

GRIZZLY TALES

Cautionary tales for lovers of squeam

by
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BUNNY BOY

First published in...

"More Grizzly Tales For Gruesome Kids"

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- Vol 3 - The ME! Monsters
- Vol 4 - Freaks of Nature
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BUNNY BOY

Harvest time is a most dangerous time to be out in the fields with eyes shut. At such a time it is advisable to pay close attention to the harvester's blades. As the countryman's saying goes;

*Harvest Time is a time of rebirth,
A time for Old Mother
To de-chaff the earth.
A time for blades to be whetted and honed,
For chopping and scything,
To reap what you've sewn-ed.*

Bill was a very naughty boy. He never ate his greens, and because he never ate his greens he was sickly. He was frail and thin. He moved like a snail and had a pasty white skin like the underbelly of a dead fish. His hair was dry and wiry. His ears looked like two wrinkled walnuts. His teeth were loose and rattled in his mouth like a box full of dominoes. Bill hated greens even more than he hated the thought of his teeth falling out.

"Oh Bill," sighed his poor mother, who lived in a constant state of anxiety, "what are we going to do with you? If you don't eat your greens you'll never grow up into a big strong boy."

"I don't care," said Bill. "I hate greens." Then he shuffled outside into the garden to meet a rabbit called Tubs.

Tubs was a fat rabbit who loved eating. He loved carrots and onions and artichokes of course, but what sent his head into a spin and his ears into a flap were greens. Anything green in fact - cabbage, sprouts, lettuce, leeks...you name it. If it was green Tubs gobbled it up - stalk, leaves, heart and all. Tubs Rabbit was the original Greedy Green Machine.

Now Tubs and Bill had something in common - Bill's mother's vegetable patch. On Bill's first birthday she had decided that the only way to get him to eat his greens was to grow them fresh in the garden. But Bill didn't care if the greens were fresh or frozen. He didn't care if she grew the biggest, plumpest green vegetables the world had ever seen, he was never eating them! Which was where Tubs came in. The deal between the skinny boy with rattly teeth and the plump rabbit with a well-oiled coat was so simple it was stupid. Tubs would eat what Bill wouldn't.

Every night, Bill left the garden gate open so that Tubs could sneak in and gobble greens till he burst. And every morning, Bill's mother came out to tend her garden, threw her hands in the air and wept.

"Oh that wicked rabbit," she wailed. "That bad bad bunny! He's eaten all my green vegetables again. Now, there's nothing left for Bill."

"Oh boo hoo!" sniggered Bill, who was watching from behind the potting shed. "I don't think I'll ever stop crying!"

Bill's mother waged war on the rabbit. She fired flat, stinging pebbles at his white tail with a catapult, until Bill had the bright idea of painting the tail green so she couldn't see it. She built an electric fence around the vegetables, but Bill air-lifted Tubs into the garden in a remote controlled helicopter. She even buried rabbit traps in the lawn, but Bill (with the help of a bottle of tomato ketchup) pretended to get his finger horribly mashed in one, so she dug them all up.

Bill and Tubs were a team. Two halves of a whole. Each one making sure that the other got what he wanted, and in this respect they were like brothers.

Then one night, instead of going to bed, Bill's mother took a torch and shotgun down to her vegetable patch and kept guard till dawn. Bill could not get past her to leave the gate open and Tubs could not get into the garden to eat his greens. That night, untouched by rabbit teeth, the vegetables grew. In the morning Bill's mother proudly cut a huge cabbage and wheelbarrowed it inside for lunch. Bill felt sick when he saw it sitting on the kitchen table, so big and round and poisonously green!

Then he had an idea. While she was out of the room he painted the cabbage to look like a football and hid it under the stairs. But when his mother opened the cupboard door to get the lead to take the dog for a walk, the dog saw the ball and grabbed it in its mouth. Sadly the paint was still wet and his black nose turned white.

"You will eat cabbage for supper," his mother barked as she rinsed off the paint and the dog spit, returned the cabbage to the kitchen table and left the room. Bill didn't waste a second. He leapt outside, buried the cabbage in the garden and knocked in a sign on top of it.

DANGER UNEXPLODED BOMB

DO NOT DIG UP!

But he stupidly forgot to wipe the mud off his shoes when he came back in. "I know what you're up to," said his mother as she dug up the unexploded cabbage, "but it won't work." Then she washed off the worms and put the cabbage back on the table. Bill would have to be more cunning still. He phoned the police and told them a gruesome tale about finding a severed head in a plastic bag. He

asked them if they wanted to come and take it away for forensic evidence? Well, of course they did! But they brought it straight back when they discovered that the head had no hair, no ears, no nose, no lips and bore a striking resemblance to a cabbage. When his mother had scraped off the putrified garbage gunk, she said, "I'll have you know, young man, that I'm not as green as I'm cabbage looking!" A puzzling phrase, which left Bill wondering if his mother wasn't human after all, and was in fact made from genetically modified vegetable matter.

Speculation aside, Bill quickly realised that there was only one way to get rid of this cabbage. Tubs would have to eat it. Tucking it under his anorak, Bill jumped on his bike, cycled through the gate at the bottom of the garden and pedalled across the cornfield towards his friend's burrow. Harmless enough you might think, until you remember that it was harvest time. Those harvester's blades were whetted and sharpened. And Bill was a malnourished mouse of a boy, whose weedy legs could barely turn the pedals on his bike, let alone accelerate him out of harm's way in an emergency.

Tubs smelled the cabbage in Bill's anorak. He hopped out of his hole and bounced across the cornfield to meet the smell. Meanwhile Bill cycled slowly towards Tubs. His under-powered bicycle wobbled in the ruts of dried earth. But (and this is the important bit) neither Bill nor Tubs could see the other over the tall, willowy wall of corn. It was just bad luck. A case of wrong time, wrong place.

Farmer Popple turned off the road and scraped his combine harvester through the wooden gate that led into the field. He was listening to the radio as he lowered the sharp, red blades to cut the corn. At the same time, puny Bill was suffering from a sudden attack of pedal fatigue and had fallen asleep in his saddle, and Tubs, being the fat, greedy, green guzzler that he was, had closed his eyes to dream about the delicious crunchiness of the upcoming cabbage. Both were still moving forward, but neither could see where he was going. Added to which, Farmer Popple fancied he had the voice of a rock star and closed *his* eyes to sing along with the radio. He was singing so loudly that he couldn't hear the roar of the engine or the swish of the blades as they sliced through the ears of corn.

Bill and Tubs only opened their eyes when the cold shadow blocked out the sun, but by then it was too late. The boy, the rabbit and the combine harvester came together on a knife edge, with a

splittery-splattery, mishery-mashery, slip slop sliver of a slice up!

When Bill woke up in hospital there was a doctor standing over his bed.

"Hello Bill," he smiled. "How are you feeling?"

"What happened?" asked Bill.

"You had a little accident," said the doctor, "but the operation has been a complete success."

"There were bits of you all over the field," added the student nurse. The doctor put his hand over her mouth.

"But every last bit is stitched back," he said with false jollity.

"And in the right place too, I hope!"

"Where's Tubs?"

"Who?" said the doctor.

"My rabbit friend," said Bill. The doctor looked uneasy as he turned away.

"You can go home tomorrow," he said.

"Where's Tubs?" repeated Bill as the doctor left the room. But nobody would tell him.

The next day, Bill went home. For the first time in his life, his mother did not make him eat his greens. The accident had softened her resolve. She just wanted him to get better. It came as something of a surprise, therefore, when Bill leant across the table and *helped himself* to a spoonful of sprouts.

"What are you doing?" she gasped.

"I don't know," said Bill, staring at the green-stuff on his plate. "I feel like a sprout. What's happening to me?"

"Maybe you've learnt your lesson," beamed his mother. "Maybe the accident has cured you!" Bill stabbed a sprout with his fork and popped it into his mouth.

"Delicious," he mumbled as he chewed it slowly. "Is there any more?"

"There's a whole vegetable patch!" she clapped. "Oh Bill, I'm so happy! Now that you're eating your greens you'll get stronger by the day!"

"Do you know what became of Tubs?" he asked suddenly. His mother put her hand on his shoulder.

"He was killed," she said softly. "I'm sorry Bill, but the doctor said he didn't feel a thing."

"Killed!" Bill gasped with shock.

"Sliced up slimmer than a wet peach," said his mother. "More sprouts?"

Bill was too upset to eat pudding. He went straight to bed and passed a fitful night dreaming weird dreams about huge rabbits

with human feet noshing greens from his mother's vegetable patch. When he woke in the morning he had soil inside his mouth and fertiliser underneath his fingernails.

His mother was crying when he went downstairs for breakfast. "What's wrong?" asked Bill, brushing the hair out of his eyes. "It happened again last night!" she wailed. "What did?"

"Another rabbit got into my vegetable patch and ate all my greens!"

"Really?" mumbled Bill, running his tongue across his gritty teeth.

"And it was a big one with clumping great feet and huge jaws..." Bill's mother stopped in the middle of her sentence and stared in disbelief at her son. "What have you done to yourself?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said. "Why?"

"You're fatter," she said.

"Probably those sprouts," said Bill.

"Are you fatter, Bill?"

"I feel fatter," he replied, "but I think it's just that my pyjamas are too small." Bill's mother was bamboozled.

"I did tell you that eating your greens would make you big and strong," she said, "but I never believed it could happen so quickly!"

It didn't stop there. Every night for the next week, Bill had the same dream about the huge rabbit raiding his mother's vegetables, and every morning he woke up to find that he was fatter. Not only that, but his hair had grown softer, his ears had grown pinker, his teeth had grown stronger, his nose had grown wetter, and his feet had grown longer than clowns' boots. But the day that Bill jumped out of his bath and rushed downstairs to show his mother his fluffy white tail, was the day that the doctor was called.

It was the same doctor who had operated on Bill in hospital.

"Oh dear," he said, turning as white as a sheet. "I never expected this to happen."

"What to happen?" said Bill's mother, as Bill wiped his wet nose on her apron.

"I never expected the rabbit to take over."

"What are you talking about?" she frowned. "Bill will you stop that! I'm trying to talk to the doctor!" Bill was hopping over the sofa and chairs and banging his head on the ceiling.

"After the accident with the combine harvester," the doctor explained, "Bill and Tubs were chopped into so many different pieces that it was hard to tell which bit belonged to who. I just used what I could find to put Bill back together again."

"You mean bits of him aren't Bill at all?" squealed Bill's mother. "You mean bits of him are Tubs!" Bill knocked the kitchen door off its hinges with a sharp kick of his huge feet. "So that's why he's suddenly eating his greens!" The doctor nodded with shame. "Nnnaaa, what's up Doc?" squeaked Bill in a strange nasal voice, grinding his long front teeth on the end of his chin. "You've got to turn him back!" shouted Bill's mother. "I can't," said the doctor, as Bill twitched his nose and bounced out of the back door into the garden. "But he's my son!" she cried. "Not anymore," the doctor said, as Bill began to dig himself a burrow. "I'm afraid that Bill is now a rabbit!"

From then on Bill's mother only ever saw her son at night. She hid behind a bush in the garden and watched his furry face and long strong teeth chomp their way through her vegetables. And every night, when Bill heard her sob for the loss of her only son, he wondered why she was so sad. After all, wasn't he doing what she'd always wanted? Wasn't he eating his greens?