Graveyard Flashback

By Rowan Peterson

Narrowed, glossy, green eyes cut across dozens of gray tombstones, trees and trimmed hedges. The eyes found their way to me, unblinkingly glaring as the older woman they belonged to dropped a colorful bouquet. Her eyes approached nearer until right in front of me. Her blond eyebrows were furrowed. Her lips snarled. My ears became deaf to the words spewed at me, hearing only the thud of the bouquet landing on the soft grass, echoing repeatedly in my chest. Finally, she left, but not before her shoulder bumped into me, sending me stumbling backwards. Landing, I found myself back in my car

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"Becca, you shouldn't be texting." Millie sat in the passenger seat, her arms crossed and eyebrows pinched together.

"Yeah, yeah. I need to text *Mom* we're on our way back," I explained, switching my view down to the phone screen, up to the road, and back down again.

"You should've done it before we left prom."

"Millie, you're being ridiculous right now, okay? It'll only take a moment. Plus, you have no room to talk, you're not even buckled." Before finishing the text, Millie reached her arm out, snatching the phone out of my hand.

"Oh my God! Millie! You can't just steal my phone like that!" Millie pushed herself against the passenger door, holding my phone out of reach. Trying to take my phone back, I struggled to pull her arm downwards.

"Oh *my* God, Becca!" Her voice rose mockingly as she scrolled through the messages. "You liar, you're not even texting Mom. You're texting your boyfriend!"

"I swear, when we get home, I'll—" Straining further for the phone, I felt my foot slam on the gas pedal and my hand push the steering wheel, violently swerving the car into the other lane.

Millie's eyes widened. She pointed at the windshield. Her mouth opened. A loud honk drowned out her voice, quickly followed by the screech of scrapping metal. Suddenly jerked forward, my eyes scrunched shut. I tried blindly grabbing onto Millie. My head fell down hard on the steering wheel. Pain reverberated down my body. Immediately, I heard a ringing in my ear. The car wheels screeched. With a final crash, the windshield shattered, raining glass down on me.

Opening my eyes, I saw Millie crumpled against the door. After fumbling with the seat buckle, I lunged across the car, pulled her up, cupped her face with my hands, and screamed over the still-going car horn, "Millie? Are you alright?"

She seemed as if in a deep sleep with her closed, relaxed eyes. "Millie?" I spoke loud, hoping my voice might travel into her dream and wake her. "Millie, why aren't you saying anything?" My voice cracked and rose in pitch as I shook her. "Wake up, wake up, wake up." My voice rattled, barely audible.

After shaking more intensely, a thick, hot liquid trickled through my fingers. Looking back at the car door, I saw a red, downwards smear. "Okay, okay, okay. You're going to be okay."

Hands trembling, I settled her back against the seat. I paused for a moment, staring at her unmoving body. Shaking my head, I lowered myself down and ran my hands over the ground, searching for my phone. Finally finding it, I tried to turn it on without success. Rummaging my brain for more ideas, I quickly scanned my surroundings, eventually looking out the broken windshield and landing on the car with the blaring horn. I must have rammed into a small, blue car and pinned it between a large tree and my own car. The sides seemed squished together, almost touching. I noticed that my door was pushed against the other car. Now that I could focus more clearly, I faintly heard music and someone screaming.

I needed to get out. I needed to get help. Crawling over the steering wheel, I tried dragging myself out of the windshield. Not paying attention to where I placed my hands, I accidentally impaled my palm with a shard of glass. A loud yelp escaped from deep in my throat. Grinding my teeth together, I continued dragging myself out of the windshield and slid down the hood. Staggering back towards the road, I called for help from whoever could hear me.

In answer, blue and red lights sped towards me until I was surrounded by them. Soon, a group of uniformed people ran towards the wreck, some kneeling down beside me. Their words were diminished by sirens, music, the blaring horn. Screaming.

"My sister," I croaked.

I sat on the grass, holding my head with my uninjured hand, until people ran past with two stretchers. I immediately recognized Millie being rushed towards the swirling lights. Then the second stretcher blurred by. A bloody boy lay unresponsive, an older woman clutching his limp hand. She looked back at me and for a moment, those doe-like, glossy, green eyes stopped time. Someone helped me to my feet, bringing me back to reality.

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Mulling over what I'd done, I stood alone among a sea of graves. Then I walked towards the small statue I've been avoiding until now. The statue stood clean and shiny, with an engraved epitaph reading, *"In loving memory of Liam Baros 2013-2024".* Slowly lowering a single rose down next to the colorful bouquet, I crouched there for a minute, mustering up the courage to whisper the words I have been repeating ever since the night. "I'm sorry. I'm *so* sorry." My voice cracked. My vision blurred. "I'm sorry."

But no amount of sorrys will undo what happened. They cannot bring back Millie and Liam. They cannot dry those green eyes. Sniffling, I stood up and wiped my eyes with the end of my sleeve. Turning around to leave, I saw her staring at me from the parking lot, wiping her own eyes.