

# I Died In A Bed Of Roses

## Excerpt

### *Chapter 1: Revenge*

#### **Now.**

My hand bursts through the soft earth.

Frantic, I grope the air, feeling for something—*anything*—to grab hold of. I find purchase against the thorny branch of a rosebush. Ignoring the pain, I yank, pulling the rest of myself closer to the surface, shredding my hand in the process.

I scream. No sound emerges. My mouth is full of dirt.

My other arm breaks the surface. I paw the fresh soil, raking deep lines in the soft earth, pulling rose petals into the ground with me.

My head is free, my shoulders.

I cough and spit and choke, clearing my nose and mouth of rich, fertile muck.

I do not scream again.

It's dark outside, hot. Summer. The sky booms with heat thunder, threatening a storm.

There is a storm inside me. Anger, betrayal, hatred, and worst of all love. Still love.

Even now. I still love her.

My legs breach the shallow grave. I rise up to my knees and breathe moist, dank air. I wait.

I am weak. My body shakes. How long had I been under there?

Why am I alive?

When my eyes adjust enough to see the silhouette of the farmhouse against the jet black night sky, I rise to my feet, steady myself and move slowly in that direction. My foot strikes something amongst the rosebushes.

The shovel used to dig my grave.

I take it in my hands, let its weight pull against my aching bones and plod toward the house.

Toward her.

The greenhouse door slams. “No no no. Not supposed to happen! No no no!”

The lumbering figure, all dirty overalls and sweat-soaked hair, shambles toward me. “Stay in the rose garden. Stay in the ground. That's where you belong now. That's your home. That's—”

I smash him in the face, crying out in exertion. It takes all of my energy to raise the shovel above my head and bring it back down. He drops, hands raising to the split in the skin that now runs from his chin to his forehead. I swing a second time, crushing his gloved hands, his nose. Teeth.

Again I hit him. His breathing is loud and erratic, his head a smear of shining black against the darkness. Turning the shovel point-down, I thrust, cleaving his head from his neck, silencing him.

The screen door of the farmhouse slams.

“Luke?”

Even now, after everything—after what she and her brother did to me—she is the most beautiful creature I've ever laid eyes on. Her long, tendril-like hair billows back as she rushes toward us, fiery crimson even in the black of night. I redouble my grip on the handle of my shovel. I breathe deep, strained breaths; not because I'm physically exhausted (which I am), but because the sight of her still takes my breath away.

Maggie. My love.

“Luke, what—”

She stops short when she sees me, when she sees her brother's corpse on the ground.

“Brian.”

She loves me. Still. I see it. Penetrating the darkness. In the glint of her eyes. Her face betrays her, its expression the same as that first night we met. That awe. That infatuation.

She loves me still.

I smash her. I weep. I bring the shovel down on her twitching body again and again. I want to erase her. I want to erase the love, the hurt, the agony. Silence the storm in me.

It does not diminish one single bit.

Thunder crashes overhead. Lightning. In that flash I see the red. See her face. Her eyes. Small sounds escape what's left of her mouth.

I smash until those things are no more.

The rain starts as I finish with Maggie. I wipe it out of my eyes as I start toward the house.

Toward her mother.

My name is Brian Sully, and I died in that bed of roses.

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## **Then.**

Moving to the Oregon coast was supposed to make life better, not worse. Rockwood Village was nothing more than a small strip of restaurants, antique shops, and a tiny neighborhood east of the coastal highway.

It was the perfect place for my exile. The perfect place for me to disappear.

I am Brian Sully, cult horror filmmaker. Not a household name, but notable enough to be considered famous in the right circles. I found success very early, when I was barely twenty-one years old. I wrote and directed a short film based on the works of legendary pulp horror writer H.P. Lovecraft. I submitted it to a film festival and won first prize: A trip to LA to meet with producers and the chance to direct another Lovecraft based film, this time with a modest (yet significant) budget.

It did well enough to launch my career as a low budget horror filmmaker, a career that lasted for more than a decade. But the constant grind, the stress, the politics and the meager paychecks left me disenfranchised, tired and jaded. After my seventh feature film as a writer and director, at 33 years of age, I took my ball and went home.

It wasn't only that. God I wish it was only that. There was also a scandal. The kind of scandal that even a schlocky B-movie director like me couldn't escape. A sex scandal.

As innocuous as I may have thought it was at the time, it put a mark on my name. A series of graphic pictures I shared with the leading lady of my last film along with several emails describing in careful detail exactly what I wanted to do to her with the subject of the pictures.

We hit it off at first, Julia and I. But by the end of the third week of production, we couldn't stand each other. She made my life a living hell for the remaining shoot dates, and I did my best to make her scenes as physically and emotionally grueling as possible.

The film turned out great. The tension between us came across as genuine terror and anger on screen. It was by far her best performance. But she wasn't about to let it go. She couldn't quit the movie and risk her own reputation, so she got her revenge in another way.

She took to the internet. She shared the images and emails I'd sent her the first week of production when we were getting along great. I was labeled a pervert and shamed across the horror community message boards and websites.

My career was ruined. Julia had won.

So I quit. Saved my friends and colleagues the embarrassment of having to justify working with

me again. I cashed in my savings and left the Midwest in favor of the Pacific Northwest. I moved to Rockwood, bought a small cabin, took a job at the tiny grocery located along the highway and started work on my first horror novel.

I thought I could get away from the nonsense of the horror community bickering, infighting, backstabbing, gossiping and, yes, sex scandals. Mine wasn't the first scandal, and certainly not the last. It was as if the community needed an annual sacrifice to purge its members, keep its numbers low. Keep the beast from bloating.

I thought I could blend in with regular people again. Not be recognized in diners by groups of horror kids wanting autographs while I tried to eat an omelet. Not have those autograph signings always turn awkward when the kids asked me why I didn't direct features anymore.

I was wrong.

“Oh my god! Brian, is this your dick?”

I was stocking macaroni and cheese boxes when Anna ran up and stuck her phone in my face.

My blood ran cold. I dropped a box of mac and cheese the hard shells bursting on the floor at my feet. I took the girl's phone, expecting to see those graphic images I'd shared over a decade before.

It was my dick. But not from the sex scandal pictures.

I'd appeared in a scene in that first short film I'd made. The one that launched my career.

*Sons of Dagon.*

In the scene, my on-screen girlfriend and I make love on a small boat when creatures from the sea capsize the boat and drown us. In the scene, we're both nude.

I looked at Anna incredulously. She was a mousey girl with a wispy, dirty blonde pony tail, glasses and big blue braces. All of nineteen years old.

“Why are you showing me this?” I knelt down to clean up the spilled macaroni. As awkward as it was to be staring at a picture of my genitals at my place of employment, I couldn't help but feel a tremendous sense of relief. Even after all this time, I was still just as emotionally triggered by the events that had led to my early retirement from film as I was when the whole awful thing unfolded.

“I didn't know you made porno movies!” She giggled and grinned at me. The other counter girl, Courtney, laughed from the checkout. Even Steve, the middle-aged grocery manager, smiled from across the store.

I couldn't tell if Anna wanted to fuck me or was just being obnoxious for the sake of it. I'd been in Rockwood for ten years. At 43, I didn't exactly look at the counter girls as dating material. Truth be told, the sex scandal had left me jaded and unwilling (if not downright unable) to put trust into any sort of meaningful relationship. I hadn't even been on a single date in the decade since I'd been shunned by the horror community.

That only made the brazen flirting of a teenage girl—or whatever the hell she was doing by waving my own dick in my face—all the more awkward.

“Please put that away.” I returned to my macaroni boxes, embarrassed. What else was I supposed to say? I was being sexually harassed with my own dick by a teenage girl.

This was some kind of karmic revenge for the Julia emails...

“You're just mad cause it's small!”

Courtney laughed out loud and even Steve snorted at Anna's obnoxious taunting.

“It's not—” I almost took the bait. Almost engaged in a debate about the size of my penis with a grocery store girl less than half my age. I pushed past her and walked across the store to where Steve leaned against the front window. The store was empty, save us employees. It was still the off-season, even though the weather had already warmed up farther inland. The waters way up here came down from the arctic, keeping them cold nearly all year round. Only the locals stuck around Rockwood when the water was cold.

“Please make her stop.”

Steve chuckled. He was a mountain man in training. A true Oregon native. His bristly black

mustache would eventually turn into a full gray beard and he would lose his teeth. His interests were fishing, the grocery store, and nothing else. “You’re the one put the movie on the internet.”

A full length video of *Sons of Dagon* was on my official website along with the trailers and some scenes from my feature films. The site hadn’t been up updated in years, but I’d left it active for posterity’s sake. A final act of defiance after I left the community. They could smear my name, put a pox on my career, but they could not erase the art I’d made. Now I regretted that decision.

I took off my apron. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Steve.”

He was still grinning. Steve was a local. So were Anna and Courtney. Native Pacific Northwesterners. They’d never traveled much outside of the mountains, and their intellect reflected that fact. “What? You’ve still got two hours left on your shift!”

“Take it up with Anna.”

I walked back to my cabin two blocks away on Easy Street (I’d taken that as a good omen when I’d moved to Rockwood. Life on East Street—now it felt like a mockery).

I was still seething both in anger and embarrassment from Anna’s harassment as I cracked open a beer and sat down at my computer. The manuscript for my new novel, *The True Origins of The Deep Ones*, was open on the desktop. I sipped my beer and focused in on the book to take my mind off the weird events of the day.

I read over the last few paragraphs I’d written. They were awful. The truth was, I was a crappy author. As a filmmaker, my style was visually distinct. I’d made my mark with visceral slime and latex monsters set against stark colored backgrounds. My scripts were often little more than an excuse to get pretty girls naked and covered with gore and goo—a fetish that would ironically both launch my career and spell its demise. As a novelist, this type of storytelling came off to me as cheap and unrewarding.

I sat back and drank the rest of my beer in one swig. In my mind I saw Anna holding her phone, wagging my own dick at me again. I tried to imagine her naked. I slipped my hand in my pants and rubbed my cock. It wasn’t small. I wasn’t any kind of size champion, but I wasn’t small.

I pictured myself rubbing my erection against Anna’s smooth face, telling her just that.

*I know, Mr. Sully. I just wanted you to prove it.* I pictured Anna taking my erection into her mouth, careful not to scrape it against her braces.

Her braces.

I took my hand out of my pants. Disgusting. What the fuck was wrong with me?

Perhaps I was the pervert my film-making community had painted me as. Perhaps the world of art was better off without me in it, harassing and stalking all the pretty actresses.

I sighed. It was dark outside. I decided to take a stroll across the beach to clear my mind.

I took the long way as to avoid the grocery. The moon was full and low, casting its brilliant pale light against the endless waves. I took off my shoes and left them atop a picnic table in the parking lot. I loved the way the sand felt against my bare feet, even on a brisk night like this. The cold made me feel alive.

I walked out to the shoreline, staring into the vastness before me, wincing against the freezing water as the tide gently broke against my skin. Alone out there, just me and the ocean, I thought about Lovecraft and his monsters that dwelled beneath the surface of the water. Lovecraft, my muse. I’d made a career off of the world and the monsters he’d dreamed up. A man long dead before I’d been born. A ghost beckoning me to create in his image. A dead god.

I felt empty inside. I’d written five novels since I’d been in Rockwood. No one had read them. No one had read them because I never showed them to anyone. They were bad. I was a bad writer. Plain and simple. I’d walked away from what I was good at. Great at. My movie career was long dead. My plans to retire and hide away from the world to write books had failed.

What did I have left?

The tide pulled harder against my bare feet, ankle-high now. The waves got bigger, stronger. I’d have to move inland soon or I’d be swept into the sea.

I didn't move.

I stood transfixed, gazing out into nothing, searching my mind for a reason to retreat to dry land. Water crashed against my shins. Calf-high now.

What was back there? Anna and Steve? The Grocery? My crappy books?

My contacts in the film world were more than relieved when I'd announced my retirement. I hadn't heard from anyone I'd made a movie with in a decade. Not my actors. Not my editors.

I'd felt nothing but numbness when I'd gotten word that Julia had overdosed on drugs and died on a straight to DVD soft-core porno set five years prior. Her career had not taken off the way she'd expected it to after our scandal. It seemed to mark her as difficult to work with as much as it had marked me as a pervert.

Julia Stine was dead. Brian Sully was already as good as dead. Why not just be finished with it?

My phone rang, breaking that dark train of thought.

I jogged up out of the water back to the table with my shoes on it.

"Brian Sully, how can I help you?"

It was my producer, Barry. He'd been with me from the beginning. From *Sons of Dagon* all the way up through my final feature. He'd been like a brother to me. We were like soldiers who'd survived war. We'd quit the business at the same time.

He assured me he'd made all the movies he wanted to make. That he'd saved smart, and that our exits were only a coincidence. But I knew. I knew people couldn't mention Barry without mentioning Brian Sully. We were a team.

And then we were nothing.

He opened a car lot; I became a stock boy.

"Come home, buddy."

It was the twentieth anniversary of *Sons of Dagon*. A Lovecraftian film festival in Cincinnati, Ohio had contacted Barry and asked if he could get me to come and present the film. Do a Q and A. Sign autographs.

The festival promoter had to be crazy. No one had asked me a single time to make a public appearance since the scandal. Not once. Had time been kind to my name after I'd faded away? Or was this some shyster just looking to make horror headlines by booking a controversial name that would get the internet outraged?

"You know I don't do that shit anymore, Barry."

But the truth was, a festival sounded good. Maybe the world had forgotten about Brian Sully's lewd pictures. Maybe a weekend with my friends and fans was exactly what I needed to reinvigorate my spirit. I wasn't looking forward to another summer season on the coast again, anyway. Too many tourists. Too many human beings in general. For someone trying to hide from the world, I'd picked a pretty crappy spot to do so.

"Come on, brother!" Barry said in his smoothest car-salesman-pitch voice. There's a LOT of money to be made! Don't make me make it without you."

I hesitated. "What about... you know..."

"Water under the bridge, Bud! Nobody cares about that shit anymore. It happened ten years ago! Ancient stuff!"

What was the worst that could happen? I'd already lived through my sex scandal once. I'd just been standing in the fucking ocean contemplating suicide. Even if a crowd of liberal crazies showed up to protest the Lovecraftian pervert's movie screening, I could always blow my fucking brains out in front of them and really make some headlines.

I agreed to attend the show.

Walking back to the cabin, I stopped inside the grocery and tendered my resignation. I figured between the money I'd squirreled away from working at the store and what the festival had agreed to pay me, I'd be able to afford the mortgage on the cabin for at least six months. If I still didn't know

what to do with my life after that, well, my stock boy job would be the least of my problems.

I booked a flight and packed, stopping back at the beach one last time before I left Rockwood. Several families were out there on the shore, parents braving the frigid waves to frolic in the water with their children.

I smiled, drove away, and never saw the ocean again.