

The Tragedy of Burt and Ophelia

By DRKPR0PH3T

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A tragedy of your wildest dreams... I love it!

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Chapter 1 - The Tragedy of Burt and Ophelia

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1 - The Tragedy of Burt and Ophelia

It all started when I ran away from home that lovely December day. It was probably the stupidest and most beneficial thing I had ever done in my life. Considering it was about 23 degrees outside, and there was a blizzard, I pretty much had no chance.

It was a pretty rash decision to leave in the first place. I hadn't even finished my high school education yet. But then again I had pretty much figured that there was no place in the world let alone Detroit for an artist.

Somehow I managed to survive the night and after selling a few quickly sketched portraits I had enough to rent out a small dirty apartment. This became my home, my studio, my paradise. Independence was a virtue I needed and got. Though I probably got it a little too soon. It wasn't much at all, in fact it was basically nothing. But it was all I could afford on an artist's income.

Well I managed to make some enemies after a bit of borrowing, gambling and some not to commenting portraits. I got run out of Detroit. And I mean literally "run" out of Detroit. I was sleeping in my apartment when I heard the pounding of footsteps on the stairs and things crashing to the floor. That was my signal to hightail it out of there. I gathered my few belongings and climbed out the window. I propelled down the side of the building and dropped down into the street. That's when the mob saw me. I just bolted right out of there. Didn't even stop to stare. When I got to the city limits the mob stopped and a few of my financial "friends" came forward.

"If you ever come back to Detroit again, we'll rip those scrawny arms and legs off and use 'em to choke you," shouted one of them.

So I left. I "boarded" a train headed south and waited.

A few days later I looked out the box car's door and saw a pleasant sight. A peach orchard with pink peaches glowing in the sun. The scent of the nectar filled my nostrils. I jumped out and wandered in. Plucked a peach off and ate it. Biting into it was like biting into heaven. And I was definitely hungry. If you have been reading and keeping track you will notice I hadn't eaten for several days!

I finally fell asleep under the shade of a peach tree. And when I awoke I decided to go into town. This is when I met Ophelia, such a lovely girl. I saw her at the general store buying some canned peaches. I came up behind her and touched her shoulder.

"Who are you?," she said softly.

"I am Burt Gumner, I just came in from Detroit," I responded.

"I am Ophelia, I didn't think I had ever seen you before. What are you doing here in Georgia?"

"Um... well I sort of got kicked out of Detroit. I'm an artist and artists just don't seem to have luck there. Well pretty much anywhere these days."

"Well since you are new would you like me to show you around? I have to be home in a little and if you like you can come and meet my family."

I thought about it and then answered with a brief "yes, that would be lovely."

So Ophelia showed me around this small town. We went into many of the merchant's shops, looked at the historic landmarks. Then we went to the peach orchard I had just come out of. Being rash and trying to impress this girl I grabbed her shopping basket and climbed up a tree.

"What on earth are you doing?" She questioned.

"Getting you some peaches."

Nervously she yelled up at me, "NO! You can't do that if someone catches you, you'll be—" She didn't have time to finish. I heard the click of the shotgun and the deep grunt of a incredibly large and hairy man.

"Git outta my peechee tree you stupid little punk bastard!," grunted the man.

I came down and put my hands up dropping the basket on the grass and allowing all of the peaches to spill out.

An hour later both me and Ophelia had been clapped in stocks and put in the middle of the town for public humiliation. I felt extremely embarrassed. This was just not my week. Ophelia was crying, the tears streaming down out of her eyes and down her cheeks. I tried to comfort her.

"I am so sorry Ophelia. I didn't know that that man was there."

"It's not that," cried Ophelia.

"What?" I asked befuddled.

"I have fallen in love with you Burt!"

Shaken by the oddly random outburst I fell back dislocating one of my shoulders. I yelled out in pain. But it wasn't because of the dislocated shoulder. It was because I too had fallen in love with Ophelia. And because neither of us could get to the other one, we were both severely depressed. Then I had an idea.

"Ophelia, remember that magician? Houdini?"

"Yes," she said somberly.

"Watch this," I said as I dislocated my other shoulder and got out of the stocks."

Then I blacked out.

Three hours later I woke up in the hospital. Ophelia was nowhere to be seen. A small dish of peach jello rested on the table next to me. My stomach growled as I realized how hungry I was. I snatched the jello and dug in with my re-located limbs.

A half hour later I was moaning and groaning. I felt as if my whole body was going to explode.

Before I blacked out yet again I heard the nurse saying, "You cannot leave jello out that long! Now he has food poisoning!"

300 years later...

I woke up to strange whirring noises and the kind of relief you get after a good nights sleep. Where was I? What had happened? I couldn't remember anything. I was lying in a large cylinder on a mattress. A glass door that fit into the cylinder was open in front of me. As I crawled out I saw several silver robed people walk toward me.

"Where am I?" I sputtered.

"Don't worry about that right now," one of them said. "You will get your memory back soon."

They wrapped me in some blankets and led me to a small chamber with a cot in it. The fluorescent glow from the walls made me feel very comfortable and mellow. I laid down and tried to sort out everything that was happening. Then it came in flashbacks. My whole childhood, early adulthood, everything, right up to the point where I blacked out after eating the jello.

The door to the small chamber opened. No sound of metal on metal issued from the hinges. An older woman appeared from outside the room. She looked to be about 65 and her skin was a bit weathered. She came over to the cot and sat down next to me.

"Hello Burt," she said.

"Um... Hi?" I responded.

“Don’t you recognize me at all?” She asked.

“No. Should I?” I stared deep in her eyes trying to find something. I saw a flicker and then it dissipated.

“Burt, you- well. Burt I am Ophelia.”

“WHA-!”

“Let me finish. 300 years ago you almost died from peach flavored jello poisoning. It was a miracle that you survived. You ended up catatonic and after 10 years of you not waking up, they decided to try out their experimental cryogenics machine. It worked and you were frozen for the last 290 years. Since then the peach industry has become the staple of America’s economy, and your artwork that was so ridiculed at the time has become famous. Also at age 65 I discovered the secret to infinite life. Sadly I am not able to digress to a younger age.”

My head was spinning. The peach industry was the staple of America’s economy. It wasn’t possible. No! The apocalypse had to be around the corner. But just then a tray was brought in with several items on it. I went over to take a look and discovered peach pudding, peach cake, and peach juice.

“Noo!” I screamed.

“You still love me right Burt?” Ophelia asked. “Right? Burt? Burt?”

The End