

HANGTOWN

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My poppa allus warned me he
said son dont you go to no
necktie party in Hangtown.

He said to me son nothin so chafes the neck as the rope a man is hung by. Well my poppa he had a whole lot to say to me over the years he had sompin to tell me near every day. We're sittin at the dinner and he slaps his hand on the table so the spoons all jump against the plates and he says son did i never tell you bout Hangtown and directly i have to own that no poppa you aint never toll your son about Hangtown. So poppa proceeds to tell me about Hangtown and this is the story.



There was an old man lived in a dog damn shackle house out back th'other side of gods green acres, and this old man had a wife much younger than himself and the wife she was ugly as a stump and the man wasnt no better only worse. The old man was so old his teeth had fallen out and had time to grow back in again teeth sharp as anything and the old man could howl like a wolf too. The wife was young and had her hands full takin care of the old man and growin vegetables in the garden out back.

Long about winter of that year the wife pulls a baby girl child out from under her skirts and she shows the old man the child says old man this is your girl child and the old man he bit the girl childs head off and they buried the bones in the garden because there wasnt food enough for them all three. The winter was long and when the snow finally run back into

the ground the wife she dug and dug that garden over to find the bones of the baby girl child they had buried but the bones were gone. The old man looked and looked and he said wolves had dug the bones up and taken them away to gnaw. Then the old man and his young wife fell to the dirt and when they got up the wife was again pregnant and that winter she pulled another child from under her skirts and again the old man bit the child's head off. They buried the bones in the garden again, this time in a locked wooden box. When they dug up the box next spring there were teeth marks on the wood but the bones were still inside. For this the old man and his young wife were glad, but later that summer the wife she died and the old man put her in the box with the other bones. The wooden box the old man hid under the floor of the dog damn shack house and there it remained. That winter a chair fell over and the old man hanged himself until he

was dead then he cut himself down and clumb into the box to join his wife and child under the floorboards.

Well, it wasn't long before someone else moved into that cabin and uprighted the chair, burnt the rope hanging from the ceiling beam, and swept the birds nests out the chimney. That wooden box hummed under the floorboards and at noon when the man was out in the fields bustin clods of dirt down with his boots the woman she could hear a hummin comin from down somewhere below her feet and it made her nervous but it wasn't the kind of thing she wanted to say to the man. One day when the hummin sound had been particularly loud she said to the man when he came in she said theres noises comin from under this here floor and all day i hear a hummin noise and the man laughed and said so its rumpelstiltskin come for our baby is it and he tromped up and down with his

boots and finally he stopped and said this board is loose and it was the board right under where the rope had been hangin when they first come into the cabin. But every day when the man had gone out to the field the hummin was even louder than before and that autumn the woman she hung herself and when he came back in she had clumb down into that box under the floorboards and all he saw was the rope and the turned-over chair she had used. Well that man he took a hammer and a shovel and he pried up that loose board and when he did so he saw the wooden box and he said whats in this here box and when he opened it up there was his wife alaying there with her neck all purple as an onion skin and she said to him i aint never gonna rest easy in this dyin grave cause there are too many bones for a person to get comfortable so the man dumped all the bones outta the wooden box then he put that box back in the ground under the floor of the cabin

and he put the board back in the floor and all those bones they was hummin and jigglin like jumpin beans spilt on the floor and the man tried to bust them up and shut them up but the hummin kept on till finally he burnt the cabin down to the ground with him inside it.

The bones were unharmed by the fire, which angered the dead man so much he tied up the bones with the rope his wife had hung herself with and carried the bones down to the river and threw them in. The bones hummed all that winter under the ice and when spring come they washed up on the edge of the river and there they waited. Some ended up in the bellies of wolves, one even managed to crawl into the pocket of a government surveyor who carried the wrist bone of the dead baby all the way to San Francisco before he emptied his pockets and discovered that what he had been polishing between thumb and forefinger

on the train ride west across the country was not a worry stone but a bone. The surveyor put the bone in a jar and put the jar on a shelf and the bone it hummed so high it broke the jar and rolled across the room and out the door. The surveyor later hanged himself though it is not known why.

It was only much later that the dead began to arrive at the cabin all black and rotted with fire and already green moss and small ferns growin up through the floorboards. The government surveyor and the girl who had swallowed accidentally the bone in her soup and the school teacher with the bruised throat and the cramped hands all the dead from all the basements and attics and garages and stairwells all the dead with the rope in one pocket and the bone in the other all the dead hummin and stumblin on unsteady legs across the country makin their way back to that place we call Hangtown.

And when my poppa he finished tellin me this he sat back in his chair and he said theres many a tale to be told about Hangtown and none is as chillin as the tale left untold.