

This Guy

Hi. Oh, don't be scared. I didn't mean to startle you. I just saw you here, putting flowers on the grave, and since we have that in common I thought I'd introduce myself. You don't have to be afraid of me. I'm gonna be 71 next August, so if I ever was dangerous that's pretty much behind me now. My name is Benjamin Woodley. I know you don't know my name, but I'd bet you've heard of me.

See, I'm "This Guy." You've probably heard stories about "This Guy" a time or two... you know, your buddies say they heard about "this guy" and what happened to him? Well, I'm that guy – me, Ben Woodley. 'Course, I'm not the guy in EVERY story – that'd be impossible – but I'm the guy who...well, tell you what...why don't you come over here and have a seat on this low gravestone and I'll tell you about it. I know it's close to twilight now, but it won't take long.

Now, first, you have to realize that this story has been told and re-told so many times that it's been distorted and embellished beyond recognition. It's been around for more than 45 years, in one form or another. It goes like this:

There was this guy (see, that's me – Ben Woodley!) who went to a dance. Now sometimes the story's set in a high school prom, sometimes a party, whatever, but just for the record, it was just a community dance – something the town put together back then to give us kids something to do that we wouldn't get arrested for, I guess. Anyway, this guy went to a dance and he met a girl named Charlotte.

What? Yes, Charlotte really was her name. That changes too. Some versions have it Patty, or Lucy, or Melissa, or whatever. But back then Charlotte wasn't an unusual name for a girl, and that's what she was called.

So, anyway, this guy and Charlotte met and started to dance. They really hit it off. The guy falls head-over-heels in love with her. They dance the night away, and she tells him that it's her birthday – she just turned 18. Well, eventually it's time for her to go home. The guy offers to walk her home and off they go.

This guy and Charlotte are walking back to her house and he's asking if she'll go to the movies with him, 'cause like I said he's really hooked on this girl. Love, with a capital L, at first sight. Charlotte kinda avoids the question, though, and instead she says she's chilly and asks if she could borrow his sweater (jacket, coat, or whatever the story may use at that time). Being a gentleman, he slips it off and puts it around her shoulders.

Next thing you know, they're at Charlotte's front door. The house is quiet but there's a lit window upstairs. They have a quick kiss goodnight on her front porch, and the guy starts back for the dance.

He hasn't gone far when he realizes Charlotte still has his sweater. So he turns back and hurries to her house. When he gets there he knocks on the door and a middle-aged man answers. The guy asks for Charlotte, and the older man gets all angry. He hollers at the boy, really starts blowing a fuse. 'What's wrong with you kids?' he screams. 'What kinda sick joke are you playing on an old man? Charlotte died a year ago today of pernicious anemia!' Then he slams the door in the guy's face.

Well, the guy just stands there, stunned. What the hell's going on, anyway? In a daze, kinda, he wanders away. He's not really paying attention to where he's going – just sorta walking like a robot, with no destination. He doesn't realize where he's headed until he suddenly wakes up and he's at the local cemetery. For some reason he feels compelled to walk to a certain spot, and when he does he finds Charlotte's grave. And -- here's the kicker – lying on top of her grave is his neatly folded sweater.

So that's the tale, as told by the man who lived it. Yup, I was the guy at the dance, the guy who met and fell hopelessly in love with Charlotte. That was half a century ago, now. And since then, every week I come here to sit on this stone and talk with her, down there in the cool, brown earth. I'd do anything for her, dare anything to be in her arms again.

Hmm? The story? Is it true? Oh yes, every single word of it really happened just like I've told you – the dance, the girl, the sweater, the way my heart pounded when I kissed her goodnight – oh yes, it all happened. Kinda hard to believe in the daylight, I realize, but now, here, while the sun is just sinking below the horizon and the shadows of tombstones are growing long and slender like shadowy, ghostly fingers...maybe it's not so hard to credit.

Oh, I don't know how it happened, not really. I mean I've given it a lot of thought, and all. I've done some reading and I've learned that supernatural events require a lot of energy. It's not so easy to do, coming back to the plane of the living. So I reasoned that Charlotte could only return to Earth one night a year – and what better night to do that than her birthday? Maybe it would have been easier if she'd been just a regular ghost. Probably takes less energy to appear as a shifting, shimmering glob of ectoplasm than as a solid, touchable, seemingly flesh-and-blood girl. But my Charlotte was much more than a ghost. Oh, waaaay more.

No, there's never been anyone else for me. Once you've met Charlotte you'll understand how I could never love anyone but her. Oh, yes, you heard me right. See, tonight's our anniversary – our 50th, no less! This will be the 50th time that I've brought Charlotte's dinner to this grave as darkness falls, and the 50th time that my darling will claw her way up out of her tomb to be with me. We'll dance here under that big, smiling moon, the way we danced on the night we met. Then, when dawn approaches she'll return to her bed, and I'll use the shovel in my van over there to replace the dirt for another year. I brought her dinner – that's in the van too – to give her energy. Picked him up at the mall on the way to the cemetery. But since I found you here I guess he can be dessert for her. He's just a kid, after all – not much meat to 'im.

Shhhh...don't cry out. The sun's down now, and the cemetery's deserted except for us... and Charlotte. And if you try to run I'll use this and shoot you down like a dog. But I won't kill you. No, if I did that your blood would be cold by the time Charlotte arrived, and she says it's much more delicious when it's warm and flowing. Like I said, it takes a lot of energy to return to our world and she needs her nutrition. I don't want to cheat her of the only meal she gets a year.

Listen...hear that scratching, down under the grass...like nails on the inside of a coffin lid?

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