

The Dissection of Benedict Rose



Stephen Smith

Stephen Smith is a senior at East Carolina University majoring in English and minoring in creative writing. He writes and reads fictional horror and mystery stories. He writes in his spare time and constantly jots down ideas that come to him throughout the day, whether that be character lines, actions, how the story progresses, or anything that he thinks will entertain readers. His goal for the future is to publish short horror story collections and then move to write full-length novels.



Abstract

This is a short horror story that I had written for a writing class at ECU.

Content Warning - This story contains some gore and death, please read with caution.

The lever was pulled, and Benedict Rose dangled from the rope, strangling his neck. The executioner must've not secured the rope correctly, for Benedict remains in the land of the living, his legs thrashing around in every direction, arms trying to break free of his restraints, his torso going left and right, and the skin around his neck getting redder as time moves forward. The audience flinches in horror at the scene. A lone man in black sits by the sidelines, staring toward the scene before him with his heavily bagged eyes, wondering when such a display would end.

"Damn it all, you botched it again!" screams Officer Bracken, the man in charge; he takes out his firearm and aims it at Benedict.

Noise struggles to release from Benedict's mouth, his eyes bulging out of their sockets with tears going down his face, tongue sticking out.

The sound of the officer's revolver echoes throughout the outdoors, a single shot to the heart; Benedict's thrashing stops immediately. His head is down, eyes still wide open, and his tongue sticks out. Most of the audience has their hands over their mouths. The lone man in black leans back, his eyes still open, exhaling.

"All right, that's enough; you've all seen the son of a bitch suffer, all of you out!" The officer in charge ushers the shocked audience, leaving behind the lone man, several officers, and the executioner.

"That's the second hanging you botched. Do it a third time, and I'll have you cleaning the prison's sewers."

The executioner shakes his head and walks off. Officer Bracken waves over the lone man in black.

"Doctor Cross, get your ass over here," the brutish man commands. The lone man replies by sighing, getting up from his chair, and walking

over to the hanged body gazing up and down Benedict Rose's corpse.

"Well, do your thing," Officer Bracken insists.

"Why? It's clear the man is dead; you don't need me to confirm that," Doctor Cross coldly responds.

"Tell that to the warden; he wants you to ensure that every execution results in a confirmed death," Officer Bracken ushers with his hand.

Doctor Cross reaches into his pocket and takes out a wooden stethoscope. He places one end right next to the bleeding bullet hole in Benedict's chest and plants his ear on the other; only silence remains.

"I, Doctor Cross, declare that the convict Benedict Rose has passed from this world onto the next," Doctor Cross says lifelessly, a poor attempt at humor that he is aware of, which only serves to anger his superior.

"Just say he's dead, fool," Officer Bracken says. Doctor Cross shrugs his shoulders.

"Boys, cut him down and take him to this freak's office," Officer Bracken commands his subordinates.

"Doctor, do whatever you do with these corpses," Officer Bracken says, walking off to enter the prison.

Doctor Cross watches as the officers cut the rope and sighs. The officers finally managed to lift the man's corpse

and take him to Doctor Cross's office.

Staring at the corpse on the table, Doctor Cross turns his gaze to his instruments that rest on a table to his right. He grabs his obsidian knife but puts it back, instead reaching for the most essential tools for his position: a bottle of whiskey and a glass. He fills the glass to the brim, places the bottle down, and takes a drink, unfazed by the taste of the bitter poison in his glass. Setting the glass down, he grabs the obsidian knife once again and cuts open the man. Blood pours out over the body, and off the table onto the ground; the tired doctor's mind lingers upon his case as he cuts into the flesh of the man previously known as Benedict Rose. He had been a man of ordinary standing. Unmarried at thirty. Rare, but Doctor Cross can attest to it, for he is around Benedict's age and unwed. Doctor Cross gazes into the chest cavity, using a lit candleholder to illuminate the insides; some wax drips into the body. He saws off the various ribs of the ribcage, places them next to the body, and stares at the man's lungs.

Oh, that's right, he had been a coal miner, Doctor Cross thought. All coal miners that the doctor had cut open had had similar lungs, covered in black dust. He cuts out the

lungs and places them on a small table to his left side.

Doctor Cross's eyes dart around the body. Wishing to save the heart for last, he turns his attention elsewhere. He cuts out the kidneys in the man. He notices the liver, places the kidneys to the side, and cuts the tissue that keeps the liver connected, putting them together on the table. The liver looks dried up, with various dark blisters covering it. The kidneys are in a poor state as well. They're shades of black, and one at the top has an odd-looking blister. Doctor Cross reaches for his glass of whiskey with a bloodied hand.

These organs look odd; what causes that? The doctor thinks, downing more of the devil's nectar.

Next, he removes the stomach and intestines. The more he cut open, the more he wondered about Benedict Rose's crime. Benedict Rose had been charged with the murder of a prostitute named Lauren Reyes. Doctor Cross examined her body during the investigation; the only damage to her body was a single strike to her skull with one of the miner's shovels at Benedict Rose's workplace. There were no signs of a struggle, and the blow had been to the back of her head. Benedict Rose was lying on the ground across from the body with the shovel in his hands, shirt and

pants slightly torn. The police concluded that the crime had occurred late at night, as a worker arrived to check equipment when the sun was rising, only to find a single shovel missing. Inside one of the caves was where the murderer and victim lay. Police concluded the investigation as quickly as they had started it; after all, the culprit was still at the scene of the crime. And so, the cuffs were chained to Benedict Rose, and his trial would soon be carried out.

Removing the pancreas, the spleen, and the bladder, Doctor Cross arranges the organs on the table to his left — the only organs left being the heart and the brain. The Doctor puts his instruments down, wipes the blood off his hands with a rag, and grabs his drink. He walks over to the lone chair in the dark corner of his office and sits down. The oil lamps on the wall, running low on fuel, and the candlelight is only bright enough to illuminate Benedict Rose's cut-open corpse in the room. He gazes exhaustingly at his progress, occasionally sipping his drink.

Did he really do it? The doctor's question lingers in his mind.

He had proclaimed his innocence right until the rope tightened around his neck.

Following Benedict Rose's arrest, he would ramble non-stop, protesting his guilt to

deaf ears.

"I didn't do it! I was mining, and I blacked out. Then, when I came to, I had that shovel in my hands! I may be unwed, but I would never pay a whore, honest!"

In the end, his protests were met with apathy. The judge had sentenced him to a bloodthirsty public. His trial ended in only several hours, and his execution was marked for the next day. Having witnessed this speedy trial, Doctor Cross heard Benedict Rose's last ramblings before the rope was wrapped around his neck. Muttering the same four words.

"I didn't do it, I didn't do it, I didn't do it, I didn't do it, I didn't do it, I didn't do it."

The sound of beating reverberates at the center of the office, its source getting closer to Doctor Cross. The Doctor's eyes widen, his mouth agape. Glass cracks on the floor. Its hands grasp the doctor's shoulders tightly, bringing its face towards him, its tongue swinging back and forth with hollow eyes that don't blink. Its open chest cavity pours out blood incessantly as the heart beats louder and louder.

"I didn't do it!"

Doctor Cross jolts from his chair, reaching for his throat, gasping for air. His eyes turned to the corpse on the table. It's in the same position he had left it. He looks

to his side and, through the darkness, sees that his glass has shattered on the floor. Fortunately, not a drop of whiskey had been in the glass by the time sleep overtaken him. He leans back in his chair, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Doctor Cross rises from his chair and quickly grabs his candlelight to observe the last organ in the torso. The heart, with a small hole in its center, remains stagnant. Quickly, he grabs the obsidian knife and cuts the vessels, removing the heart. In his hand, he turns it to the opposite side of the bullet hole; there isn't an exit wound. Officer Bracken did shoot him from a distance, so the bullet was still lodged inside. Taking three of his fingers, he digs into the small hole. Finding the bullet, he grabs and removes it, small chunks of flesh glued to it; satisfied, he places the heart and bullet side by side on the table to his left.

Sighing in relief, the doctor marvels at seeing an empty corpse. He turns to face Benedict Rose's hollow eyes, staring into his soul. He takes out his research notebook and records his findings. Aware of the fact he still needs to cut open the skull to reach the brain, he opts to do such a task in the morning. The smell will be rotten by that point, but the doctor no longer cares. He wished to leave,

not because he was tired; he'd done this procedure dozens of times without rest. Not because of the liquor he had been drinking throughout the operation, the effects of alcohol on his body have dwindled over the years. Nor was it mere procrastination of his job; he's the most diligent doctor in this prison. He knows he should be alone, yet he has company. He can't see them but can hear them, feel them. He's always been aware of their existence, and their numbers grow with each execution. Doctor Cross closes his notebook, extinguishes an oil lamp, and, taking another, walks out the office door.

He hears the lone sound of a heart beating again inside the office he just left. The doctor walks away slowly, turning his head to see a silhouette through the window of his door. He quickens his pace, walking through the corridor. The oil lamp only has enough fuel to illuminate what's in front of his face.

"Black magic? Me?"

"I'm innocent; I don't know what else to say!"

"Fools, all of you! To believe such folly!"

"Damn you all into the deepest fiery pits of Hell!"

"God knows the truth; he knows the character of my soul."

"I didn't do it!"

Echoes of the past cease as Doctor Cross shuts and locks

the door to the ward.

I heard them again, Doctor Cross laments, pondering his state of mind. He walks off, daring not to look behind him, dreading that he will return tomorrow morning.

Doctor Cross opens the door to his small shack of a home. He places the oil lamp that had gone out during his trip back on his table. He locks his door and lights a candle. When going to a cabinet, he hears a knock at the door. He stops before deciding to continue his course of action. Doctor Cross opens his cabinet for another bottle of whiskey; the knocking has become faster. He stares at the door, taking a swig of whiskey from the bottle. The knocking gets louder until, eventually, it stops. Sighing, he puts the bottle back in the cabinet, removes his shirt, and walks to his mirror to check himself before bed.

The candle only illuminates the doctor. Small splotches of blood are on his face, which he wipes with a cloth resting next to his mirror. His once pitch-black hair has prematurely greyed, his eyebags only getting darker, further contrasting his pale skin. And then, he sees them. Rope burns on his neck, and yet when he touches them, he feels nothing. A long incision from the center of his collarbone going down to his

lower abdomen can be seen, yet he looks down, and nothing is there. Looking back up, he sees multiple heads behind him. He turns around in a panic to see his empty home. Doctor Cross sighs, extinguishes the candle, and collapses into his bed, exhausted.

Despite his exhaustion, sleep never comes easy for Doctor Cross, lying on his side, his back to his front door. Wooden creaks get closer to his bed, and the sounds of ropes tightening are faintly heard. The doctor refuses to turn around. This isn't the first time and won't be the last he hears such a disturbance.

If he didn't do it, Doctor Cross thinks, trying to block out the noise.

If he didn't do it, then I carved open an innocent man.

And what of the others? If they were not guilty as well.

How many innocent people have I cut open? Doctor Cross shakes his head, not wanting an answer to his question. Sleep finally has a hold on him. However, one last question lingers in his conscience.

The rope failed to break his neck. Was that a punishment by God? To suffer for his sin? Doctor Cross wonders.

Or was it a sign from God that we should have reconsidered his guilt? Doctor Cross's eyelids finally closed, pondering a question he knew he would never get the answer to. 🕯