

Regrets

An Interactive Text Adventure

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The latest version of *Regrets* can always be found at:

<http://www.shadowvault.net/regrets.htm>

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Walkthrough

People playing the game for the first time should type INFO or ABOUT. A walkthrough is in the accompanying PDF file or can be accessed during the game by typing walkthrough.

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...press a key...

Of course, I never expected to come back here. When Marie died, I locked up the old cabin, threw away the key and left. I intended to sell it. I never wanted to set foot in the place again.

But then...

Then I had the dream.

It was a strange dream, and this is from someone who has spent his life having strange dreams. As a child, I saw people with no heads; as a teenager, I watched a tramp die under the wheels of a moving truck several minutes before the actual

event; as an adult... and then, later in my life, I had a dream in which I believed Marie was at the cabin. Pure nonsense of course. The desperate hopes of a lonely old man. And yet...

And yet here I am all the same, the key (retrieved from where I had thrown it on the garden back home) poised to open the door.

"Are you in there, Marie?" I ask softly as I step into the cabin.

...press a key...

It is not a large place, the cabin. A couple of simple rooms - one we used as a bedroom when we came here, another as a kitchen - but it is here, the main area, where I am convinced I saw Marie. Standing by the bookcase, a glass of sherry in one hand. She had her other hand resting on the back of the ancient armchair.

> 1

The main area of the cabin: not a large place but cosy. Very cosy. Or once it was. Now it's cold and somewhat drafty. It carries the smell of misuse. An armchair sits before the currently unlit fire; on one side of it is a bookcase; on the other a desk where either myself or Marie used to sit to pen letters. The door to my back leads out of here but that doesn't concern me right now. Two other doors, to the west and north, lead to the bedroom and kitchen respectively. The east wall is given over to a window which shows me trees and, peering through them, a lake.

> x bookcase

I peruse a few of the books on the case. Marie liked to read romance; I was more a horror fan. Strange, then, that most of the books here seem to be historical sagas. Perhaps Marie liked to vary her reading from time to time.

But no. That doesn't strike me as correct. Marie read romance and little else. She made a point of telling me. So the historical sagas-

...press a key...

As I crouch by the bookcase, I have a sudden flashback to a bookstore I visited many years ago. An argument with the clerk. I stormed out in rage. He followed me, offering placations. I slapped him across the face then threw him into a wall and kicked him several times until he was unconscious.

...press a key...

I let go of the bookcase and stagger back a few feet. Why did I think of that unpleasant incident just then? It must have been... what? Twenty? Twenty-five years ago? Maybe thirty. I'm not even sure what the argument was about.

> x window

It's not a feature that was present in the cabin when I bought it ten years ago but I decided that double-glazing was a necessity so I-

No, wait. Marie decided to have a double-glazed window fitted. Of course. I was quite happy with the window as it was but Marie thought it might become cold around winter time so we had this one fitted.

I wonder how I forgot it was Marie who decided on double-glazing.

> look through window

I see... not the woods that I normally see, with the lake beyond that so captivated Marie when we first came up here... but instead a field. Marie is there, seated upon a bench, reading a book, an umbrella shielding her from the sun. I raise a hand as if to wave to her but something stops me. Something...

I see her hands. They are thin, bony. Almost skeletal. Then she looks at me and I see her face: not the face of a living, breathing woman but a death mask.

...press a key...

"You shouldn't have come back, Walt," she says, her words travelling easily to me though the distance between us is great. "You aren't ready to accept what happened."

"It was terrible, Marie," I say, speaking my words to the glass of the window. "I couldn't bear seeing you like that. I couldn't just-"

"You were a selfish man, Walter Brannak, and you never stopped to consider what impact your actions would have on everyone else. I hate you, Walter. I hate you."

Her words cut deeply into me, worse than a knife wound.

"You shouldn't have done it, Walter," she says.

"Marie-"

She turns away from me. "You shouldn't have done it," she repeats again, but this time her voice is distant, the words fading away as-

...press a key...

I blink. Come awake. I am standing, half asleep, with my face pressed against the window. Beyond it there is no field, no Marie. Just the trees and the lake. As always.

> sit in armchair

I sit back in the armchair and close my eyes, trying to picture the cabin as it was when Marie was alive. I relax my breathing, sink back into the chair, concentrate on remembering everything as it used to be...

Then I open and my eyes and see...

...press a key...

Marie.

"Hello, Walter," she says. She's standing by the window, a hand resting on the frame. "I was wondering how long it would be before you came back to gloat."

"... gloat?" I say. My mouth seems sluggish. Am I dreaming? I must be. But what a glorious dream! Marie, alive!

"Gloat." She looks out the window and then she looks back. Her face is wan, pale, almost ghostly. "It hurt what you did, Walt. Hurt me bad."

"I didn't... mean..."

"No. You never do. That's your problem. You go through life doing as you damn well please, never stopping for a moment to consider what effect your actions are having on those around you. And then, one day, something happens. Something big. And you finally realise what a fool you are."

I can't say anything. My mouth is frozen.

"Goodbye, Walt," says Marie and fades away.

I try to reach a hand out to her but-

...press a key...

But, instead, I awaken.

I am alone once more in the cabin.

> x desk

It was close to the desk where Marie was standing when I saw her. Has she left something for me on the desk, something I need to find? Or, more likely, am I just

missing her so much that I gave myself the vision as an excuse to think about her some more? It could be either, it could be neither. I have no way of knowing.

The surface of the desk is bare aside from a series of scratches and a small diary, a journal I used to keep. Why it is here, at the cabin, and not at home I can't say for certain. There is a drawer, locked, in the left hand side.

> touch scratches

I lay a hand on them. As I do, I remember the first time I met Marie. She was so beautiful. So young and full of life. I was twenty years her senior and yet she made the age difference between us seem like nothing more than mere days. In a way, I was glad to be older than her as I could never bear the idea of her dying before me and leaving me alone with her death. Now that unfortunate event has come to pass, I find being without her more painful than physical torture.

> kick drawer

Normally I would not dream of doing such a thing, but a strange desire to see just what lies within the drawer overcomes me and I take a step back then kick it as hard as I can. The drawer bursts open, spilling onto the floor a letter. I stoop, pick it up, and read the name and address on the cover:

"Marie Brannak, 425 Malvin Square, Chester Grove, Berkshire"

The letter from the surgery.

> read letter

I tear it open. I seem eager even though I know what the contents of the letter are. After all, I read them a hundred times that first day and a hundred more after that. And then a hundred more as I struggled to find some way to disbelieve what I was reading. I know the letter off heart but, even so, I sit and read it through once more: "... regret to inform... inoperable... perhaps 6 months... very sorry..."

Marie. My poor Marie.

> read diary

I hesitate as I reach for the journal. Something tells me not to read it, yet another part of me tells me that I have to read it. That it is the reason I came here.

Yes I hesitate...

> read diary

I open the journal and read a few entries:

June 15

Marie grows steadily worse. How I hate seeing her like this. I wish there was something - anything - I could do. But there isn't. There isn't. The doctors have told me they can't cure what she has and even trying to would just make her worse, shorten the precious time she has left. I can do nothing but wait. And watch her die.

...press a key...

June 25

I was never a believer in euthanasia. Never. It is a sin to end someone's life before their allotted time, a blasphemous act and I would have struck down any man who dared to suggest otherwise or, worse, to champion its course. Yet I think about it more and more. This morning, Marie vomited for half an hour. She lay in bed for an hour after that, so weak she could barely move. I called the hospital but they said there was nothing they could do. She should sleep. And pray. Pray? Pray!

...press a key...

July 5

I didn't reach the decision easily. I debated it long and hard. I even considered talking it over with Marie a time or two but she was never lucid enough to understand what I was proposing. In the end, as I lay there and held her painfully thin hand, I came to a decision. I would do it. To hell with the consequences. If I spent the rest of my life in prison for my actions, it would be a small price to pay for easing her suffering.

...press a key...

July 6

It is done. It was surprisingly easy. Marie was so weak she didn't even struggle. I tried to explain to her as I was doing it my reasons but I was never sure she understood what I was saying. When I removed the pillow, she was gone.

...press a key...

June 7

Another letter. I sat on the front porch and read it and felt my world shatter. The sheer injustice of it all tore me apart and I think I cried like a baby. Several people passing by the house stopped and asked me if I was alright. I swore at them. I threw things at them until I left. Then I stormed inside the house and smashed my hand into a wall until I was so exhausted I passed out. Even then, the contents of the letter

passed through my mind and would not leave me be: "good news... extensive surgery... believe cure is found..."

> s

Wearily, I stagger from the cabin and make my way down to my car. I feel... tired. So very tired. Part of me wonders if my coming to the cabin served any purpose at all other than to reopen old wounds. Eighteen years in a small, cold cell gave me a lot of time to think, and brood, and regret my actions, and even though I believed at the time that what I was doing was the correct course of action... now, years later, I wonder. I still talk to Marie sometimes. I try to wait until no one else is around because they give me funny looks and make gestures indicating they suspect I am mad. But I talk to her and she answers me. She condemns me for my actions. But not nearly as much as I condemn myself.

...press a key...

The game has ended.