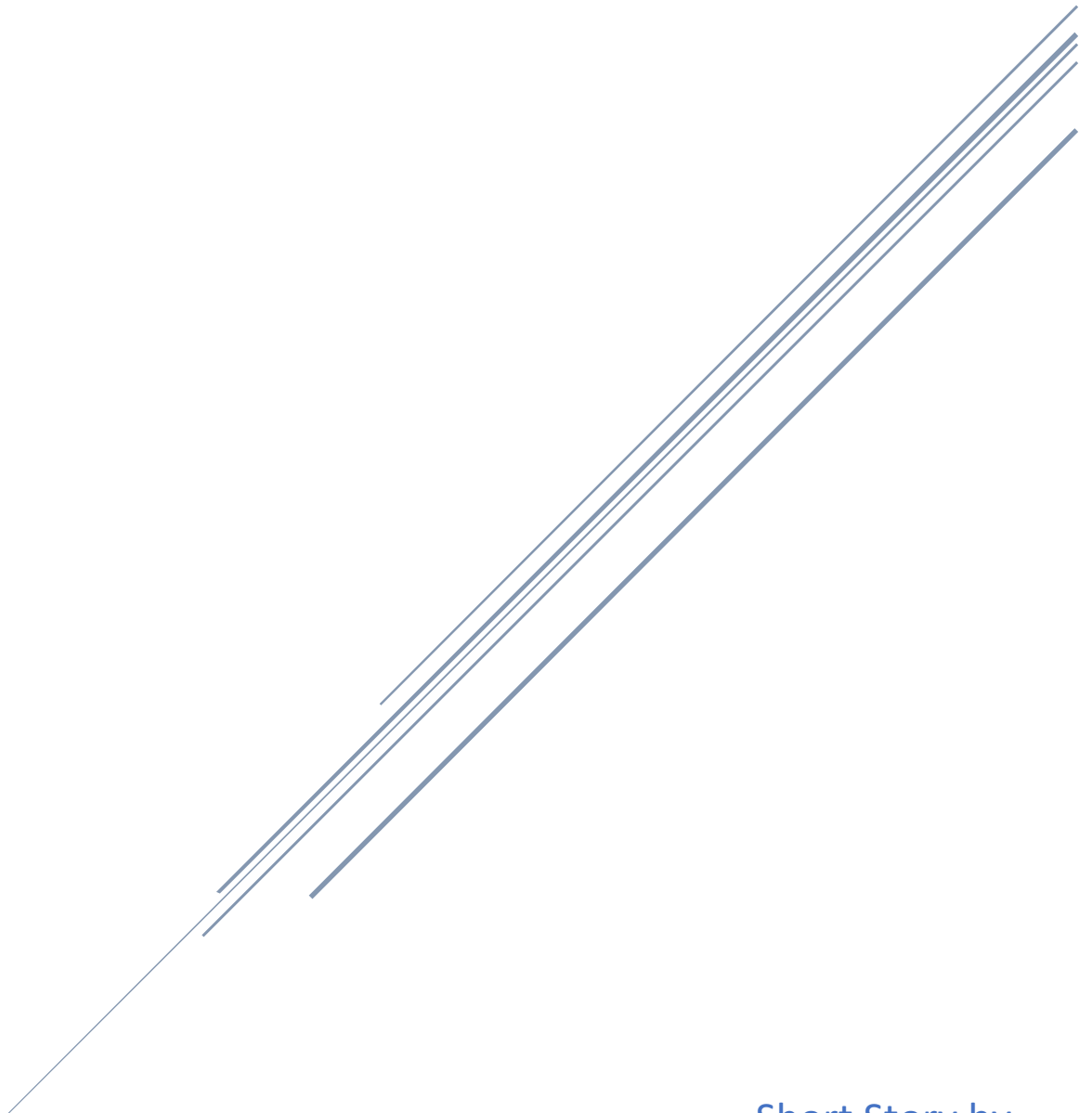


HERO'S CURSE

R. J. Davies



Short Story by



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Hero's Curse

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At thirty-three years old Hero Stein had always lived an unusual life. She had longed for a little piece of normal yet, knew that just wasn't in the cards for her. Since she could remember if she wasn't fighting the demons that lurked and dwelled in the shadows, it was talking to people who weren't there ... ghosts. Growing up it was a challenge for her parents, as they were deeply religious and strict it got to the point where she wasn't allowed to socialize with kids her age. When both of her parents died, Hero was only fourteen years old. The police and social worker explained to her that it was just a car accident and it was unfortunate. Passed around from one distant cousin to another when she was sixteen, she ran away. No one went looking for her.

She had learned the hard way you can't run away from yourself. Whenever she looked into a mirror, she had that pale lost face staring back at her. Hero Stein was no hero. It was a cruel twist of faith that her mother chose that name. Later she found out her great grandmother was also called Hero. Looking in the mirror her bloodshot eyes starred back at her.

No matter how fast or how far you run, you can't escape us, a haunting voice whispered in her mind. She knew it was one of them. They were always with her. He was right she couldn't get away there was no escaping.

There was a knocking at the door she held her breath.

Don't answer it, a familiar voice whispered. Don't do it Hero ... just don't!

Stepping towards the door she stretched a hand out and grabbed the doorknob. The windows started to rattle first then the door. Closing her eyes, she said a small prayer that she would survive this one. The door flew open as she pulled her hand back just in time.

"Little Hero," a tall thin man rumbled as he stood before her. His cracked dry lips spread into a toothy grin. "You don't call ... you don't write ... I'm beginning to think you're trying to avoid me," he chuckled.

"Oh, I'm ready for you," she gritted her teeth.

He raised one hand and she flew backwards across the room and slammed up against the wall, the air sprang out of her lungs in a rush.

Blinking she struggled to stand up. The hell she had been put through for the last thirty years just made her stronger.

"Is that your best?" she panted feeling the burning tears in the back of her eyes just waiting to be released.

"Oh, honey we're just getting started." he stepped inside, the door closed quietly behind him.

She summoned up all her strength and wheeled her energy. Biting back as she raised her left hand. He staggered backwards and bumped into the door.

"Some people just can't take a hint," she growled.

He grinned, "bring it on Hero."

"I don't want anything to do with you guys."

"I hear the words but know you don't mean it."

"I'm not playing with you guys anymore."

He laughed.

She felt the anger within bubbling to the surface. With seconds she was standing in front of him. Her left hand wrapped around his throat. Her right hand poised ready to rip out his dark heart.

His black eyes shone with excitement; the grin spread across his face again.

"Do it," he whispered. "Do ... it ..."

"I just want to be left alone," she plunged her fingers through his chest.

He chuckled. "Dig deeper ..."

She couldn't find what she was looking for.

The chuckle turned into a maniacal laugh.

One of his cold bony hands with long fingers wrapped around her thin wrist, the one that was digging into his chest. He pulled her hand out and grabbed her other hand.

"Sweetie, it's time to stop fooling around. You are going to help us."

"I've been fighting you guys for years, I'm not about to give up now."

"How cute sweetie, we weren't fighting you. We were helping you to hone your skills."

"You're lying."

"Believe me or not. But if we really wanted you dead, you would have been dead when you were three."

Panic began to seep through her pores. What if he was telling her the truth? It did seem weird that they continued to pursue her all these years, battle after battle. She narrowly escaped each time, learning more about them and more about herself.

"No, you're lying," she gasped shaking her head.

He shook his head and lean in close to her. She felt his hot stale breath feathering across her face as he whispered, "Sweetie the last thirty years have only been foreplay ... we're just getting started." He licked her cheek, it felt like wet soft sandpaper. "Don't worry you are by far my favourite, Hero. Now that you know the truth it's time to have some real fun," he chuckled deeply.

There was a knot in the pit of her stomach that warned her whatever came next, she wasn't going to like it.