, Jeffy.

-You will know, neighbor!
Just you wait and see.
You have no idea...
Todd! Joseph!
Where the hell are you, goddamn it?
What is it?
I saw everything.
What exactly did you see?
What's wrong with Sam?
I don't know.
Sam?
He's dead.
-What the hell happened here?
-I don't know.
-Was it his wound?
-It's this place! It did something to him.
What do you mean, "this place"?
Why would Jeffy Hollister
send us here?
-What do you know about this farm?
-What are you talking about?
It was a trap, William!
The farmer that lived here,
he sacrificed his slaves...
...in some sort of ritual
to bring his wife back.
He killed them
because they turned into beasts.
Demons. I saw it.
We need to get outta here, William.
Sam's dead, Todd.
Where the hell have you been?
We need to get as far away
from this farm as we can.
We're not leaving here
without the gold.
-The gold?
-Yeah.
The gold. Remember?
We left you here watching it.
Two against one, Todd.
What are you thinking about?
You know I'll kill him,
Miss Annabelle. You ain't that quick.

Maybe.

He won't be lonely long if you do.

-I should've left you all here.

-You watch yourself.

I've ridden with you a long time.

I've saved your life many times.

-That don't make it yours!

-Put the gun down, Todd.

You had no part in this?

That gold don't mean nothing now.

It's gone.

No...

We find Joseph and Clyde,

and we find that gold.

Did you hear that?

What?

Now it's gone.

Todd...

Forget about Joseph and Clyde.

Your brother's dead.

Let's get on our horses

and get out. Right now.

I don't care what you decide.

It don't matter what you do.

Todd!

Wait just a goddamn minute!

Look at that.

What could have done this?

Looks like I'm walking!

What the hell could have done this

to the horses, William?

-Do you hear that?

-Hear what?

No more.

I can't trust my eyes anymore.

There are worse things to die of.

I'm not leaving here without that gold.

I am.

Annabelle, if you wanna leave,

go with Todd. I'm staying here.

Sam's not dead. He walked out of here.

-Didn't look like he was walking anywhere.

-Well, he's not here now!

He was dead!

Whatever took his body
took it to keep us here.
We have to find him.
William, listen to me!
What is it?
Someone must have come through here.
-Let's keep moving.
-No. Hold on.
-Let's go.
-No, wait!
That's Clyde up there!
Here.
He's all tied up with hemp.
Hold on.
Oh, my God!
What did they do to him?
Have you got your razor?
Slow down!
Annabelle!
William!
William!
William, where are you?
Who's out there?
William!
Where are you?
William!
Dog?
What in God's name is that?
That is the ugliest damn thing
I've ever seen.
It jumped right at us, didn't it?
Gave me a scare.
Unless you're fixin' to eat it,
leave it alone. We need to get.
Mount up.
Captain...
Maybe we should check the house, sir.
It came this way.
Johnson and I can check the area
and catch up with you later.
All right.
But I want you back with us
before sundown.
Move it out, men.

We've wasted enough time on this.

-What's this all about?

-Here, look at this.

-Is that gold?

-Uh-huh.

-Where did you find it?

-Get off me.

Right here.

Must have dropped it.

All right...

...come along.

-Johnson?

-What?

Here's another one.

-Another one?

-Uh-huh.

Damn, he was ugly.