

**THE
HAUNTED
CORPSE**

**By Emily Cameron
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Once upon a time, there lived a young lady named Mrs. Johnson and her beautiful nine-year-old daughter, Mary. They lived in a grand house with stained-glass windows and lovely golden walls which they had moved into just a few weeks ago. The Johnsons' house was a rather fancy place fit for a princess, with its polished furniture and glittering crystal chandeliers. Not only was the house pretty, it was safe too. The firm, strong plaster walls protected Mary and her mother from any dangers, and two swords formed an X over the brick fireplace. The man who had sold the swords to them assured Mrs. Johnson that it would kill anything, monster or man. Mary didn't know why he had said "monster" because she was sure that there was no such thing as monsters, and those silly books about zombies were just stories people made up to scare children. Monsters were not real.

Or were they?

One night, Mary found that she could not sleep. At around twelve o'clock at midnight she heard a noise. THUMP. THUMP. It was the sound of somebody going up the stairs. But who? Mary's mother? It couldn't be, Mrs. Johnson had gone to sleep hours ago. But perhaps she had woken up for a midnight snack and was going down the stairs? No, when Mrs. Johnson climbed the steps she always skipped, swiftly and lightly and fast. This person or thing was slowly moving up the steps, taking his time. And besides, Mrs. Johnson never made a sound going up the stairs, and this thing was crashing his foot loudly onto each step.

Mary kicked off her silk sheets, got out of bed, and put on her slippers. She carefully approached the door and opened it. She walked down the grand marble hallway and came to the spiraling staircase. She closed her eyes, opened them, and braced herself in case the thing climbing the staircase was anything dangerous. Then with a terrified gulp she began to edge her way down the stairs, with her back flat against the polished wooden railing. She climbed down the steps slowly and carefully, and with each step the thumping got louder and

closer.

Suddenly, Mary bumped into something. She looked up, terrified, and screamed. She had bumped into a monster. And she had thought there was no such thing as monsters! But here was one right here, standing in front of her. Here was proof. The walking corpse was the scariest sight she had ever seen. Its wrinkly, papery skin was stretched over its bony skin, and where its eyes should have been were empty sockets. Blood was splattered all over its tattered white T-shirt, and its blue jeans were covered with bullet holes. Mary screamed. The monster reached forward toward Mary with its bony hands, ready to place them around her neck and strangle her to death. Mary slapped the hands away, but it reached forward again . . .

The monster wrapped its long, bony fingers around her neck and grinned a horrible, twisted grin. The thing yanked Mary's head close to its head, inhaled a sharp, quick breath of air, and exhaled it all over Mary. Mary shrieked as she sniffed the corpse's breath—it smelled like a mixture of tuna sandwiches and dead bodies. The moment the horrible smell reached her nose, a tingling feeling swept over her. There was a cracking sound, a blinding green flash of light, and Mary was gone. In her place was a stone statue of a girl, her mouth stretched wide in a terrified scream, a look of pure helplessness on her face, and her arms thrown into the air in the middle of thrashing them around wildly. Mary Johnson had been turned into a statue.

The statue wobbled on the step, and fell. It crashed down several steps before it shattered into a million pieces. The pieces of stone sank through the floor as if it were made of water, and the body of Mary appeared, lying on one long step, eyes closed, hands crossed over her chest. Mary's long, curly, golden strands of freshly combed hair had been neatly divided into half, one half spread out on her left shoulder, the other half on her right. Mary's lips had a very faint smile painted on them, perfectly shaped pink lips. Her nightgown did not have a single crinkle on it . But there was one problem.

Mary Johnson was dead.

Mrs. Johnson had a good fright the next morning when she was swiftly gliding down the staircase and found her daughter lying dead on the fifty-third step. Mrs. Johnson, shrieked a high-pitched, ladylike shriek, bent down next to Mary, grabbed her shoulders, and gave a good hard shake. "Mary Johnson!" she rumbled angrily. "You played such an awful joke on me! Stop pretending to be dead and get to your feet right this very moment!" Her face turned purple with rage when Mary did not open her eyes. Mrs. Johnson did not even notice that Mary's shoulders were as cold as ice. She was too angry and furious with her daughter. Playing a silly joke on her and pretending to be dead! Why, that was the most awful thing a child could do to a mother! She'd surely punish Mary for this! But little did Mrs. Johnson know that Mary was dead.

"Alright then!" huffed Mrs. Johnson angrily. "I guess I'll just have to eat breakfast without you, Mary. And I was going to cook your favorite, bacon and scrambled eggs with a nice, warm cup of hot chocolate and some whipped cream. Too bad you chose today to play a joke on me." She let go of Mary's shoulders. The dead girl's lifeless head bonked onto the step with a loud thunk. That would have hurt badly, thought Mrs. Johnson. And still she is pretending to be dead, fighting the urge to scream in pain. Too bad for her. She carefully skipped the step Mary was lying on and galloped the rest of the way down the steps.

Mrs. Johnson ate her breakfast and began to hurry back up the steps when she felt her foot land on something soft and squishy. With a surprised yelp, she glanced down and saw that she'd stepped on Mary. The girl, though, did not cough and cry out in pain. She stayed still and did not move. Mrs. Johnson began to grow angry. Her silly little daughter was playing a joke on her, pretending to be dead, and refused to wake up. Mary's mother grabbed Mary's shoulders and shook furiously again. Mary's chin bounced up and down on her chest, but she still did not open her eyes. "Oh, the little twerp!" hissed Mrs.

Johnson as she dropped her daughter back on the step.

An hour later, Mary was still not moving. Mrs. Johnson was furious. She rolled her eyes angrily and tickled Mary on her thin stomach. But Mary did not burst out laughing. She stayed still. Mrs. Johnson frowned, because her daughter was very ticklish, and could not stop laughing if you tickled her. But how could she possibly be staying still now and not be laughing her head off? Mrs. Johnson knelt down close to Mary's face and leaned close to her lips, waiting for them to crack into a giggly smile. They were smiling faintly, but Mrs. Johnson knew that smile had been there when she had found Mary earlier. Suddenly, Mrs. Johnson let out a terrified scream. She yanked her head away from Mary's face and stared in horror at Mary. She wasn't breathing! Her dear daughter was not breathing! And if Mary was not breathing that could only mean one thing.

Mary Johnson was dead.

Mrs. Johnson rushed downstairs, not caring if she wasn't walking swiftly and lady-like. Her daughter mattered more than being neat and tidy and posh. She reached the end of the staircase, and skittered across the marble floor until she reached the small, polished, redwood table decorated with flowers in a vase, thank you and birthday cards, and an old-fashioned telephone. She hastily dialed a few numbers and pressed the receiver to her ear.

A voice, sounding crackly and far away, answered the phone. "Hello?" it asked nervously. "This is Doctor Griffin. Um, I'm kind of busy right now, could you call later please?"

"No!" barked Mrs. Johnson.

"What's wrong? Is this serious? If it's not, I'm going to hang up on you," growled Doctor Griffin.

"My daughter is dead," hissed Mrs. Johnson. "Serious enough for you?" She spoke through gritted teeth.

"Hmm," muttered the doctor, in an uninterested voice. "What a great joke. Could you at least tell me who you are?"

"No!" barked Mrs. Johnson. "I'm Susan Johnson."

“Oh, Susan,” groaned the doctor. “Not *you*.”

“We'll chat later!” screamed Mrs. Johnson. “My daughter is dead, alright? Now come over to my house right now!”

“How did she *die*?” He pronounced “die” in a long, drawling voice, and snorted as if he was trying to tell Mrs. Johnson without words, “Yeah, right. I believe that,” in a sarcastic tone.

“We'll chat later, I said!”

“You mean, you screamed,” muttered the doctor.

“GET OVER HERE RIGHT NOW!” shrieked Mrs. Johnson, and she hung up.

She bustled across the marble room and raced up the stairs two at a time until she reached her daughter. Mary's face was turning pale and white, and her skin was rotten and swollen. A terrible odor wafted around the dead girl, and when Mrs. Johnson opened up her eyelids, her watery-blue eyes stared back at her, unmoving, unblinking, and glassy. Tears sparkled as they crawled down Mrs. Johnson's face. Her daughter, her one and only daughter, was dead. Completely, utterly dead. And there wasn't a thing anybody could do about it, not even a *doctor* . . .

Suddenly, Mrs. Johnson felt a bony, long hand grab her shoulders. She screamed, a high-pitched, piercing, ladylike scream, and automatically grabbed the hands on her shoulder and slapped them away. She whirled around. There, standing in front of her, was a walking corpse. A zombie. Not dead, not alive. And it was standing in front of her, grinning a horrible, twisted grin, and laughing the most awful laugh you could imagine. Its skin was pale and rotten. Its tattered T-shirt was spotted with red blood and another slimy green substance. Its legs were all misshapen—twisted and the left knee bent backward much too far. At the top of his head, part of his bloody skull was poking out. It had no eyes, just empty, blank eye sockets. A bloody scratch ran from his left ear to the right side of his jaw, and it was bleeding badly. Blood flowed out like a river flowing down from a mountain, and every two or three seconds the putrid red stuff squirted all over Mrs. Johnson,

who was screaming.

Every time the blood squirted on Mrs. Johnson, it shot a sizzling red hole right through her body. The poor old woman was immobilized with pain. She stood, unmoving, in too much agony to twitch a finger, on the fifty-second step of the staircase, next to her dead, rotting daughter. The monster, the walking corpse, the zombie, whatever that horrid creature was, laughed a high, cruel laugh that made Mrs. Johnson's insides twitch and wiggle painfully. The sizzling holes in her body grew bigger and bigger until they were the size of her hand. In the middle of her stomach were many burning, white-hot holes.

Suddenly, the monster's squirting blood splattered right on Mrs. Johnson's forehead. *ZZZZZZZZZ*. A hole appeared where the splatter of blood had been one second ago. Mrs. Johnson screamed her final, last scream and crumpled to the floor. There was a loud, startling *pop!* and she burst into ashes (burst into flames?). Sparks and flames flew everywhere. The monster laughed its hideous laugh. *I shall rule the world!* he rumbled, choking back a few chuckles. *I shall kill every single person I see, and soon there will not be a single human left in this world. I will run free and enjoy my life. Ah-hah-hah-hah!*

“No, you won't!” yelled a fearless voice behind the corpse. The monster spun around to face a young, handsome man in a long white doctor's robes. His head was a dark, dark brown, and his eyes were the color of chocolate, and his voice was strong and powerful. It was Doctor Griffin. He had heard Mrs. Johnson screaming as he drove toward her house in an ambulance, and, after banging on the polished wooden doors several times, he'd fetched his crowbar and with one skillful swing of the dangerous tool, he'd managed to smash open the window. He had then crawled inside, and rushed upstairs to the corpse. Doctor Griffin was rather surprised when he saw his two least favorite patients lying dead on the stairs. He was quite scared of the walking corpse, but his fear made him strong. “No, you shall not rule the world, you putrid thing,” he cried loudly. “I shall kill you first! And don't think I don't know

how or what to kill you with, because I do!”

Well, it looks like this little fella wants to be sizzled to death just like Susan Johnson. Or perhaps he should be turned to a stone statue like Mary. Which shall it be, my friend? Personally, I think both of them are quite painful, but you chose. Now which is more painful, do you think, Doctor Clifford? hissed the corpse. His accent was a bit British, but mostly American. He spoke formally, as if they were simply two happy people talking at a formal meeting, but this was much, much more than a formal meeting. This was a matter of life and death.

“Doctor Griffin,” corrected the doctor primly. “My name is Doctor Griffin. And frankly, I'd like to be turned to stone rather than be sizzled with a bunch of holes, but it's your choice, really. I mean, you're the one who wants to kill me, right?” Doctor Griffin acted like they were enjoying a cup of coffee at Starbucks and having a casual conversation. He didn't seem afraid at all. In fact, he even sounded a bit menacing, as if he wanted a duel.

The monster was taken aback by surprise. *You're—you're not scared of me?* he gasped.

“No,” breathed Doctor Griffin. “I'm not.” He shouted, and swung his dangerous crowbar at the monster, whacking it square in the face, right between the empty eye sockets. The monster screamed as blood flowed smoothly out of the vicious dent in the upper part of his nose. He smacked a bony hand to his nose and covered up the wound.

ARRRRGGGG! wailed the monster, and he threw himself forward in an effort to get the dangerous acid blood on Doctor Griffin, but the young man was fast. He stepped back quickly and skipped down the stairs until he reached the bottom. Aware that the skeleton was at his heels, but not really frightened, he glided smoothly across the marble floor of the huge room until he reached fireplace at the other end. Two swords formed an X over it. At the sight of the swords, the monster stepped back into the shadows. *Oh, please, no. Not those swords. Please, don't kill me with them. Oh, I promise I*

won't kill anybody, please. O-o-o-o-o-o-o-oh . . .

Doctor Griffin ripped one sword from above the fireplace, snatched down the other, and gripped them tightly in his hands. "You've killed too many people, corpse," Dr. Griffin whispered. "Now *I* am going to kill *you*." He smiled wickedly, showing two rows of perfectly white teeth. The Johnsons' swords glittered and sparkled in the sunlight, reflecting off the glorious golden rays on its razor-sharp blade. Strangest of all, the light reflected off and shone right on the monster's empty eye sockets.

Oh, the pain, the pain! cried the corpse. *The pain! Stop that! Please, I'll do anything!* He collapsed onto the floor in agony and rolled around, smearing blood and the green slime all over the freshly polished marble. He shielded his eyes with his bony hand and struggled to his feet. Dr. Griffin smiled evilly and fingered the deadly blade of the sword. It had reflected the light of the sun straight in the monster's eye, and it had hurt the zombie. Doctor Griffin, along with being a doctor, knew very well how to kill a monster, since he'd taken secret lessons when he was younger, but, after a year or so, his parents had found out and, furious, had instantly signed him out of his fighting classes. Doctor Griffin's parents thought that he'd forgotten how to fight monsters, but he hadn't. It was one of those things you didn't forget, even after six years.

And I thought I was the evil one, muttered the corpse, slowly removing his hand from his eyes as Doctor Griffin lowered his sword. He knew the light was supposed to blind him, but since he didn't have eyes and couldn't see anyway, this hardly had any effect on him, even if it did hurt.

"You are," breathed Doctor Griffin. "And now I'm going to KIIIIILL YOOOUUUU!" He sprinted towards the corpse, the sword's sharp blade pointed straight at the zombie's chest. The zombie yelped, realized what was happening, and sank his teeth into his bony hand. The poisonous acid blood leaked out of the tooth-marks in his hand. He held his hands in front of him as Doctor Griffin ran closer. When I grab that stupid

doctor, the blood will burn a hole in him, thought the zombie.

Just as Doctor Griffin came close enough for the monster to grab him, he leaped into the air, kicked the zombie in the head, and landed on the floor as the corpse stumbled backward and fell. The doctor shouted in triumph as he stabbed the sword through the monster's heart.

The zombie coughed and wheezed as blood spilled out of the hole in his chest. He lifted his head up a little and managed to utter a few last words. *Why? Why did you do that to me . . . ?* He groaned as his head landed with a thunk on the floor. His mouth opened, then closed, and he didn't speak anymore.

Doctor Griffin watched intently as the corpse began to dissolve into powder. His head, his body, and his arms and legs melted into sand. He smiled proudly, laughed, and gasped as the sand sank into the floor as if the marble was water. There was a flash of green light, and, standing where the corpse had been was Doctor Griffin's two *favorite* patients.

Susan and Mary Johnson stared around the room, then they gazed at smiling Doctor Griffin. Unexpectedly, suddenly, Mary flung her arms around his neck and laughed her sweet, gentle, melodic laugh. "Thank you so much!" she giggled. "Of course—the swords! Why didn't I think of that? 'It can kill man or monster,' the person who sold them to us said. That corpse thing was a monster!"

Mrs. Johnson smiled. "I must say, Doctor Griffin, you are a real corpse-slayer. I never thought a doctor would be able to kill a zombie that squirts acid blood!"

"And turns people to stone," added Mary.

"But how could you see what I was doing? Both of you were lying on the stairs!" yelled Doctor Griffin.

"Our *bodies* wear lying on the stairs," corrected Mary primly. "But our spirits and our souls were with the monster. Our souls were jammed inside his pockets. We took turns looking out to see what was happening. When the corpse died, we could feel our tiny selves getting shoved back inside our bodies again, and we were so happy. We knew you'd defeated

the corpse. Oh thank you!” Mary beamed at Doctor Griffin.

“You're welcome,” chuckled Doctor Griffin, rather pleased with himself for killing a deadly, nearly-indestructible monster that could turn people to stone, squirted acid blood, and perform a whole bunch of other dangerous tricks to kill a human that I probably shouldn't describe. He pulled the two Johnsons into a bear hug.