

Return of the Monster

As I stand in front of the grave for the late Mary Shelley, crowbar in hand, I wonder if I'm just crazy or if the guy I'm doing this for is. See I own an independent bookstore that has really been struggling recently. In order to keep the business afloat I put an ad in the wanted section of the newspaper asking for anybody that is interested in acquiring rare books. Within a week of placing the ad a man contacted me and offered me \$2 million to find a legendary book that was supposedly written by Mary Shelley before she died. He told me the legend states that before she died she wrote a sequel to Frankenstein. The legend also says that it's buried in a tomb underneath her gravestone. In order to get it you have to pass one daunting test. One that tests your knowledge of literature but specifically of monsters.

As I pry the crowbar between the slot that lifts the lid from the grave I get this incredibly cold feeling like a sense of foreshadowing. Despite this feeling I know I can't turn back now. I lift the crowbar and as soon as I do the lid lifts up and a gust of air shoots out of the grave like air out of a really powerful aerosol can. It knocks me off my feet.

I stand up and start to lift the heavy lid off the grave. As I look down into the tomb I notice steps leading down into the darkness. I slowly start to walk down trying to feel each step with my foot since I don't have a flashlight or torch to lead the way. After about two minutes of walking I feel this cool breeze upon my face and then what feels like cobwebs. Cobwebs? Down here? Underground? The more I keep walking, the thicker the cobwebs become. As I brush the cobwebs away I come away with a handful of baby wolf spiders. I jump with anxiety as I throw them down and then hear a sound, a clicking, crawling sound. I accidentally walk right into the wall in front of me but I'm able to feel around and turn the corner to see what looks like the shine of the moon but I know that's not possible. As I get closer to what appears to be a circle courtyard illuminated by the moonlight I freeze in my

tracks by what I see. Shelob. Shelob the giant spider from *The Two Towers* by J.R.R. Tolkien. She is eating what looks like a human wrapped in her own webs. Across from her is Sting, the sword that Samwise uses to wound her in the book. I start to sneak very quietly toward Sting because I know that if I'm to retrieve that book I'm going to need that sword. Just as I get a few inches from retrieving it I see Shelob's body shift toward me. I hold completely still hoping she won't see me but she has a bunch of eyes so who am I kidding? About a split second before she jumps towards me I grab Sting and swipe behind me and manage to cut off one of her legs which inhibits her ability to move. After I do this I back away to see what kind of environment I'm working with. There's a rock to the right of her that I can climb if I'm fast enough. Before Shelob has a chance to get her bearings I climb the rock as fast as I can and I jump off it with Sting raised in the air and as I land on top of her I thrust the sword into Shelob's biggest eye and I hear the loudest shriek I've ever heard in my life. She bucks me off and I roll on the ground. After I realize what just happened I'm racing through my brain to try and remember how Shelob was defeated in the book. Samwise cuts her leg, stabs her eye and then.....just as I remember I open my eyes and she's staring me in the face and her giant jaws are within a couple of inches of my face. Without even thinking I grab Sting which is laying next to me and I jam it into the belly of the beast. Shelob shrieks one last time and as I pull the sword from her abdomen all of her blood and intestines spill all over my face. The smell was ungodly. As I try to get up from the mess I notice what feels like a book wedged in with all the intestines. I wipe it off and notice the title, *The Return of the Monster* by Mary Shelley.

Two weeks later I arrive at the massive Gothic mansion that belongs to the man that I experienced all this for, The Collector. That's the name he goes by because apparently he doesn't go out much. He has a reputation for living inside his mansion and only associating with his butler. After

three rings and five knocks on the door the butler finally answers the door and leads me into the study where my current benefactor is waiting with a steel briefcase, which I assume has the money.

“Please sit” he says to me.

“Thanks.”

“Can I offer you something to drink sir?” the butler asks me.

“No thanks I’m having mimosas at the club later.” I say with a chuckle.

“So do you have something for me?” the man says back to business.

“Yes. It wasn’t easy and the nightmares have almost gone away but I found it. Here you are.” I say as I had them heavy leather bound book.

“It’s more beautiful than I ever imagined.” said the man.

“Sir, may I ask you a question?”

“If you must.”

“Most people have heard about this book but they don’t seem to think that there’s any merit to its existence. Why were you so sure of its existence?” I asked curiously.

“I met Mary Shelley when she was 10 years old. Her family was vacationing in the northern part of England and we came across each other when she went for walk after lunch.”

“How can that be? You don’t look any older than my father.”

“I guess since you retrieved this prize possession to me you deserve the truth. What if I told you the story of Frankenstein is actually true?”

“You’re kidding me!” I exasperated not believing my ears.

“No I’m not kidding. The story of Frankenstein is a story I told Mary Shelley when she was 10. The story I told her was the story of Frankenstein. I told her my story.”

“Your story? You’re a writer? Or an unknown witness to the story with really good plastic surgery and a life-lasting pill? You can’t possibly be....”

“Go ahead say it. You know the answer. You can say it.”

I paused for a minute thinking again if I’m crazy or this man is. Then I said it without even realizing what I was saying... “You’re the...monster? Frankenstein’s monster?”

“I never really liked that term but yes I am the monster from the story.”

“You look nothing like Boris Karloff though.”

“Hahaha I never liked that movie or that adaptation. No I don’t look like that anymore. I have seen a lot of incredible scientists and some plastic surgeons over the years but the best were my father’s kids. They all grew up and joined the family business by devoting their entire life to, well to my life. I owe them absolutely everything.”

“So I guess this book, *The Return of the Monster*, really belongs to you more than anybody else.”

“I can’t thank you enough for what you went through to find this book. I’ve been looking for it a long time and you have made a very very old man very happy. Here is your money as promised. I hope it helps with your business.”

“How did you know about my business?” I ask puzzled.

“I never hire any investigator without doing heavy research on them first. Plus I would never trust just anyone with this very important personal wish of mine.”

“Well can I ask one more favor of you sir?” I ask with anticipation.

“Most definitely.”

“I can’t believe I’m saying this after all I’ve been through but if you ever find yourself in need of another rare book would you consider hiring me again?”

“Actually, I have a friend from the old days that has been looking for a very specific book.”

“Oh yeah? What’s his or her name?” I ask as I reach for my personal notebook to write down the name.

“Ever heard of Bram Stoker?”