

# The Sin-Eater's Ghost

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**I'm telling you this story because my grandmother told it to me. We've been handing it down from generation to generation. Your great-great grandmother was actually there the day Dodgy Bell died. Dodgy Bell was a sin-eater - you've heard of sin-eaters, right? They're those strange Scots who eat a meal on or near a dead person because that's how the dead person gets into heaven. We stay away from sin-eaters, at least until somebody dies.**

**Dodgy Bell was sentenced to be hanged for being a sin-eater. He had to be hanged not once, but twice! The first time they tried, the rope snapped. Dodgy fell and headed straight toward Mary King's Close. The sheriff caught him though, and immediately put the noose back over Dodgy's head and hanged him a second time, right there on High Street. In full view of the city,**

**Dodgy was on his way to perdition, but not before he uttered the words, “I’ll be back...you can’t guard your souls.” Snap! His neck broke and his feet dangled in the air. The crowd was silent. Your great-great grandma, Bridey Wallace, was there. She knew that in death, Dodgy Bell had other concerns.**

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**You see, being a sin-eater is a powerful thing. Maybe that’s what was so feared about them. What happens to a man when he eats the sins of others? He takes all the bad out of them, but it doesn’t just disappear. It becomes part of the sin-eater. It becomes his own sin, his own evil.**

**Dodgy was old when they hanged him. No one rightly knows how old, but likely the oldest person in Edinburgh, maybe all of Scotland. That means he spent decades eating the evil of others and making it his own. Maybe he started off innocent, but he didn’t stay that way. Sin is too corrupting, too corrosive. Anyway, they dragged his body through the street, up and down the Royal Mile, and then to Greyfriars Kirk. They buried him there with no headstone. But while the grave was fresh, grave-robbers tried to dig it up.**

**Nothing.**

**No body.**

**Dodgy Bell was gone.**

**Some thought that his body had simply rotted away fast, or that other grave-robbers got there first, or that the grave-robbers reporting the missing body had dug in the wrong place. But do you remember what I told you about a sin-eater? Evil like that doesn’t just die, and your poor great-great grandma saw that fact first hand.**

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**Your great-great grandmother, Bridey, came from a very affluent family. Her father, Walter Wallace III, was a renowned medical doctor in Edinburgh. Not only did he practice, serving as most affluent doctors in the city did, he also continued to teach aspiring doctors at Edinburgh’s primary medical school.**

**In order to study the human body accurately and efficiently, someone like Mr. Wallace needed human subjects, and more specifically, cadavers. And because there was technically no legal way to obtain such commodities, there were other means...grave-robbing. One clammy night, just after dinner, your great-great grandmother and the doctor were sitting in his library when there was a loud knock on the door. Although Mr. Wallace sent Bridey upstairs, she lurked near, but out of sight, due to her endless curiosity. Mr. Wallace opened the large wooden door, and there stood a slouched, muddy old man...Dodgy Bell. Dodgy had come to eat the sins of the doctor's most recent subject, who had been robbed from his grave prematurely before Dodgy could perform his duty.**

**"This man of whose body you possess, he lays unrest. Let me in so I can do my duty," said Dodgy in a creaky slur.**

**The doctor refused to let Dodgy in his home and ordered him away. But before Mr. Wallace closed the door on the old man, Dodgy locked his eyes on the lurking Bridey. She gasped and ran upstairs. That was the first, but unfortunately not the last, experience with the old sin-eater.**

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*This story my grandma was telling me was taking an interesting turn, and I was even allowed to stay up past my bedtime! Grandma's house had always been a fun place to stay. Now that our family had turned out to be linked to this eerily intriguing part of Scotland's past, my mind raced to put together the pieces and understand my great-great grandmother's involvement in the legend of Dodgy Bell. Something clicked, and it started to make sense...*

*"Oh my goodness!" grandma suddenly exclaimed.*

*Startled back into present reality, I asked my grandma what was wrong. She just had to pee. You see, she was getting old and developing a...er...shrinking bladder problem. I jumped up to assist her arduous trek to the toilet. For the next five minutes I was forced to listen to one of the most horrifying noises known to man, the struggle of the elderly on the toilet. Knowing that you will, one day, labour to perform one of the most basic tasks (peeing), it would be enough to scare anyone out of their mind. Absolutely terrified by the muffled grunts and other racket coming from the toilet, I retreated to the study.*

*Dodgy Bell...the name seemed familiar. We had probably learned about him in school, but the sound of his name was too fresh. Like someone had just whispered it in my ear or had slipped it to me in a note. The study seemed an appropriate place to ponder the subject and hide from the fiasco unfolding a few rooms over. I slipped back onto deep thought about Dodgy and my great-great grandmother. A large crash brought me back. Oh dear, grandma had fallen off the toilet.*



*Upon rushing to check on grandma in the powder room, I found out the noise wasn't, in fact, from her at all. Grandma was fine, but worried about the noise as well. Into the kitchen we walked, only to find Harold, grandma's orange tabby cat, with a mess of tuna all over him and the floor. Grandma began cleaning up the mess so I snuck back off to the study again.*

*Dodgy Bell...DodgyBell...D.B.! The initials on the letter setting on my grandma's desk, that's why Dodgy's name seemed so familiar! Picking up the letter, I began to read. The letter described the final resting place of Walter Wallace III, Bridey's father. The end of the letter was signed "May He Rest In Peace, D.B." My mind began racing. Had Dodgy Bell performed his sin-eating practices on great-great grandma's dad? Why was he sending this letter to Bridey and how did grandma end up with it so many years later?*

*Suddenly grandma burst through the study door! I quickly slammed the letter back on the desk and sat down. My heart was pounding as grandma asked me what I was doing. I told her nothing, but the look in her eyes show that she already knew. She sat right down next to me and began recalling the story Bridey told her many years ago of her second meeting with Dodgy Bell. The next time Dodgy came to her childhood home was the night Walter Wallace III died.*





**After the door slammed, Dodgy Bell stood for a moment, unsure of his next steps. He was a sin-eater, and sin-eaters have very strict codes of honor and duty. He knew that he had to grant the cadaver his last rites. After all, Dodgy mused, it was his solemn task in life to guarantee the passage of humans into heaven.**

**As he stood outside the Wallace home, he noticed a movement behind one of the windows. It was Bridey, making her way to bed. He watched her trip lightly up the stairs, pausing for a moment on the landing – perhaps to say goodnight to her father. Dodgy was struck by her innocence and the thought that if she were the one laying on the dissecting table, he would not hesitate to find a way to ease her passage from life. He owed the cadaver the same respect. With a plan forming, Dodgy slipped away.**

**Three a.m. that night found Dodgy hunched over the Wallace back gate. There was a muffled curse as he carefully listened for the tick tick tick of the now open lock. Moving quickly, he stole across the garden and through the storage room into the house.**

**Dodgy could feel his mouth water at the thought of the meal that awaited him. He made his way down the hallway, picking up speed as his eyes started to glisten and his stomach to clench in excitement. There was a light at the**

end of the hall but he didn't stop to question it. Turning the corner into the doctor's office, Dodgy suddenly stopped in his tracks. His mind slowed as he gaped in shock at the sight before him.

Around the cadaver were plates of food – bowls of fruit, plates of meat, racks of pie. Seated in front of him was Walter Wallace III. His eyes widened as he swallowed his bread and stood to face Dodgy.

Dodgy couldn't believe his eyes. Mr. Wallace was a sin-eater.

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Dodgy was infuriated. His only purpose on this earth was to make sure others got to heaven. With another sin-eater in the town, Dodgy was in trouble. You see, without eating sins, Dodgy would die.

Dodgy decided to confront the doctor. There was no way he was going to let Walter Wallace III get away with this. Dodgy couldn't allow another person to take away his job. There was no way he was going to move again.

You see, Dodgy didn't always live in Edinburgh. People used to say he lived in London during the Black Plague. He would go and collect the bodies of people that died and take them to his home. He would cook elaborate meals and eat them around the bodies and afterward he would bury them. Soon a priest friend found out what Dodgy was up to and accused him of witchcraft. Dodgy fled so he wouldn't be hanged, and ended up in Edinburgh.

Bridey had been tucked in and was drifting off to sleep when Dodgy decided to confront Wallace. Right before Bridey was deeply asleep, she was awakened by a crash.

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Clutching her tartan nightgown, she crept down to her father's workshop. Amongst the gleaming steel of the scalpels and bone saws hanging on the stone walls, two men grappled over the work table. As punches hit and missed, the corpse hung grotesquely half on and half off the table. Bridey saw Dodgy shove her father across the table, effectively smashing the corpse's head into the stone.

**“How could you do this?” Dodgy shouted. “You’ve been giving me corpses for at least a decade! You’re the reason my bones creak, my skin sags, and my eyes going bad! There’s no sins left! He slammed his fist on the table, glaring. Mr. Wallace looked livid, the vein in his temple standing out like Arthur’s Seat.**

**“What about my daughter, aye? The wee lass is only eight. I can’t be leaving her fatherless!” he growled. “She deserves a normal life!”**

**Dodgy smiled, his missing teeth standing out next to the cracked, crooked, and rotten ones, aptly mirroring his soul. As he grinned, it was easy to see that he had no soul of his own to survive, but made others’ souls his. “I’ll be more’n happy to take the girl off yer ‘ands, I’m sure she’d bring a pretty pence down in Mary King’s Close.”**

**Bridey clasped her hands over her lips, but it was too late – here gasp had already been heard by both men, and Dodgy’s hooded eyes latched on her wide ones.**

**“There she. Come in poppet. Come to Dodgy.”**

**“No!” Mr. Wallace roared. As he leapt towards the door, trying to block it, Dodgy smirked. With swift, skilled hands, Dodgy latched on the doctor and SNAP! His neck was broken.**

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**Bridey stood motionless, horrified by what she had seen. Dodgy smiled and sauntered deliberately towards the stairs. Bridey backed up slowly until her back hit the wall, her little palms sweating and her red ringlets sticking to her face. Her heart pounded in her chest, threatening to leap right out of her.**

**“I’m sorry you had to see that, love,” Dodgy said, never taking his eyes off her. He grabbed the hand rail of the staircase, slowly making his way up ti Bridey. “Don’t be afraid, poppet. You, my darling, have nothing to fear.”**

**Bridey slid slowly and carefully to the left, away from the stairs. All she could feel was the strong beating of her heart in her chest.**

**“He always was a lousy son,” Dodgy said, almost to himself. The creaking of the stairs became louder and more pronounced as he got closer to the top.**

**Bridey closed her eyes, imagining herself in her mother's war arms. She would know what to do. She would have come to save Bridey from this terrifying man creeping up the stairs.**

**And then the creaking stopped. Bridey opened her eyes and found herself face to face with Dodgy. He took her chin and cupped his hand around her face. "But you, my little one," he said. "You are different."**

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**He gently patted her on the head, turned around, and exited through the kitchen. Bridey simply stood there, stunned and scared until her mother finally came down in the morning. Horrified herself, her mother took Bridey in her arms and ran off to find the police. Even though they asked her a thousand time, Bridey never reported what she saw – whether she couldn't or wouldn't is hard to say. But when she returned to the house, everything was gone – no body, no food. It was almost as if the night simply hadn't happened.**

***"But what about that letter?" I exclaimed, unable to keep silent any longer. "And why didn't you mention we were related to Dodgy before? And how was Bridey different? And –"***

***Grandma gave me that knowing look again and said, "Now child, let me tell the story, and you'll find out soon enough."***

**Now, it was years before Bridey received that letter. She found it on the doorstep, and knew almost before reading it who the mysterious sender had been. Of course, the letter left Bridey with another question: Did she dare go to visit her father's grave? She had been avoiding the graveyard ever since the night her father died, terrified of seeing Dodgy there. But this was different – this was her father. And besides, Dodgy owed her a couple questions.**

**It took her a few more days to steel her nerves, but one night she snuck out to visit the grave. She was uncertain of what exactly might happen, but she knew one thing for sure – she would not be leaving empty-handed.**

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**She borrowed her mother's pouch and packed a small knife next to the flowers, turning the blade so it wouldn't score the ribbon. The night she chose**



was clear so the lantern was a concession to the possibility of clouds. It had taken four years for Bridey to get the nerve to ask to visit her father's grave and a further two for her mother to give in and let her visit on her own.

The shawl was not quite warm enough to deal with the wind, no matter how tightly she held it around herself. Thankfully, the cemetery was not far from the house and her family plot was barely out of sight of the fence. Snow crunched beneath her boots as she lifted the lantern to ensure she could find the gap into the graveyard. There was a silence over the yard and Bridey crossed herself and wished she had waited until spring.



Each grave was capped with snow that glowed with the light of the passing lantern and she paused every few graves to sound out each name to try to find her surname. Bridey wandered for a time before realizing she must have missed the section entirely. She turned to the next row and spotted a tree two rows down.

The one time she had accompanied her mother, she remembered a tree far from her father's grave. It was two graves down from her. She swallowed and raised the lantern as a cloud drifted across the moon. At that moment it struck her just how lost she had become. Waiting until after her chores had been a mistake. Going in winter had been a mistake. A prickling on the back of her neck made her hand drift to the pouch.

**“Your father is nowhere near here; you must be lost.”**

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Bridey jumped and clutched her bag, but she didn't scream – she had come to get answers from Dodgy and refused to be scared by him. “Hello, poppet. I had a sensing that you might come. Tell me, what brings you to my ol' neck of the woods?”

Bridey narrowed her eyes. “You sent me a letter and I'm here to get some answers out of you.” Dodgy plopped own on a headstone and waved an arm, “Well, ask away.” Bridey steeled herself and took a deep breath. “On the night you...killed my father, you said something to me. You said I was...different. What did you mean by that?”

Dodgy gave a wide grin, displaying yellow, rotting teeth. “Why, poppet, I suspect you already know exactly what I meant.” Bridey glared at him, but remained silent. Dodgy chuckled and stood up suddenly, with his face a mere couple of inches from hers. Bridey was so shocked, she couldn't move. “You, my dear girl,” Dodgy breathed, “are a sin-singer. Your dead dad and me can gobble up the sins of the dead and let them fester in our guts and bones. But you...you can do much more than that – you can sing to the sins until they ain't sins anymore.”

Dodgy put his hands on Bridey's shoulders and shook her slightly. Bridey, shocked, just continued to stare at him.

“Poppet, I am going to need you to help me with a certain hanging I hear is coming up.” Dodgy started laughing and the stink of his breath filled the air.



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**“The hanging is my own,” Dodgy explained. “To be honest, I’ve grown weary of this life, always shepherding others’ pass to the next world but having to remain behind. I asked myself whether I was doomed to the fate of a sin-eater forever. In my quest for answers, I learned that the sin-eater was never supposed to be alone as I am now. He is meant to have a partner: the sin singer.”**

**The eater and singer have been entwined for as long as anyone can remember. Sins of the dead cannot be undone, but the choices of their descendants have limitless potential for good or evil. The sin-eater collects the sins from individuals at the end of their lives. From them, the sin-singer creates new choices for those at the beginning of life. Her lullaby acts as the channel for these choices to reach newborn babies.**

**“The eater is man and the singer is woman. My singer was to be my daughter – the twin sister of your father. She died during childbirth. The sin-eater and singer have always worked hand in hand with every generation. But I’ve been working without a singer for too long. One cannot hold the sins of others forever, and thus, they have consumed my humanity.”**

**“Ever since I realized this, I’ve been planning my own death. There is not enough humanity left in me to survive without the sins of others. When they hang me, their first attempt will fail. This is the human good in my body passing to the next world. Their second attempt will succeed, during which you must sing a lullaby. Your song will transfer and release the sins before they return to my body.”**

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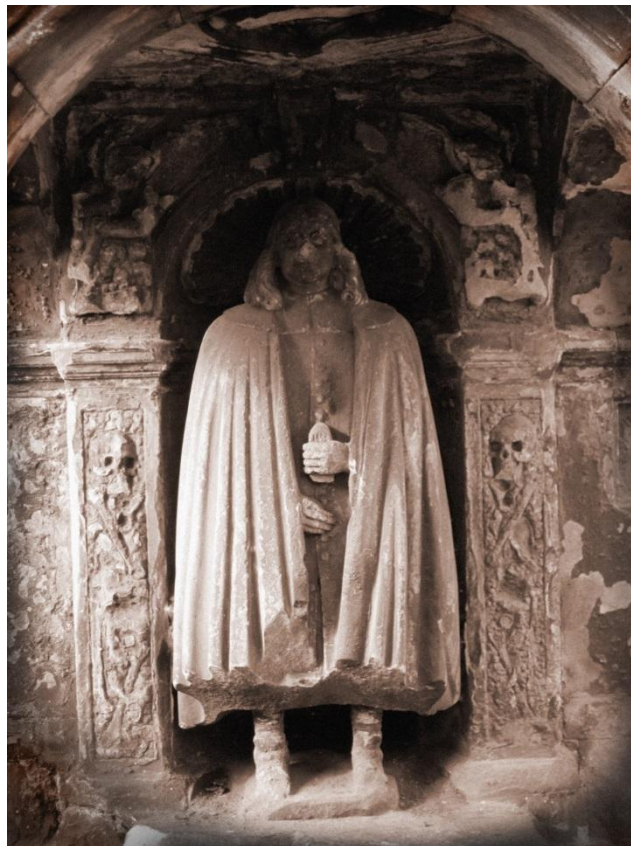
**The following morning, Edinburgh awoke in a clamor to the sight of Dodgy consuming mountains of haggis, neeps, and tatties at the foot of Mercat Cross. Before him lay fresh corpses recognized by many as Sas Masterson, Bas MacWards, and Sue ‘Oer Complicated – notorious criminal writers hanged for sedition not twenty-four hours before. The constable was called and Dodgy hanged twice for sin-eating.**

**But we’ve already been over that, Grandmother muttered, pouring herself a much needed drink. What I’ve failed to mention was Bridey’s presence.**

**Dodgy was too old to be used for medicine as a cadaver. No, it was straight to a shallow grave for him. Bridey trailed the caring body and during twilight approached the fresh mound. Her body trembled and grew cold as muffled shrieks and cries of the damned reached her ears: Dodgy wasn't dead. The first drop from the gallows had failed to break Dodgy's humanity due to the faulty noose.**

**Beneath her fee lay hundreds of years of evil escaping from the corpses. Greyfriars' Kirkyard had become a nest of sin. As the sin-singer, Bridey was entrusted with soothing the vices and releasing them to the future. She nervously cleared her throat and began "singing." Unfortunately, Bridey was tone deaf. "Rock-a-bye baby, in the treetop. When the wind blows, the cradle will rock." With that performance, the hellspawn leapt from the earth and formed a ghostly visage before her.**

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**Every candle in Greyfriars' Kirk simultaneously extinguished itself as an unearthly chill crept over the terrified Bridey. The ethereal assemblage of spirits in front of her had taken a human-like form, though unlike any human she had ever seen. In the pitch-black darkness, she could make out long,**

**spindly fingers, a hunched back, those yellow...crooked...teeth. “For the love of God, poppet, stop that noise!”**

**Bridey felt her heart start racing. It couldn't be Dodgy; he said her song would release his sins and he could pass on. And yet this figure in front of her was undoubtedly him, albeit far more horrifying. Perhaps...perhaps this wasn't actually Dodgy. After all, the sins he had eaten that she was releasing had been a part of Dodgy for a long time. It would make sense for them to take on his form. Either way, Bridey had an overwhelming urge to get out of Greyfriars'. She slowly started to back away, keeping her eyes on the spectre to make she wouldn't be followed.**

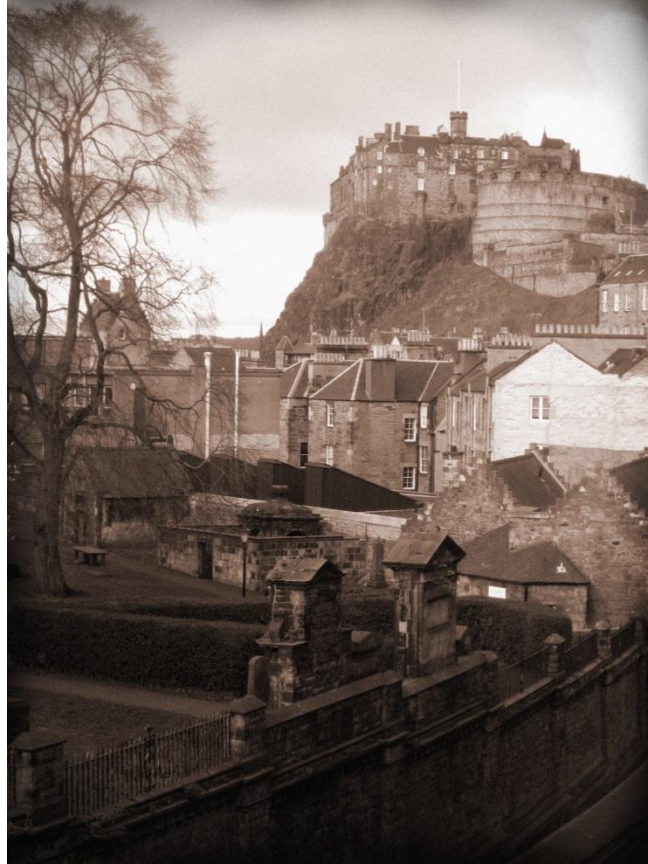
**“Where are you going, poppet? Don't you want to stay and join your 'ol Dodgy?”**

**The voice had all the creaks and croaks of Dodgy Bell, but it echoed with the sounds of Hell. She kept slinking back, softly saying her prayers in an attempt to keep whatever or whoever it was at bay.**

**“Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. Praying can't help you now, luv. You've unleashed the beast.”**

**The laugh echoed throughout the kirkyard as the ghost moved towards Bridey. The poor girl turned on her heels and began to run. She slid through the gate and continued running, up and down various closes in an effort to delay whatever fate would befall her. As she approached Edinburgh Castle, she realized she could run no more. She collapsed on the ground as the sins of Dodgy Bell slowly crept over her.**

□



**Her knees pressed against the cold, wet cobblestones of the castle entrance. Bridey felt a cold sense of dread overtake her. A chilling breeze found her feet, moved to her ankles, and then she felt a hand on her shoulder. Refusing to look back and risking the loss of her courage, she read the warning of the castle: “*Nemo Me Impune Lacessit*” – “No one can harm me unpunished” – and tore away from the cold, ghostly hand. She crossed through the threshold of the castle and then turned to face the ghoulish apparition. The face of Dodgy Bell changed into a furious anger. Whether it was D.B. himself or the malevolent remains of the thousands of sins that he had consumed, his edges started to fray. His image became hazy.**

**“Why would you go and do that, sweet child? Don’t you want to sing with your grandfather just one more time?” He feigned a smile, though his brown furrowed with anger.**

**“You can’t touch me now,” Bridey responded. “Just because you’re a sin-eater doesn’t mean you have to be evil. My dad was a sin-eater and he was kind to me. He loved me and mum. He did good for the world by teaching anatomy at his lectures. But you – you let yourself become evil. You were too weak and uncaring in the first place. You’ve done this to yourself, Dodgy.”**

**Dodgy could no longer contain his anger. He screamed in outrage, a high-pitched noise that made Bridey's bones tremble. As he screamed, the spirit started to fall apart. Bursts of malicious energy shot out from the figure on the outside of the castle entrance. The sins of thousands of dead Londoners and Edinburghians burst out from the very seams of Dodgy's existence. They look like streaks of pure blackness flying through the air. As Dodgy screamed, his anger drove the sins in all directions. They were everywhere. None could reach Bridey, safely on the castle grounds, but as they rebounded off the castle walls, the very earth that the castle stood upon seemed to reverberate with an old, powerful energy.**



**The trembling below Bridey grew, and the sins left outside the castle walls halted, silenced by the power that was coming from the grounds. The trembling turned to a humming, and then it was as if the sound had turned to song. Bridey look around – bewildered, frantic – for the source. It continued and down the wynd from the castle came a wee twinkling light. It wasn't a lantern or a candle – for there was not a soul that was holding it. It was like magic, hovering above the cobblestones, making its way to the girl. As it came closer, the singing grew louder and it was clear to Bridey that this was the source of the music; this tiny light had come to save her from Dodgy's sins.**

**Bridey had been so captivated by the light and song that she had tuned out the shrieks from Dodgy, and when she turned around he was no longer there. The sins, too, had disappeared. It was as if the young girl had been dreaming. She knew she hadn't been, though, for when she turned back around toward the castle, the light was still lingering – softly fading every second. She jabbed her open hand out toward it, grasping at the air as if to keep the diminishing light by her side. As her hand clamped down in the center of the light, she felt a weight in her hand – an envelope.**

**Hesitating to bring the heavy envelope back toward her person, she left her arm hanging in the air. Her eyes were bugged and her mouth was agape. She pulled her arm toward herself slowly. The wax seal was visible in the moonlight and she turned the letter over to search for addressed name.**

**“Miss Bridey Wallace” was spelled neatly across the front. Bridey peeled the seal off the envelope and carefully inched a neatly folded paper out from its holding. Unfolding the page, she saw only a few lines of writing:**

**“He was a liar. He was not your grandfather.**

**You are not a sin-singer.  
For the truth, go to the tree in Greyfriars' Kirkyard."**

**No one had signed the letter and Bridey was exhausted and confused. She sat down on the ground and looked up at the sky, and began to cry right there in front of the castle.**

□



**With red blurry eyes, Bridey returned to the graveyard. Completely exhausted, she dropped to her knees by the tree. She searched the bark for answers, but was only greeted with more questions. Nothing was there but she suddenly felt a warm wind rush through her body. Turning around, startled, she could make out the blurry image of her father.**

**It was then that Bridey –**

***“Wait! Grandma! You’ve told me this part before!” the little one interrupted. This is the part where Bridey’s father hugs her but things aren’t actually okay, because she realized Dodgy wasn’t lying. It was her father lying all along! She was the most powerful sin-singer of all, but her father didn’t want to share the sins. He didn’t let her practice her powers, so any experience***



*with a dead person would leave her cursed by their ghosts and haunted by their sins and regrets, right?"*

That is true, little one, but I never told you this, the grandmother stuttered. Tell me, where did you hear this?

*"Em, I don't remember, but I remember picturing all of the ghosts and imagining really scary and sad things...like people being killed and stuff? It makes me feel sad...and mad... and really scared every time I think of it."*

Child, you're shaking!

Both the old woman and the child were terrified, one because she was feeling things inside herself that she couldn't control and the other because she was witnessing these things within the other.

Images of death, evil, and acts that no child should see flashed wildly through the young one's mind. She could feel Walter Wallace III and Dodgy's ghosts tugging at her souls from opposite sides, but she only recognized it as a familiar feeling of confusion. It was stronger than it had ever been.

Without warning, the child started convulsing, tossing her red locks back and forth viciously on the floor, unable to control herself. Her grandmother moved cautiously towards her until the child became still and wide-eyed. Her grandmother was met not with the child's emerald green eyes, but with eyes that held more fire than her hair.

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As the grandmother looked into her granddaughter's eyes, she knew that the child was not looking back at her. The eyes that met her gaze were familiar to the grandmother. The grandmother had grown up with those eyes peering down at her all throughout her childhood. These had been the eyes of her grandmother Bridey. As the grandmother came to this conclusion, suddenly there was a very loud crack and a puff of smoke. When the smoke cleared, the ghosts of Dodgy Bell and Walter Wallace III appeared. The ghost of Wallace rushed at the granddaughter in a fit of rage. He could sense the spirit of Bridey inside the granddaughter and he was very upset with Bridey realizing what she was. Walter and Dodgy approached the granddaughter with intent to kill. The granddaughter's eyes flashed with fear before

determination set in. The granddaughter opened her mouth and began to sing. Now, like last time, Bridey knew what she was so the most beautiful melody came pouring out of the granddaughter's mouth. As the Bridey sang, the ghosts became more and more faint before they disappeared in a cloud of smoke. As the ghosts disappeared, the grandmother could have sworn she heard Dodgy sneer, "You may have beaten me this time, Bridey, but I will be back."

When the smoke cleared, the grandmother saw her granddaughter lying flat on the ground, unmoving.



The granddaughter awoke to the grandmother trembling from fright amid the remains of the room.

*"Grandma, what just happened?" she asked.*

The spirits appear to be restless again. The sins of Dodgy still walk among us, but Bridey is holding them off. Now, I think it would be best for us to put them all to rest, but sins, especially those held in an evil, linger on. We will need a vessel in which to imprison Dodgy.

*"Where will we find a trap for sin, of all things, Grandma? Won't it just leave from anything we use?"*

My little one, only an heir of a sin-eater will do to hold such a volume of sin. If nobody takes it upon himself then the pain caused will vanish forever.

*"You don't mean..."*

I do, Grandmother cut her off. One of us must take up Dodgy's sins to finally allow him to move on. One of us must eat the sins of Dodgy.

*"We don't even know where to find his body!" the granddaughter exclaimed.*

We don't need his body, we only need his sins, which may still be nearby. We may even have help from Bridey's spirit.

They began by making a feast fit for an eternal king's funeral. The food was organized around an empty urn.

*“Grandma, I should eat it.”*

**Nonsense! You’re only a child. There is no reason for you to get his sins.**

*“What if they are only held during life? I’ll hold them far longer before somebody else has to eat his sins again.”*

**You will do no such thing!**

**At which point, the grandmother took the first bite.**

□



**The air grew instantly cold, and before five minutes were up, the granddaughter could see her breath. Before ten had passed, the tea that had been part of the meal, once piping hot, was now frozen solid. After that bite, that fateful bite, there had been utter stillness. The shock remained on the granddaughter’s face as shock of a completely different kind grew in the other’s eyes.**

As at Greyfriars', all the lights went out, only this time the darkness was accompanied by a rain of glass; every light bulb in the entire house had broken.

The minutes passed. As she watched her grandmother's eyes change, heard her breathing start to rasp, and felt the oppressive weight of the darkness, now palpable, wrap around her frail shoulders like a cloak, the granddaughter, in a panic, thought of Bridey. No sound came from her lips, but her mind screamed the name.

Her life, so short in comparison to her grandmother's and even more so to the creature...demon...beast sitting across the table, the piece of bread still clutched in her fingers – or were they claws? – paled and grew shadowy. The tall grandfather clock in the next room chimed the hour, and motion was restored. The beast, in Dodgy's hoarse voice, screamed, "I said I'd be back, poppet! Wha' now, no Bridey to save you this time? All alone, nowhere to run! This night it a' ends; come t' hell wi' me!"

There was no light, no safety, and no hope. Until the granddaughter remembered two things: with every sin-eater, there comes a sin-singer, and that a lullaby was necessary. It all came together at once. Dodgy the sin-eater was dead. So, too, was Walter Wallace III. Bridey, then, was no longer a sin-singer; her voice could scatter but not transform the sin. She knew that Bridey would not come. She had too little power over the beast. Then a voice echoed in her mind, the voice of her mother singing an old, old lullaby. Then the granddaughter knew that she was the next sin-singer.

She opened her mouth, disregarding claws on her arm leading her towards the door and Hell. The tune was fresh in her mind and the words poured from her gently, softly.

“Flow gently sweet Afton, among the green braes,  
Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise.  
My Mary's asleep by the murmuring stream.  
Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.”

Stanza after stanza she sang, and she felt her grandmother's touch on her arm. She stopped singing, though she did not quite finish the song. The two embraced.

The grandmother died the next day. Already aged, the new need for sins to eat had been too much. Her granddaughter sang over her body as, coffin-clad, she was lowered into the earth. The song was a lullaby.

**Thus passed the last known sin-eater and the sin-singer became once again a normal girl. The story is closed. Finished! Almost. Sometimes in the house a lightbulb breaks. Sometimes, a shadow with nothing to cast it is seen. Whether this is the failure of a new sin-singer or the last sin of Dodgy Bell untransformed as the lullaby was unfinished, will never be known.**

**“I’ll be back...you can’t guard your souls.”**



*A note on the presentation of this story from the handwritten pages: a Baskerville typeface is used for the title and authors, and Garamond for the story text, the notion being that these typefaces are in keeping with the tone of the tale. The images used as illustration are all of Edinburgh and whether one can see shadows of Dodgy and Bridey in them is best left to the mind or soul of the reader. Memento Mori.*