

He popped his head out of the hole and looked beyond the heaping piles of freshly dug dirt, making certain there were no intruders hiding in the bushes, waiting to rob him of his find. Satisfied there weren't any, he reached down and grabbed the lid. Rusted solid, the tiny hinges creaked loudly as he tugged. He yanked harder and harder until they snapped.

Then... Wooosh! A gigantic gale force wind blasted up and out from the coffin, violently ripping the lid from his hand. The plank door pinned his legs against the earthen side of the grave. Using his arms, he shielded his face as the tornado strength winds blew straight up past him. His hair was blown straight on end. The tree limbs above him thrashed and whipped wildly as the colossal, continuous gust of wind ripped through the leaves. Dust, dirt, and stones, tore at his arms and face as they were hurled from the hole. The rush of the air howled loudly with an eerie, awful sound, as though a thousand people were screaming at once. Thaddeus grimaced as the forceful wind would not allow him to catch his breath.

As fast as the howling wind had erupted from the coffin, it abruptly stopped. Then the lid slammed shut with a loud whack. The branches bounced and swayed to a peaceful rest as Thaddeus, trembling, cautiously began to wipe the dirt from his face and arms.

Being more cautious on his second attempt, he slowly lifted the lid while peeking over it through squinted eyes. No howling gust of wind greeted him as the mummified remains of the once very pretty and young Rachel Petersen, laid to rest in a plain floral print dress, came into view. A thin layer of dust covered her and everything else inside the tiny coffin.

But how could that be? After that violent windstorm, which just moments ago blasted forth from the coffin, no dust would have remained. That was just another curiosity that never crossed Thaddeus's mind.

Staring back at him were two large empty eye sockets in a tiny skull, which rested on a satin pillow. Her facial skin, once having a flawless peaches and cream complexion, was now brown, deeply gouged with wrinkles, and drawn tight, exposing her baby teeth. Her nose was reduced to two narrow slits. Red hair, parted in the middle, covered her forehead before coming to rest in curls on her shoulders.

The bones and joints in her hands and arms were clearly visible. Her skin-tight hands lay folded on her chest, clutching a rosary. An artifact!

*"She looks like a dried-out prune with red hair,"* Thaddeus thought to himself. Then his pulse pounded faster and louder in his ears when he spotted the holy prayer beads.

He stared wide-eyed at the white beaded rosary that had a tiny silver crucifix attached, then the corners of his lips curled into a sly smile as he congratulated himself on the find, "I knew there would be something of value buried with her."

Slowly he reached down for the *treasure*. "One more inch and it's mine."

Then he quickly jerked his hand back when Seth's warning echoed through his mind, *"Do you want someone like her to haunt you for the rest of your life?"*

"Nonsense," he reasoned to himself with a chuckle. "Ha! What does Seth know?"

Then his subconscious haunted him, *"What about your dream? The curse in hieroglyphics?"*

He answered himself out loud! "That's nonsense too! Take the treasure and cover her back up!"

Nervously, he wiped the beads of sweat running down his brow; again, he reached for the holy rosary very slowly while staring at her ghastly, withered face. And those two empty eye sockets staring back! He was expecting her to move, or worse yet, holler, *"Grave robber,"* and grab at him with her boney hands. Nevertheless, he desired that rosary so badly, he was willing to take that risk.

Thaddeus delicately grasped the tiny cross. Firmly, but with a gentle touch, the young archaeologist raised it two inches until all the slack was out of the chain. Now taut, it would not come away from the corpse any further; the remaining beads of the rosary had been intertwined around those hideous looking hands.

Keeping a vigilant watch on her hollow eyes, he tugged a bit harder on the rosary. He did not see when the army of huge, dark orange centipedes scurried out from under her hands. Quickly, one after another, thousands of the ugly bugs crawled out from their hiding spot and ran up the chain. They raced across his hand and up his arm. "Oh!" Thaddeus hollered as he let go of the cross and flung his hand back.

Thousands more continued to pour out from their hiding spot, climbing over his shoes, up his pants, up his legs, under his shirt. "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Moreover, they stunk. Like battery acid mixed with used motor oil and ammonia.

A part of his dream flashed through his mind, *"Within these walls lie the remains of Rachel Petersen. Cursed will be all those who dare enter."*

In one bound, he jumped the four feet out of the grave. The hideous bugs poured out of the hole and chased him down. Chills ran the entire length of his spine as he danced about, flailing his arms, trying to shake the repulsive insects off as more and more covered him.

He ripped his shirt off and used it to swat the creepy crawlers off his back, chest, shoulders, and stomach. They were in his hair; he shook his head. One was halfway in his ear when he pulled it out. He kicked his feet into the air while grabbing and shaking his pant legs; he stomped on the vile and relentless *hunnerd leggers* that did fall to the ground. The ones he missed, turned and came after him again.

For ten awfully long minutes, they kept up their never-ending assault.

While jumping up and down, he tripped over the shovel's handle and fell face first over the freshly dug dirt pile back into the grave, landing three inches from Rachel's mummified face; he swore he saw Rachel smile at him! ...