

GRAVE MISGIVINGS

Written by

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The most dangerous food is wedding cake.

- JAMES THURBER

FADE IN:

EXT. OCEANSIDE CEMETERY - BIRD'S EYE VIEW - NIGHT

A vast, enclosed space. Gently rolling hills nestled in the middle of a sleepy coastal community.

SUPER: ASTORIA, OREGON - PRESENT DAY

The land is dotted with headstones and obelisks, crypts and benches. Towering Douglas firs and Sitka spruce stand silent watch over the dead.

The trees sway and MOAN, buffeted by powerful gusts of wind. Beyond lies the endless ocean, its infinite whitecaps drenched in moonlight.

MAX (V.O.)

At least once in your life, someone
is going to ask you to do something
you really don't want to do....

Our attention is drawn to a remote corner of the cemetery, where a hazy green light gleams in the darkness.

MAX (V.O.)

But you'll do it anyway.

As we descend toward the light, we hear the droning MURMUR of two voices - one male, one female.

MAX (V.O.)

Why, though? Guilt? A hangover? Or
maybe you just can't think of a way
to get out of it.

EXT. OCEANSIDE CEMETERY - ASTRAL PASSAGE - NIGHT

We draw closer and closer to two figures. They speak in an indecipherable language.

Harsh. Guttural. Ancient.

MAX (V.O.)

And only later, in the cold light
of day, or the darkness of a small-
town cemetery...

The figures face each other across flat, smooth object roughly the size of a manhole cover. The Summoning Stone.

MAX (V.O.)

...will it dawn on you...

The hazy green light blossoms and turns blindingly bright.

MAX (V.O.)
...that everything has gone to
hell.

An icy SCREAM, unlike anything you've ever heard.

INT. OPEN MOUTH - NIGHT

We see a mouthful full of perfect veneers.

MAX (V.O.)
But hang on a second - I'm getting
ahead of myself.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. RAMSHACKLE METH HOUSE - NIGHT

Your basic meth house.

Grubby beige-colored carpets. Cheap, flickering lights. Low-rent furniture. Sink filled with dirty dishes. Beer cans and liquor bottles everywhere.

Another SCREAM. Terrified and girlish.

MAX (V.O.)
Did I mention there's lots of
screaming in this story?

We stare into the void of an open mouth, filled with multi-colored braces.

EXT. SOUTHEAST PORTLAND RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Ghostly streetlights, shrouded in fog. Wet pavement. Dimly-lit houses.

A lone Portland Police Bureau squad car coasts into view, stealth-mode. No emergency lights. No siren. The squad car pulls to the curb near the intersection of two quiet, car-lined avenues.

SUPER: PORTLAND, OREGON - FIVE YEARS AGO

INT. SQUAD CAR - NIGHT

GAIL 'MAX' MCGEE, late 20s, athletic and alert, sits in the driver's seat. His gear includes a dark blue uniform and a black ballistic vest marked POLICE in bold yellow letters.

MAX (V.O.)
That's me - Max McGee. My parents
named me Gail, but how many guys do
you know named Gail?

He taps on the keyboard of the car's mobile data terminal and pulls up a mug shot: an angry-looking white male, mid-40s, rune-shaped neck tattoos, salt-and-pepper beard.

A name emblazoned below the mug shot: WALTER KRIEG.

Max divides his attention between the mug shot and a ramshackle, single-story meth house across the street.

He snatches a police radio microphone from its cradle.

MAX
(on radio)
Delta Four Nine on scene.

FEMALE DISPATCHER
(on radio)
Four Nine. Be advised to stand by
for additional units. Repeat - wait
for back-up units. Acknowledge.

A muffled SCREAM.

MAX
(on radio)
Stand by.

EXT. SOUTHEAST PORTLAND RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Max scrambles out of the squad car as KENDRA - 15 years old and frantic, with ink-black hair, several nose rings and the aforementioned multi-colored braces - rushes out of the ramshackle house.

Kendra stumbles down the rickety porch steps to the sidewalk.

KENDRA
(babbling)
Help somebody please help please!

She spots Max, sprints toward him and jumps into his arms.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
(sobbing)
You gotta stop him!

MAX
Take it easy. It's gonna be okay.

Max peels Kendra off his chest and lowers her to the ground. He puts his hands on her shoulders to center her.

MAX (CONT'D)
Where's Walter?

Tracy gestures wildly toward the ramshackle house.

KENDRA
In there with my mom - hurry!

Max opens the driver-side door of his squad car and stuffs Kendra inside. He pulls a cellphone from his vest, taps the screen and hands the phone to her.

MAX
This is 911. Give 'em this address
and everything else you know. You
hear me?

Kendra nods, still SOBBING. Max SLAMS the door shut, keys his shoulder-mounted radio mike and heads toward the house.

MAX (CONT'D)
(on radio)
Dispatch from Delta Four Nine. Be
advised subject is inside the
target residence with one adult
female. Making entry.

FEMALE DISPATCHER
(on radio)
Negative, Delta Four Nine! You are
advised to -

Max hits the radio OFF button. He un-holsters his service weapon, raises it and moves toward the house.

EXT. RAMSHACKLE HOUSE - NIGHT

Max stages at the front door. Handgun pointed toward the door, held tight against his body.

With his left hand, he tests the front doorknob. It moves freely - unlocked. He takes a deep breath.

MAX
(to himself)
You got this.

He enters the house, handgun raised to eye-level and paired with a sun-bright flashlight.

INT. RAMSHACKLE HOUSE - NIGHT

Relentless thrash metal music BOUNCES off dingy walls from unseen speakers.

Max scans the living room. The front sight of his handgun and the flashlight beam track his gaze.

MAX
(command voice)
Police! Anyone in here, make
yourself known!

No response.

Max moves toward a hallway to his left, still scanning.

MAX (CONT'D)
(command voice)
Portland Police! Show yourself!
Hands where I can see them!

Nothing.

At the far end of the darkened hallway, a door BURST open. WALTER KRIEG appears, a dead ringer for his mug shot.

He's dressed in camo fatigues, and clutches a large, discolored butcher knife in his right hand.

Despite his appearance, Walter speaks in a strangely calm tone of voice.

WALTER
You're trespassing on my property.

MAX
(command voice)
Drop the knife! Do it now!

WALTER
(shakes his head)
Nope.

Walter reaches the intersection of the hallway and the front room and raises his right hand above his head.

MAX
(command voice)
Stop!

Walter doesn't stop. Max pulls the trigger - no bang. He pulls again - still nothing. A malfunction.

MAX (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Oh, shit.

Max holsters his weapon as Walter launches himself forward with a deafening SCREAM.

MAX (V.O.)
I know - more screaming.

We get a glimpse inside Walter's mouth. Yikes.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. CITY - PORTLAND POLICE BUREAU HEADQUARTERS - DAY

A bustling downtown street. The SOUNDS of the city - the RUMBLE of delivery trucks, the HOWL of sirens, the SCREECH of brakes - drift through the air.

In the distance, the faint, familiar sounds of circus music. The Clown Song.

SUPER: PORTLAND, OREGON - ONE WEEK LATER

Mid-block is a plain, granite-surfaced building. An engraved sign next to the entrance reads "PORTLAND POLICE BUREAU." A wide sidewalk runs between the building and the street.

Near the sign stands CHIEF KNIGHT, mid-50s. Uniformed, with the unmistakable aura of someone who commands respect. He wears the uniform well.

To the Chief's left is a female assistant, 20-ish, dressed in civilian clothes. She holds a case containing a single, beribboned ceremonial medal.

To his right is Max. His left arm is in a sling, his face bandaged. His expression and posture suggest he would rather be somewhere else.

Max alerts as strains of the CLOWN SONG reach his ears. He looks around, anxious.

A small gaggle of journalists is waiting, including TRACY, 30-something, a sharp but jaded female TV reporter. Her partner is Julio, 40, a world-weary video camera operator. They wear identical windbreakers with matching logos.

CHIEF KNIGHT
(to the gaggle)
Good morning, everyone. Thank you
for being here. We'll get started
in just a moment.

Chief Knight turns to Max and puts both hands on his shoulders in fatherly fashion. They speak in hushed voices.

CHIEF KNIGHT (CONT'D)
Your father was one of the finest
officers I ever worked with, and he
would be very proud of you. I wish
he was here today.

McGee leans forward.

MAX
I'm not sure I deserve this. Medals
are for real heroes. Like my dad.

CHIEF KNIGHT
Listen to me, son. You don't have
to die to be a hero.

In the gaggle, Julio moves closer to Tracy.

JULIO
(to Tracy)
Sometime today, Chief.

TRACY
Don't forget - it's straight from
here to the circus. We need B-roll
and a couple of MOS interviews.

Chief Knight turns to his assistant, takes the medal from its case, and addresses the reporters.

CHIEF KNIGHT
It is my privilege this morning to
honor a fine public servant.

He holds the medal up for all to see. A gleaming silver disc, bearing the image of a police badge, suspended from a red, white and blue ribbon.

CHIEF KNIGHT (CONT'D)
Never before in the history of this
agency have two members of the same
family been recognized for heroism.
Until today.

He turns to face Max.

CHIEF KNIGHT (CONT'D)
Officer McGee, it is an honor to
bestow upon you the Departmental
Medal of Valor for exceptional
courage in the line of duty.

With care, the Chief raises the medal over Max's head and
drapes it around his neck.

The medal seems to transform Max. His posture is now erect,
his expression resolute. He CLEARS his throat.

MAX
Hi. Are there any questions?

A few seconds of silence. Tracy looks around, then raises her
hand. Max nods.

MAX (CONT'D)
Go ahead.

TRACY
In those moments spent saving
Tricia Nelson, did you feel fear?

MAX
Maybe. Probably.

Tracy waits for something juicer. More heroic.

MAX (CONT'D)
But, uh, I was in rescue mode. I
was prepared to sacrifice myself in
order to prevent loss of life.

A down-on-his-luck CLOWN shuffles along the sidewalk toward
Max. Faded orange wig, sad-looking red nose, soiled floppy
shoes, baggy jumpsuit. Squeeze horn. The whole nine yards.

The Clown taps Max on the shoulder. He wants to get by.

CLOWN
(raspy voice)
Coming through, brother.

Max sees the Clown and SCREAMS. A high-pitched, ten-year-old child's frightened SHRIEK. Arms raised, he backs away and into the Chief.

Tracy gives Julio a discreet nudge. He responds with a thumbs-up - he's getting the shot.

The Clown turns to the gaggle without missing a beat.

CLOWN (CONT'D)
(dead-pan)
Hey - it's Scaredy-Cop.

The reporters erupt in LAUGHTER.

TRACY
(to herself)
Scaredy-Cop. Jackpot.

The Clown continues on his way. A shaken Max resumes his position in front of the gaggle. He manages a feeble LAUGH.

MAX
Not a big fan of clowns.

Julio looks at Tracy.

JULIO
No kidding.

As if by agreement, the gaggle melts away amid CHUCKLES and snippets of CONVERSATION. The Chief approaches, all business.

CHIEF KNIGHT
Officer McGee.

He reaches out, lifts the medal over Max's head and hands it to his assistant. They walk away without a backward glance.

Max is alone on the sidewalk. Slumped shoulders. Defeated.

The Clown reappears, moving slowly in the direction from which he came. He stops in front of Max.

CLOWN
Fame. It's a bitch, huh?

MAX
I'm not famous.

The Clown grasps his squeeze horn. HONK HONK.

CLOWN
Give it a few hours.