

# English fiction



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Bones I Shelley looked at her nails. She was a little upset with the thick red mud that lodged itself there. “ This is why I hate camping”, she said out aloud. The other girls in the tent ignored her. They were busy giggling trying to get their Girl Scout uniforms on for tonight’s bonfire. Shelly looked at her nails again, and began picking at the dirt with the fine edge of a Seventeen magazine. Laura entered the tent and brought with her the blush of the cold wind outside at which all the girls screamed in child-like unison, “ Get in Laura! It’s freezing outside”. “ Yeah...” Shelly said at last, “ seriously don’t be such a fucking bitch.” Shelly winced mischievously into a crooked smile. She knew the “ bitch” comment would certainly stir the girls in the tent. “ Shut up Shelley, you are soo bad”, said one girl, “ really who talks like that?” said another. Laura didn’t mind it at all. Shelley and she were already becoming the rebels of the group. Last night, they were the only girls that sneaked out of the tent to try a cigarette only to return ecstatically giddy-headed at the shock of the other “ good” girls. “ Hey Shelley, could I have a word with you for a second?” Laura said motioning out of the tent. Shelley finished cleaning the nails in her left hand and obliged.

“ What is it Laura?” Shelley said.

“ Katie found out from Holly that Jen was going to complain to the Head Master about our late night rendezvous”

“ No way!”

“ Yeah she said that Jen was going to tell her about the cigarettes tonight at the bon fire”

“ Really? We’ll have to figure something out before she does...”

“ Yeah that’s what I thought, so what do we do?”

“ I don’t know but let’s tell her to take a chill pill first, maybe tell her she can

hangout with us in the cafeteria if she shuts up”

“ Eww... you really be seen with Ragged-Jagged-Jen at school?”

“ Whatever, we’ll just tell her that for now, and see what happens...”

Shelley reentered the tent with Laura. It was almost eight o clock and the sun had completely set. Shelley walked past Ragged-Jagged-Jen with a polite smile, “ Why don’t you join us to set up the bonfire Jen?” Jen looked like she had been hit by a Bentley. Her wiry frame purred at the thought of hanging out with only the coolest girls in school. All she could let out was a grunted, “ Sure!”

Shelley, Laura and Jen left the tent to find a good spot for the bonfire. The nights in the forest were always a little spooky. Shelley was amazed at how the same forest appeared so tame in the day. She wondered if there was a whole race of species that specialized in night living other than bats and owls. That night the dull glow of the moon permeated through the thicket of trees. In a way, it provided a silver lining for the entire jungle.

The Head Master had told Laura to stay north, so they obviously went south with Jen following them ignorantly. Before they knew it they were audience to a virtual orchestra of crickets, bugs, and other noisy critters. The leaves of the trees acted like holes to a flute and all was going well.

They were following a trail set up by god-knows-who which ended in a perfectly barren circle. Suddenly, they all felt a little taken aback at being thrust into the naked moonlight. “ What a great spot” Laura gleefully chirped, “ Let’s set up the fire here.” They were given strict instructions for the campfire. First, they had to make sure there was enough seating around the fire for thirty girls. Next, they had to dig a hole half a foot deep and fill it with wood and other combustibles and then report back. They began looking

for a perfect spot to start digging. Shelley still felt a little uncomfortable. This land was too clean to be out here in the middle of nowhere. What freaked her out even more was a broken shovel she found lying behind a banyan tree. “ Um... Laura, I think we should find another place, I don't like this spot”.

“ Are you crazy Shelley, this is perfect, almost like God wanted us to find it”.

“ Don't tell me you believe that God has a plan for us. Mom always told me that I could do what I wanted and God would support me if I was right”.

“ Well, whatever, I am setting up the fire here. So hah!”

Ragged-Jagged-Jen knew she had little say in the matter. She was still glad that she was guest of honor on this expedition. Like an opposing magnet, Laura rushed to the middle of the dead land and began digging. Shelley began feeling even more uncertain as her palms began to sweat. Jen began navigating for some firewood around the edge of this barren circle.

Within seconds, Laura let out a miffed scream... “ Shelley... Shelley...” is about all she could muster. Before she could say more, Shelley knew something was wrong and rushed to Laura who was squatting next to her dug-out. The moon temporarily blurred Shelley's vision and by the time she could readjust all she could see were BONES! Laura was sitting quietly next to them, almost mesmerized by the shade of ivory they displayed in the moonlight. Shelley's knees began to shiver a little but she almost immediately tightened her thighs.

“ Hee, hee, haa, haa...”, Laura broke into an uncharacteristic laugh that lasted for a seemingly long five seconds. “ What? What! Why are you laughing? What's so funny?”

“ Can you imagine which poor animal was attacked here? I wonder was it a

deer running away from a cheetah? Ooh, it could also be some mighty animal slain by a heroic hunter. Wow a real life Indiana Jones in our very own forest.”

“ Hey just cover it up alright. We’ll talk about this later. Those bones are freaking me out.”

“ Aw, c’mon, are a titsy-bitsy pile of old bones gonna scare you?”

“ No, it’s not that”, Shelley said adjusting her pride, “ it’s just better to find some other place to pack the wood.”

It was the moonlight that must have played with her eyes but Shelley took another look at the pile of bones. This time she was sure. Buried under one straight long bone she saw the one thing that confirmed her fears: a human skull.

II

She tugged hard at Laura’s sweatshirt cracking one of her newly cleaned nails in the progress. “ Come on, we are leaving here right now! Laura I am not kidding”. Laura seemed unusually amused by the bones, completely unaware that they were human. Shelley knew Laura was an asthmatic and figured it would be best she tell her later when her medication was around. “ C’mon Jen, we are leaving right now! Hurry you don’t want to be left behind”. There was no reply. Shelley repeated a little louder and a little more worried, “ Jen get out right now... I don’t have the patience. We’ll get some wood together later?” There was a ruffle in the bush that Shelley caught with her left ear. She turned around so quickly that Laura couldn’t help but laugh at how nervous Shelley had become, “ I hope the big-bad forest monster doesn’t come after us... I mean we can’t afford to miss prom this year”, Laura chuckled.

“ Fuck you Laura, this isn’t funny. JEN, where are you?”

“ I told you we shouldn’t have brought her...”

“ Shut up you never said that, you always love telling people I told you so.

Why don’t you help for a change, I’ll go and cover the bones the way you found them”

Shelley began covering the bones with the caked red mud. There go my nails again she said to herself. Suddenly the sounds of the forest went dead—the crickets, the owls, the bugs. Even the gentle leaves stopped their erotic swagger. Shelley didn’t feel good at all. For the first time she hoped she’d hear those little bugs clamor. The silence was too deafening. The moonlight was steely. She had never felt so alone. This is how it feels to swallow an ounce of adrenalin on an empty stomach. She just wanted to cover the hole and get out of that spot, out of that forest, out into civilization.

She felt a warm gust of air under her neck. She could swear there was a presence behind her. Alright, Shelley thought, this isn’t the adrenaline, there is definitely someone behind me. She turned immediately expecting a dark world of pain. But lo, all she saw was good ol’ Ragged-Jagged-Jen meekly balancing the firewood.

“ Oh thank god! Where the hell were you Jen? You are such an idiot, seriously, no wonder you have, like, no friends!” Shelley felt immediately bad about what she said, she was really just happy to see her alive.

“ Sorry there was no wood around, but here I got some”, Jen said.

“ Leave it here, let’s go, we are leaving, come on Laura. NOW”

The girls made their way back to the tent. Their friends were busy playing with their torches telling each other ghost stories. Jen took the stage and put the flashlight stereotypically under her chin, illuminating the awkward bumps

on her face. “ I heard of a lady who was once victim to the beatings of her husband. So one day she...” before Jen could say more, Shelley covered her ears, “ Shut up! No more ghost stories tonight.” The tent became silent.

Shelley was the prettiest girl in school and turned out to be only a little bit of a bitch. Her looks propelled her into favorable status with both teachers and students. So when she said, no more ghost stories, it usually meant no more ghost stories! However, Laura was still musing about the bones she found, and figured this would be a great time to mess around with Miss Perfect Shelley. Laura snatched the torch from Jen and continued, “ And then there were these bones...” Before she could say anymore Shelley pounced on Laura, “ shut up bitch, no more story time tonight”.

“ Look who’s scared, Miss Pretty”, Laura joked.

Shelley got more furious and lunged toward Laura to force her to shut up, but her flying tackle ended up landing both girls outside of the tent, where any kind of a scuffle was sure to draw adult attention. Struggling to get herself under control, Shelley was surprised to see that Jen had followed them outside. She had a strange sort of smile on her face as she watched Shelley and Laura get up from the ground and her face seemed to have a slight glow to it. “ C’mon, I need to show you something”, she said to them. Shelley and Laura, not used to taking orders from anyone, especially not Raggedy-Jaggedy-Jen, merely looked at each other for a moment. It was so out of character for Jen to speak up that they both found themselves following without saying a word.

Jen led the girls back behind the tent and into the forest, again heading south. Shelley stopped in her tracks. There was no way she was going back to that clearing with the bones in it, at least not at night.

“ We can’t go back there,” Shelley said stubbornly. “ We have to tell someone about those bones. It could be important. I – I don’t think they were animal bones.”

“ Aw, scared little Miss Pretty can’t handle the thought of those scary old bones?” Laura teased. “ Maybe the big bad wolf will come out and gobble you up, too?”

Shelley opened her mouth to snap back a comment, but her eyes happened to fall on Jen at that moment. Jen stood in the moonlight and there was no mistake that she was glowing now. Slowly, she lifted one finger up to her lips in a silencing motion and Shelley couldn’t utter a sound. Suddenly, Shelley had no control over her own body. She simply began taking one step after another, following helplessly behind Jen deeper and deeper into the forest with Laura snapping out teasing comments all along the way.

At last, they reached the little clearing and all Shelley could do was stand at the edge and watch while Jen led Laura directly to the center.

“ Dig”, she said.

Laura, who still hadn’t shut up in her teasing of Shelley, simply stared at Jen.

“ What makes you think you can suddenly start ordering me around?” she demanded. “ I’m not here to serve you. You’re only here as a favor. Maybe if you had a friend once in your life, you would know that friends don’t rat on each other. That’s why we brought you along you know? Just so you wouldn’t rat on us.”

“ Dig”, Jen repeated, pointing at the recently covered bone pit.

Laura turned to Shelley as if seeking some support, but Shelley was still held powerless by that strange glowing coming off of Jen. She was surprised Laura didn’t see it and didn’t seem to be affected by it, but she couldn’t seem to do



anything about it.

Not getting any help from Shelley, Laura finally shrugged her shoulders and picked up the broken shovel. “ Sure, why not, I’m not afraid of any stupid pile of bones, no matter what kind they are.”

But when Laura had dug twice as deep as she had before, she still could not find any trace of the bones that had been there before. “ I don’t get it”, she said, wiping sweat from her forehead and staring into the pit she’d created. “ I know this is the same clearing and I know this is where I was digging before. But where did the bones go? They can’t have just disappeared.” But Shelley was beginning to get an idea. Jen wasn’t looking so jaggedy anymore and Laura was looking a little too tired for the work she’d been doing.

“ It’s time”, Jen said and reached out a hand to touch Laura’s face. Shelley would never forget the look of shock and horror that she saw there just as Laura’s skin began to melt away, seemingly into thin air. Within the space of seconds, Jen had absorbed everything that had been Laura except for a pile of bones and clothes lying neatly at the bottom of the pit.

Her eyes wide with horror, Shelley looked across the clearing at a newly radiant Jen. There was no way anyone would describe her now as raggedy. She was shining with a light completely her own. Jen put her fingers to her lips again.

“ Shhh. Remember, friends don’t rat out friends. That’s why we brought you along”.