

# **THE BONE CHURCH**

**Stephen King**

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When traveling to the heart of darkness, terror is not an emotion - it's a destination.

If you want to hear, buy me another drink.

(Ah, this is slop - slop, I tell you - but never mind; what isn't?)

There were thirty-two of us went into that greensore  
and only three who rose above it.

We were thirty days in the green, and only one of us came out.

Three rose above the green, three made it to the top:

Manning and Revois and me. And what does that book say?

The famous one? "Only I am left to tell you."

I'll die in bed, as most obsessed whoresons do.

And do I mourn Manning? Balls! It was his money

put us there, his will that drove us on, death by death.

But did he die in bed? Not that one! I saw to it!

Now he worships in that bone church forever. Life is grand!

(What slop is this? Still - buy me another, do. Buy me two!

"Put another nickel in... the nickelodeon - - "

In other words I'll talk for whiskey; if you want me

to shut up, switch me to champagne.

Talk is cheap, silence is dear, my dear.

What was I saying?)

Twenty-nine dead on the march, and one a woman.

Fine tits she had, but an ass like an English saddle!

We found her facedown in the dead fire one morning,

an ash-baby smoked at the cheeks and throat.

Never burnt; fire must have been cold when she went in.

She talked the whole voyage and died without a sound;

what's better than being human? Do you say so?

No? Then balls to you, and your mother, too;

if she'd had two she'd been a fucking King.

Anthropologist, arr, so she said. Didn't look like no anthropologist when we pulled 'er out of the ashes with char on her cheeks and the whites of her eyes dusted gray with soot. Not a mark on her otherwise. Dorrance said it might've been a stroke and hwe as as close to a doctor as we had, that pansy-whore. For the love of God bring whiskey, for life's a trudge without it!

Every day the green did 'em down. Carson died of a stick in his boot. His foot swole up and when we cut away the goddam boot leather, his toesies were as black as the squid's ink that drove Manning's heart. Reston and Polgoy, they were stung by spiders big as your fist; Ackerman bit by a snake what dropped out of a tree where it hung like a lady's fur stole draped on a branch. Bit its poison into Ackerman's nose. How strong a throe, you ask? Try this: He ripped his own snoot clean off! Tore it away like a rotten each off a branch and died spitin' his own dyin' face! Goddam life, I say, and if you

can't laugh you might as well laugh anyway. It ain't a sad world unless you're sane, you know.

Javier fell off a plank bridge and when we hauled him out and he couldn't breathe so Dorrance tried to kiss him back to life and sucked from his throat a leech as big as a hothouse tomato. It popped free like a cork from a bottle and split between 'em; sprayed both with the claret we live on (for we're all alcoholics that way, if you see my figure) and when the Frenchman died raving, Manning said the leeches'd gone to his brain. As for me, I hold no opinion on that. All I know is that goddam Javier's eyes wouldn't stay shut but went on bulging in and out even after he was an hour cold. off a branch and died

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bulging in and out even after he was an hour cold.

Something in there, all right, arr, yes there was!

And all the while the macaws screamed at the monkeys

and the monkeys screamed at the macaws and both

screamed for the blue sky they couldn't see,

for it was buried in the goddam green.

Is this whiskey or diarrhea in a glass?

There was one of those suckers in the Frenchie's pantstu

did I tell you? You know what that one ate, don't you?

It was Dorrance himself who went next; we were

climbing by then, but still in the green. He fell

in a gorge and we could hear the snap. Broke his neck,

twenty six years of age, engaged to be married, case closed.

Arr, ain't life grand? Life's a sucker in the throat,

life's the gorge we all fall in (or choke on), it's a soup

and we all end up vegetables. Ain't I philosophical?

Never mind. It's too late to count the dead,

and I'm too drunk. In the end we got there.

Just say that.

Climbed that high embankment out of all that  
sizzling green after we buried Rostoy, Timmons,  
the Texantul forgot his nametuand Dorrance  
and a couple of others. In the end most went down  
of some fever that boiled their skin and turned it green.

At the end it was only Manning, Revois and me.

We got the fever too, but we got better;  
killed it before it killed us.

Only I ain't never really got better. Now whiskey's  
my quinine, what I take for the shakes, so buy  
me another before I forget my manners  
and cut your fucking throat. I might even  
drink what comes out, so be wise, sonny,  
and trot it over, goddam your young cheeks.

There was a road we came to, even Manning agreed  
it was, and wide enough for elephants if the ivory hunters  
hadn't picked clean the plains and the jungles beyond 'em  
back when gas was still a nickel.

("Put another nickel intutu" Arr, nevermind.)

It bore up, that road, and we bore up with it on tilted slabs  
of stone a million years peeled free of mother earth,  
jumping one to another like frogs in the sun, Revois  
still burning with the fever and metuoh I was light!  
Like milkweed gauze on a breeze, you knowtuyet  
still I saw it all. My mind was as clear then as clean water,  
for I was as young then as horrid nowtuyes, I see  
how you look at me, but you needn't wince, for  
it's your own future you see on this side o' the table.  
We climbed above the birds and there was the end,  
a stone tongue poked straight into the blue.  
Manning broke into a run and we ran after, Revois  
trotting a right smart, sick as he was.  
(But he wasn't sick longtuhee!)  
We looked down and saw what we saw.  
Manning turned red at the sight, and why not?  
For greed's a fever, too.  
He grabbed me by the rag that was once a shirt  
and asked if it was just a dream. When I said I saw  
what he saw, he turned to Revois.



But before Revois could say aye or nay, we heard the thunder  
coming up from the greenroof we'd left behind,  
like a storm turned upside down. Or say  
like all of earth had caught that fever that stalked us  
and was sick in its bowels. I asked Manning what he heard  
and Manning said nothing. He was too busy looking  
into that cleft, down a thousand feet of ancient air  
into the church below: a million years of bone and tusk,  
a whited sepulchre of eternity, a thrashpit of prongs  
such as you'd see if hell burned dry to the slag of its cauldron.

Arr! Yes!

You expected to see bodies impaled on the  
ancient thorns of that sunny tomb. There were none,  
but the thunder was coming, rolling up the ground  
instead of down from the sky. The stones shook  
beneath our heels as they burst free of the green  
that took so manytuRostoy with his mouth harp,  
Dorrance who sang along, the anthropologist  
with the ass like an English saddle, twenty-six others.  
They came, those gaunt ghosts, and shook the greenroof

from their feet, and in a gray wave; elephants no zoo ever held stampeding sideways from the green cradle of time.

Towering among 'em (believe what you want) were mammoths from the dead age when man was not, their tusks in corkscrews and their eyes as red as whips of sorrow;

wrapped around their wrinkled legs were jungle vines.

One cometuyes!tuwith a flower stuck

in a fold of his chest hidetulike a boutonniere!

Revois screamed and put his hand over his eyes.

Manning said "I don't see that." (He sounded like a man explaining to a fucking traffic cop.)

I pulled 'em aside and we all three stumbled into a stony cunt near the edge. From there we watched 'em come: a tide in the face of reality that made you wish for blindness and glad for sight.

They went past us and over us, never slowing, the ones behind driving the ones before, and down they went, trumpeting their way to suicide, crashing into the bones of their oblivion a dusty mile below.

Hours it went on, those endless convulsions of tumbling death;  
trumpets all the way down, a brass orchestra,  
diminishing. The dust and smell fo their shit  
near choked us, and in the end Revois fell mad.

Stood up, whether to run away or to join 'em  
I never knew which, but join 'em he did,  
headfirst and down with his boot heels in the sky and  
all the nailheads winking.

One arm waved. The other... one of those giant flat feet  
tore it off his body and the arm followed after, fingers  
waving: "Bye-bye!" and "Bye-bye!" and "So long, boys!"

Har!

I leaned out to see and it was a sight to remember, all right,  
how he sprayed in pinwheels that hung in the air  
after he was gone, then turned pink and floated away  
on a breeze that smelled of rotten carnations.

His bones with the others by now, and where's my drink?

But not with a single new one; the only new bones were his.

Do you see what I say? Listen again, damn you:

His, but no others.

Nothing down there after the last of the giants had passed us  
except for the bone church, which was as it was,  
with one blot of red, and that was Revois.

For that was a stampede of ghosts or memories,  
and who knows which haunts men the more? Manning got up  
trembling, said our fortunes were made (as if he  
didn't already have one).

"And what about what you just saw?" I asked.

"Would you bring others to see such a holy thing?

Why, next thing you know the Pope himself will be  
pissin' holy water over the side!" But Manning  
only shook his head like a fool, and held up hands  
without a speck of dust on them although not a minute  
past we'd been choking on it by the bale,  
and coated with it from top to toe.

Said it was hallucination

we'd seen, brought on by fever and stinkwater.

Said again that our fortunes were made, and  
laughed. The whoreson, that laugh was his undoing.

I saw that he was mad or I was and one of us

would have to die. You know which one it was,  
since here I sit before you, drunk, with hair that once  
was black hanging in my eyes.

He said, "Don't you see, you fooltutu"

And said no more, for the rest was just a scream.

Balls to him!

And balls to your grinning face!

I don't remember how I got back; it's a

dream of green with dark faces in it,

then a dream of blue with light faces in it,

and now I wake in the night in this city

where not one in ten dreams of what

lies beyond their lives for the eyes they

use to dream with are shut, as Manning's

were, until the end, when not all the bank accounts in hell

or Switzerland (they may be the same) could save him.

I wake with my liver bellowing, and in the dark

I hear the thunder of those great gray ghosts rising

out of the green roof like a storm set loose on the earth

and I smell the dust and shit, and when they

break free into the sky of their undoing, I see  
the ancient fans of their ears and their eyes.  
There's more to life than this; there are maps  
inside your maps and time beyond your time.  
It's still there, the bone church, and I'd like to  
go back and find it again, so I could throw myself  
over and be done this comedy. Now turn away  
your sheep's face before I turn it away for you.  
Arr, it's a dirty place, this reality,  
and there's no religion in it, so buy me a drink,  
goddam you. We'll toast elephants that never were.