

WATERY GRAVE

Ghosts of the Forgotten

Written by

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EXT. LAKESIDE DOCK - NIGHT

SUPER: Cayuga Lake, NY - 1860

A weathered 45 foot steamer rests at the shabby dock. A pair of workers load a barrel of molasses up the rickety ramp to the idling ship. Nearby, 2 men converse in angry whispers.

Tall and gaunt, Pastor GARRETT FAIRBANK (60WM) is in tense negotiation with stocky boat captain SILAS BISHOP (45WM), who scowls and glares suspiciously as he counts a handful of cash. More is demanded, and the priest pleads with his brutish companion to accept his meager payment.

GARRETT FAIRBANK

Please, Mr. Bishop. It's all I could get. You can't leave them here. It's inhumane.

SILAS BISHOP

I'm a businessman, Father. You pay for 5, you get room for 5. Not 6, and definitely not 7.

GARRETT FAIRBANK

They are innocent children, sir! Surely you would not separate them from their mother--

SILAS BISHOP

Listen Father. The kids are another \$25, period. And I want real money this time, none of that worthless Confederate shit.

GARRETT FAIRBANK

I have given you everything.

SILAS BISHOP

Not everything. Where's the watch?

The anguished priest pulls out a small gold pocket watch. Bishop snatches it away and examines the Swiss filigree.

SILAS BISHOP (CONT'D)

I'll give you 15. Wait, I'm feeling generous. I'll give you 20. Or they can stay here, I don't care.

GARRETT FAIRBANK

Please sir, have mercy on these poor souls. Their father has been recaptured. They have no one else.

SILAS BISHOP
 Maybe the kids can take her place
 and SHE can stay here.

Voice tinged with icky sleaze and ill-intent, he adds:

SILAS BISHOP (CONT'D)
 Boys could use a new galley wench.

GARRETT FAIRBANK
 (firmly)
 No. She is a God-fearing woman who
 has put her faith in me. I shall
 see this through to the end.

SILAS BISHOP
 Well, yer Holiness, just bring me
 \$5 more and everybody's happy. I'm
 leaving in 10 minutes either way.

GARRETT FAIRBANK
 You would deny these innocent
 children the chance to accompany
 their Mother to freedom. Have you
 no heart? No compassion? No soul?

The burly ferryman tosses the watch, catches it and tucks it
 into his tattered coat pocket.

SILAS BISHOP
 Nope. Fuck you. Pay Me.

EXT. - SHIP'S DECK - CONTINUOUS

Onboard the ship, teens CALEB and JEREMIAH BISHOP prepare
 the steamer for launch. The molasses container sits next to
 4 other similar barrels. From inside one of them, a quiet
 cough is heard. Staring through a narrow crack between the
 staves is the wide, fearful eye of a young black woman.

JEREMIAH BISHOP
 Shut up, ya stupid bitch.
 You're gonna get us caught.

CALEB BISHOP
 Do it again and we'll dump your
 black ass overboard.

The men chuckle darkly at the threat.

INT. - WOODEN BARREL - CONTINUOUS

Inside the damp confines of the barrel, the claustrophobic stowaway covers her mouth with both hands to stifle another cough. Tears stream down her face as she sobs in silence and strains to hear the men talking on the dock.

One of the deckhands moves a lantern, placing it on the grimy deck. Through the wooden slats, the flickering light illuminates the inside of the barrel.

The lid is covered in scratches, parallel lines dug into the interior in bloody rows. The woman spies a torn fingernail embedded in the wood. Her eyes widen in sudden realization and she screams in terror.

CUT TO BLACK.

Title card: WATERY GRAVE

EXT. LAKESIDE RESORT - EVENING

SUPER: Cayuga Lake, NY - PRESENT DAY

The sprawling lakeside hotel is packed with customers celebrating the 200th anniversary of Bishop's Crossing.

Fine diners enjoy lake trout and green beans amandine at a dockside restaurant. White-gloved waiters hustle about, popping corks and pouring wine.

INT. - BISHOP'S CROSSING INN - CONTINUOUS

From inside a wine cellar below the bar, an oak barrel is rolled up a cleverly-hidden ramp. Employees hoist the dusty wooden cask into position on it's cradle-like base. It's one of the barrels from the prologue. A tuxedo-wearing SOMMELIER approaches with a tap in one hand and a mallet in the other.

SOMMELIER

To celebrate our bicentennial, Mr. Bishop is going to share a wine that's been in his family's cellar for 145 years.

Interested murmurs animate the crowd.

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)

It was presented to Silas Bishop as part of the country's 100th anniversary back in 1876.

The customers are now attentively listening.

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)
This was just after the ferry sank
and he lost his sons, so it was
never opened.

Understanding looks from the eager locals.

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)
But we've been given permission to
open it here tonight, the old-
fashioned way.

The wine expert motions to the wooden keg and centers his
spigot over the bung.

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)
Now to be honest, we're not quite
sure what we're gonna get here. The
local vintners relied on the local
Concord varieties pretty heavily.
And they would age the wine in
these molasses barrels.

He raps on the wood with a knuckle, eliciting nods and
grunts of interest from the audience.

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)
Which means, it might be a really
nice, dry, sweet red.

Excited anticipation fills the room.

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)
But, we could have had some air or
mold seep in over the years.

Disappointed groans from the crowd. The host adds:

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)
But I think our odds are pretty
good, don't you folks? So let's
find out. Ladies and Gentlemen,
without further ado:

He raises the mallet to strike a ceremonial blow.

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)
I give you the 1876 Chateau Bishop!

The man gives the metal spout a solid thwack. It does not
penetrate, prompting a few snickers from the crowd.

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)

Now, especially in wines with high sugar content, sediment can build up around the bung, which can sometimes make these older casks a little tough to tap.

He grips the mallet purposefully and with a powerful effort tries once more to hammer home the tap. The resulting thud causes the barrel to shift backward in it's cradle. The spigot is now halfway in.

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)

Alright. Almost there. One more ought to do it. Is Mr. Bishop here? He should get the first glass.

A passing waitress shakes her head no and he continues.

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)

He's not? Well, who else would like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to sample this unique vintage?

The crowd enthusiastically gathers around, glasses in hand, hoping to sample this intoxicating taste of local history.

The man takes another swing at the spigot and stands perplexed as muffled laughter erupts. The tap hasn't moved.

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)

Sorry folks, sometimes you've got to call for backup. Jimmy! Come here. I need your muscles again.

An athletic server walks over, takes the mallet and delivers a crushing, two-handed blow to the steel spout.

The oak cracks and splinters as a dark slurry spills out onto the black and white tiles of the marble floor. Jimmy stands covered in gore and retching in revulsion as an overwhelming stench reaches the panicked crowd.

Bits of tattered cloth are mixed in amongst the vile deluge, and globs of goo ooze from the fractured barrel. A small, off-white object tumbles out. It bounces twice and comes to rest, instantly recognizable as a human tooth.

SOMMELIER (CONT'D)

Oh my God!
(to horrified waitress)
Call Mr. Bishop, right away!

EXT. LAKESIDE CABIN BACK PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

ALAN DECKER (72WM), sits scowling in an Adirondack chair on his deck. Across the lake he follows the flashing lights of police and EMS. He drains his beer and rises, wincing and rubbing the surgical scars on his knee.

ALAN
Don't call. Not tonight, Elise.
I'm tired. Enough already.

At the screen door, an aged black lab watches patiently as a fluffy white chihuahua scampers at his feet. The landline rings, prompting a stream of barks from the tiny pup.

ALAN (CONT'D)
Shut up, Babs.

Irritated, he runs both hands through his thinning, silver hair and shakes his head.

ALAN (CONT'D)
Goddamn it.

He turns, steps over the old dog, and goes inside.

INT. LAKESIDE CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Pillow and blanket on the sofa, a pizza box and numerous beer cans on the coffee table. Alan clears some debris and takes the phone from the end table. He answers wearily.

ALAN
Yeah, I see it.

ELISE (O.S.)
They found a body in a wine barrel.

The dogs hear her voice and tails begin wagging.

ALAN
Fascinating.

ELISE (O.S.)
Hang on--

The fluid, high-speed tapping of a master keyboard user.

ELISE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Molasses?
(rapid keystrokes)
Oh, OK. That makes sense.

ALAN
And HOW do you know this?

ELISE (O.S.)
I'm glad you asked. Sarah at the
front desk dates Jimmy, who works
in the bar. Wait a sec--
(pauses)
EWWW!

ALAN
What?

ELISE
Sarah just posted something.
Jimmy's clothes are ruined.

ALAN
Sucks to be Jimmy. Were you there?

ELISE
No, but I was texting Sarah's
sister when it happened--

ALAN
Is there a point to this?

ELISE (O.S.)
Well duh.
How'd a dead body get in there?

ALAN
I don't know.
Maybe they fell in at the winery.

ELISE (O.S.)
Oh, come on Alan. That's bullshit.
What are we missing?

ALAN
Well, for starters: How did that
barrel get to the Inn?

ELISE (O.S.)
That's just it! It's been sitting
in their wine cellar for a HUNDRED
and FORTY FIVE years!

Alan raises an eyebrow but feigns indifference.

ALAN
None of this has anything to do
with me, Elise. I'm retired.

ELISE (O.S.)
 Sure you are. I'm coming over, Al.

He rolls his eyes in futility and clears the clutter.

ALAN
 Don't call me Al.

ELISE (O.S.)
 (apologizes)
 Oh, right. Sorry.

ALAN
 And I DON'T want you to come over--

ELISE
 (brightly)
 I'm still coming over. Ciao!

Not entirely displeased, the half-smiling lawman hangs up the phone and rises to his feet. The dogs swarm excitedly in anticipation. He stares longingly at the woman smiling in a wedding photo on the mantle, musing:

ALAN
 What am I supposed to do?
 She won't leave me the hell alone.

EXT. LAKESIDE CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

A heavily-stickered Prius pulls into the driveway behind Alan's pickup. Next to the truck sits a tarp-covered vehicle on wide radial tires. Popping out of the hybrid with her purse and laptop is ELISE, a 27 year-old black woman.

ELISE
 (on phone)
 Eww, no. I wouldn't either. Tell him to take a bath in tomato juice.
 Yep. Ok, I gotta go. Bye bye bye!

Putting her phone away, she pats the fender of the shrouded mystery car affectionately as she walks by.

ELISE (CONT'D)
 (musing)
 Hey sexy. Has Daddy taken you out to play lately?

Opening the front screen door and leaning out, ALAN offers:

ALAN
 No. I'm re-jetting the carburetor.
 Waiting on parts.

ELISE
Did you order them online?

ALAN
No, I--

ELISE
(teasing)
Why did I even bother fixing your
WIFI? I'll order them--

ALAN holds the door for her as she breezes past, pausing to give him a hug as she enters.

ELISE (CONT'D)
Now, where are my babies?

The dogs excitedly fall over themselves coming to greet her. She puts down her things and crouches to accept the puppy love. Between sloppy canine greetings, she inquires:

ELISE (CONT'D)
Pizza and beer, again?

ALAN
So? C'mon Elise, get off my back.

ELISE rises to stand, hands on hips.

ELISE
Well, somebody's got to look after
you. Betty would've--

ALAN
(annoyed)
Betty would've what?
You're not my guardian angel.
I didn't agree to that.
Besides, Betty liked pizza.

The curious black woman lifts a cold piece of Meat Lover's Special and sniffs to determine it's age.

ELISE
I do too, Papa John.
Just not seven days a week.

She drops the listless slice to it's cardboard coffin.

ALAN
I've been meaning to get to the
grocery store, just haven't gotten
around to it...

ELISE
Uh huh. Sure you didn't.

Out of excuses, Alan grabs a pair of brewskis.

ELISE (CONT'D)
Well, you'd better go soon, before
the National Geographic people get
here and clean the place out.

He cracks open both cans and hands one to Elise. The grizzled ex-cop takes a pull from his foamy brew, adding dismissively:

ALAN
I thought it was the Discovery
Channel?

ELISE
They're already here. Saw the
trucks unloading the submarine out
by the feed store.

ALAN
Oh goody.
Who's next, Jacques Cousteau?

ELISE
Who?--

The woman slugs down some beer and issues a healthy burp.

ALAN
Doesn't matter.

ELISE
All I'm saying is, Downtown is
gonna be a mob scene next week, so
you'd better go now.

ALAN
I keep telling ya, they aren't
gonna find squat. That water is
freezing cold, pitch black, and
four hundred feet deep.

The pair sip their malty beverages before Elise chimes in:

ELISE
Come on, they found the freaking
Titanic. Our shitty little Civil
War ferry should be a walk in the
park.

ALAN
It's gonna be 'Al Capone's Vault'
all over again.

ELISE
Who knows what's down there--
(burps)
What's Al Capone got to do with it?

Draining his beer, he crushes the can in his hand.

ALAN
Never mind.

EXT. - BISHOP'S POINTE - THE NEXT MORNING

Two police cruisers and a black Crown Vic sit in the
semicircular driveway that surrounds a marble fountain.

A small group of officers idle nearby as a plainclothes
detective emerges from the doorway of the palatial Colonial
home.

The patrol units mount up and the cars exit through an iron
security gate, leaving the landscaped serenity of the
estate's manicured grounds.