

Hollow Jane

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.



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Books by Glenn Slade Clark, Jr.

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A Hero Before His Time

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There was always something about Jane that no one could ever quite put their finger on. Something not quite right, but not quite wrong. By that definition alone, it was something all too easily dismissed as nothing at all. The secret of what it actually was, or wasn't, was a simple one to understand, though quite difficult to reveal. The truth was Jane had been born perfectly lacking.

Her mother made a point to disguise this fact from the start. Jane had a seemingly normal girlhood, followed by a seemingly

normal adolescence, now capped off with a seemingly normal womanhood.

Jane was now married to her high school sweetheart. His name was Herbert. Herbert was a good man, strong in character and morally secure. Sometimes this made Jane uncomfortable. She was neither of these things, though she seemingly wanted to be. Seemingly, however, was the key word to almost understanding Jane. By seemingly wanting to be more like her husband, for example, Jane didn't want to be like him in the least. She did, however, feel that everyone else thought she should, and so she did what she thought they thought she should do.

No great imagination is required to see that this sort of life could become tiresome. In fact, though she seemingly loved Herbert and had seemingly been so happy at their wedding, the truth was she had only married him because she thought that's what everyone else thought she should do. Jane had no opinions of her own. She had no moral resolve. She had, to come to the point, nothing at all.

And that's really the whole tale in itself, for how could nothing at all hold anything at all together? How could nothing at all continue the preposterous charade of being?

It all began to crumble when Jane met a new friend and fell back towards a habit she'd not indulged in since she'd met Herbert years before. Her new friend was nothing at all like the woman Jane seemed to be. She was mockingly unfaithful to her

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husband, she had no respect for the needs of her daughter. She would stay out to all hours at night clubs, drinking herself stupid and taking off to the parking lot with men she'd barely known. She invited Jane out a time or two.

Herbert didn't see anything wrong with Jane enjoying a girls' night out. It didn't seem like something that could cause him any grief. But *seemed* as we've noted, was the secret key to almost anticipating Jane.

The last time Jane and her girlfriend went out, Jane at last gave in to her old ways. It was the only way for someone so completely lacking to go on. Just before they got to the night club, Jane took her old hatchet from the trunk of her car and whacked her friend's head off with one nasty blow. She put her friend's body in the trunk with the axe, then she pulled off her own head and put it alongside her friend's body. Now blaringly headless, Jane knelt down and picked up her friend's head, placing it on her own neck. She smiled then, seeming to be happy, though she wasn't. Jane had never been happy, nor would she ever be.

It was quite a night Jane had then, as she shed her wholesome illusion for this new one. With this seeming new self Jane was a whore. She drank until she couldn't walk. She indulged the desires of several strange men. She neglected to call poor Herbert until well after three.

When Jane finally came stumbling through the door of her house, Herbert was waiting, though she didn't know it. She stumbled into their room, and he watched her, as she pulled out her memory box from under the bed. She unlocked it and dropped something in. It made a loud thump as it landed, then she locked the box tight and shoved it back under the bed.

After several such episodes, Herbert decided something had to be done. He knew there was something in the memory box that she took with her each time. He waited for her that night, behind the bedroom door.

When Jane came stumbling back home once again, Herbert waited until she'd opened the box, then he turned on the lights and demanded to see what she had in her hands. Horror flooded his mind when he saw her friend's head being held by the hair. Jane looked askance, not understanding what was so horrible. She told him this was simply a part of who she was now. If he wanted to stay married, he would have to accept it.

Unconvinced, Herbert opened the box, then he fell back in disgust, pointing at it as if Hell itself were enclosed. Nine more heads stared blankly from within. Heads of young girls, heads of young women. His horror froze his heart, as his wife then shrugged and reached up, removing her own lovely head with a slight tug. She put her newest head on then and explained. She told Herbert how she'd been doing this all along. Her mother had taught her, as a child, how to fit in. She had to be what the

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other girls were, because being herself wasn't an option. As far as Jane could remember, in fact, she had no self to speak of.

Herbert asked through his tears, which head had she been born with? Which head was actually her own? Jane didn't know. It had been so long, she'd forgotten. All she knew was the use of each head, the crowd they gave her access to, the women they allowed her to be. Women not so lacking as she.

In a panic, Herbert called his friend, who was a physician, then he called Jane's mother, demanding to know the truth. Her mother explained that Jane had no real head. She'd been born without one, so she'd taken one from an ideal child and placed it on her daughter's neck. She'd given Jane a hatchet when she'd started kindergarten, so she could be whoever she needed to be as she seemingly went on.

When the doctor arrived, Herbert told him everything, showing him the box, asking if it were actually possible that his wife could use all eleven of these heads. The doctor revealed it was not. He then took her pulse. There was none. He asked her to remove her head so he could have a better look. She obliged with a seductive wink and popped it right off. Herbert took the head from her hands and set it down in the box, hoping to replace it with the head that he loved.

The doctor removed Jane's clothes and gave her a thorough examination, even cutting her arm open and looking inside. No blood was spilled, as he peeled back the skin. There was nothing

behind it, nothing at all. Poor Jane was hollow, beginning to end. Herbert couldn't understand. How was this possible? He still didn't know.

It wasn't possible, though. Not at all. The doctor explained this to him as well as he could. It wasn't possible for a woman so hollow, lacking both a heart and a soul, to live. It wasn't possible for a woman, especially one who wasn't alive, to manage herself without a head, or for that matter to rotate between eleven heads. The doctor's conclusion was simple. Jane wasn't. She couldn't. And she wouldn't. Jane was perfectly lacking. If one could name it, she lacked it. And her head-swapping shenanigans were only an effort to fill a void within herself. But the great trouble was, the void *was* herself. It could never be filled, because if her self was a void, then she wasn't at all. Jane didn't exist.

The doctor told Herbert what had to be done. They buried her hatchet and burned all her heads. They drove her to the forest and set her free in the night. Herbert had to let her go. She was a void, and she couldn't be allowed to drain anyone else as long as she seemed to exist. Herbert watched her go with great sorrow, for she didn't look back. She couldn't. She wandered into the woods without direction, without clothing, without a care, without a thought.

Herbert wept, as he accepted her fate. He had loved her so much, for so many years, but she had only married him because she wanted the ring. He was just part of an image she'd been

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convinced to present. All that love he'd poured into a void. And she'd never requited. She couldn't. Void's only take. They take, and they vanish. But creatures with hearts are resilient. Herbert would go on living and loving, just as Jane would go on not going on at all.

About the Author

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr. is the author of eleven books, including the novel *Cry, Wolf: Shadow of the Werewolf*, the short fiction anthology *The Great Debate*, the Gothic horror series *The Chronicles of Nightfire, Texas*, and two fantasy series: *Metrognomes* and *The Legends of Nod*. He lives in Dallas, Texas, where he is currently hard at work on his next book.

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