

## Snake Oil

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## Snake Oil

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

### Summary

[SCAR]

Well, hello there!

*(Laughs)* It's been awhile since I recorded one of these! Did you miss me?

So... statement of me, Scar Goodtimes, regarding a certain business partnership, and a question of eternal life.

### Notes

I would recommend having read [End Condition](#) and [What's the Time, Mr. Wolf?](#) before reading this one! [The Wastes](#) is also commended reading, but is not required.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

[Click]

[SCAR]

Well, hello there!

*(Laughs)* It's been awhile since I recorded one of these! Did you miss me?

Our good friend Grian is still missing in action, which is... honestly, I sorta feel like I've been left hanging! We left off in a *weird* place, last time we talked, and- well, hopefully he'll be back soon and we can have a proper conversation. I'm living in suspense, here.

He better be grateful I've been keeping his secrets while he's gone, I'll tell you that much! Pearl is *scary* when she's mad.

In the meantime, though, since he's not here, and it's my turn in the spooky office anyways, I figured now might be as good a time as any to record a statement I've been meaning to for awhile!

Maybe I'll give it to him as a welcome-back present when he turns up again. Show I care, you know?

So... statement of me, Scar Goodtimes, regarding a certain business partnership, and a question of eternal life.

Statement begins!

This was... I was still living in America at the time, so I think it was about eight years ago. 2014? That sounds right. It was after I finished college, but before- well, before Grian and I first met! So it must've been around 2014.

At the time, I was conducting a... personal investigation, you might say. The same investigation that ultimately led me here, as a matter of fact!

I was trying to figure out death.

*(Laughs)* Sorry, sorry, gosh, that sounds so *serious*! All I was *really* doing was chasing rumors around from California to Maine, trying to figure out why I couldn't die. Not that I want to die, of course. I just wanted to know *why*, and if- well. Suffice it to say, it would put my poor mind at ease to have some certainty one way or the other.

*(Meow, distantly)*

Oh! Jellie! Do you want to help me give a statement? I'm telling the nice people about Cub.

*(Meow again, closer)*

Yeah, that guy! Do you remember him? From Chicago?

It was really just coincidence, me meeting him for the first time. Funny thing, I was actually on a train- or, well, I'd just gotten off a train. I, uh, try to avoid planes where I can. Too much potential for catastrophe. Not that my record with trains is spotless, either! My luck, I'm telling you.

I'd been headed out to the east coast, and I was supposed to change trains in Chicago. I happened to run into an older gentleman just outside the station. He said he was looking for participants for an 'independent research study' he was hoping to run for a new anti-aging medication.

Suspicious, obviously. My kind of guy! I told him he didn't want me in his study- just *imagine* how I'd skew the results- but that I'd love to take him for drinks and pick his brain a little about what he was working on. He was a little, uh, reticent at first, but I promised him I had some... relevant personal experiences to share in exchange. I love a good quid pro quo. *And* I told him I'd pay, which I think was what sold him.

It took a bit of prying to get him to open up, but you know me- I can be very persuasive! We got

along really well, once we started talking. We were just right on the same wavelength about things.

I told him a little about my situation, and he told me about his.

He said he'd encountered something about a year before that had shaken his worldview up a bit- thinking about it now, I guess that must've been the Hills book he gave that other statement about. And not long after, he'd come across an article about a certain urban legend circulating around his hometown. Something that could cure any illness, even old age. He'd been fascinated, he said- left his house and job and moved back to America to try and find it for himself.

And eventually, he said, he had. Found it, that is.

This was about the time I realized I'd missed my connecting train by- oh, about three hours. Now, it wasn't a huge problem, because what Cub was telling me about was *exactly* the sort of thing I'd been looking for, but it *did* mean I had nowhere to sleep that night. I asked if he'd be willing to host me- because I did really want to see what he was talking about- and he said sure, if I was willing to help him with his project in exchange.

I said it was a deal, and we shook on it.

It didn't look much like a spring of eternal youth, when I finally saw it on the counter in his kitchen. It was a big round flask of some extremely *bad* looking liquid- almost like oil, but a little... blue? Purple? It looked like if water could bruise. Put shivers right up my spine.

He told me to wait, and went to rummage around in his fridge for a minute before he came back with a box of fried chicken. He picked out a leg, and dipped it in the stuff.

The breading disintegrated off into nothing, and then the meat underneath... twitched, and started to, uh, *writhe*. It looked like it was going to peel itself right off the bone. It looked *very* gross.

And then... it started growing feathers. Like somebody else I know- *ha*, sorry, sorry. But seriously, it was so gross. One of the worst visuals I've ever put in my brain, and I've seen my own guts scattered across half a mile of freeway!

In another couple of seconds, it looked like a full chicken leg again, like it'd just been ripped straight off a living bird. And not a *dead* bird. It was *moving*, the little claws kicking and scratching, and *bleeding*, too, which was just- *eugh*. It slipped out of Cub's hand and fell back into the flask, and just- disappeared. I couldn't see it anymore.

As he was washing the blood off his hands after, he grinned and asked if I'd still be interested in going into business with him.

Of course I said yes!

It was the closest thing I'd encountered yet to my own, uh, *condition*. I couldn't help but wonder if what happened to that chicken leg looked anything like what happens to me when I come back to life every time. It's not like anybody's ever been in a position to be able to tell me.

And of course that leads to a... well, one has to wonder. What *would* it do to people?

He admitted that's what he had been trying to work out- whether it would be safe to use it on himself. He was an older guy when I met him; in his fifties at least, if I had to guess, and he said he had some hereditary family health problems that made him real nervous about getting any older. If it really could make him younger, it could be, well, life-saving!

But, you know, goodness knows *what* something like that would do if you just took a dip in it. Hence why I'd met him handing out fliers in search of volunteer guinea pigs. Why risk your own skin when you can risk somebody else's?

So began our little joint business venture! Uh, I'll skim a few details, just in case. I can't imagine the IRS will be looking through the cassettes here any time soon, but it never hurts to play it safe. Suffice it to say, the regulations in America about selling vitamin supplements are *really* lax! Somebody should really look into that. Not too hard, though.

We were a good team! Like I said, we were on the same wavelength. He engineered the product, I sold it. I told him his business approach when he met me was all wrong. People don't want things that are *experimental*, they want things that are *cutting-edge*. It's all about the spin!

He would never tell me *where* exactly he was getting that sludge. He was all tight-lipped about it. And I bugged him about it a lot! At the end of the day, though, I can respect another man's need to play a few things close to the chest. I do it all the time! So I didn't take it too personally, though in hindsight I might've saved myself some trouble if I'd pressed a little harder back then. I just took the little bottles of pills he turned out and sold them.

What surprised me was when it really seemed to *work*.

I'll be honest, I'd been ready to ditch town the moment something went wrong. But that didn't happen! Not at first. People started coming back, saying our supplements were working for them like nothing ever had. They felt *young* again. No more aches and pains, they had more energy—some of 'em even swore their wrinkles were fading! Really warmed the heart.

I never tried it myself. Cub asked me at one point whether I was interested in— cause, well, my joints, you know? They haven't really gotten the message I'm still alive. (*Laughs*) I'm not old, and I was even younger then, but I still feel it some days!

I opted out, though. (*Laughs again, nervously*) You know that saying about looking a gift horse in the mouth? I don't want to go examining those teeth *too* closely!

Things were going good! We continued like that for... oh, at least a month or so. Cub was still holding off on testing anything on himself. He kept saying he wanted to wait and see if there were any (*poorly imitating Cub*) 'long-term adverse effects.'

And then... everything went a little sideways.

One day, I got back to Cub's apartment, and found him on the floor.

It's kind of funny. For all my own personal experience, I'd never had to deal with somebody *else* dying in front of me. I was pretty useless about the whole thing. He was a lot more together than I was, somehow. He told me, very calmly, that his heart was doing something it shouldn't be doing, and he'd been trying to sit up for almost half an hour, and there wasn't much time left.

I went for the phone to call for help, but he told me to stop and bring him the flask from the kitchen instead. That's what he'd been trying to get up and reach. So I did. What else was I supposed to do? He was dying. I didn't know how to handle that.

He took it in shaking hands, and tipped it back, and drank.

He drank, uh, kind of a lot of it! We'd just been selling pills with tiny little pinches of the stuff, so the dosage we'd been testing was almost nothing. This was... more! I almost went to stop him when he'd downed half of it, but I didn't want him to *die*. I guess I trusted him to know what he

was doing. (*Laughs*) Not smart of me!

He dropped it when it was empty, and it shattered on the floor.

I asked him how he felt. He said he wasn't sure yet. He looked a little... sick. I could see all the veins around his mouth and down his neck. He asked if I could bring him a bucket, and I did, but he didn't throw up, just sort of curled around it and sat there. There was still broken glass everywhere, but he didn't really seem to notice.

And then... you remember how I said the chicken leg, uh, *writhed*? I think that's the word I used. Imagine that but a person's skin. It was, uh... not nice! Not very nice at all to see! It was like his muscles were trying to crawl off. I couldn't see his face, exactly, and I'm glad I couldn't. Nothing against Cub's face, you understand, but- *eugh*.

At this point I was back to being pretty sure he was going to die, just in a much weirder way than heart failure.

I was staring at the top of his head where it was bent over the bucket. He had a lot of grey hair, almost white. But as I watched... black started to sort of... *bleed* back in, like an oil spill. Or like hair dye, I guess, but it looked all wrong. It's going to sound silly, but it looked almost *too* black. Almost blue.

I remember the feeling I had at that point really clearly. I felt like something had gone very wrong, and I should get out of there as soon as I could. Which is unusual for me! I don't know if you've noticed, but my self-preservation instinct is a little wonky.

Then and there, though- I don't know *what* I was scared of, exactly, but I was scared.

He finally stopped... moving. I still couldn't see his face, but I could see all the wrinkles and calluses were gone from his hands, where they were wrapped around the edge of the bucket. His knuckles were white from holding on, I remember that.

You know, I don't think I ever asked him if it hurt, but it must've.

He looked up, and I finally saw his face.

He looked... well. He did look younger! A lot younger. Like I said, he'd been pretty firmly up there into middle age, so far as I could tell, but... he looked my age. Younger, even- twenty-one? Twenty-two?

His clothes looked weird on him, like he'd lost a lot of bulk, which I remember being strange, because he didn't look any *smaller*. More like there were parts of him missing where I couldn't see. His face looked very... hollow? Big dips around his eyes, under his cheekbones.

Now, I won't say he looked different in a *bad* way, *necessarily*. He was a handsome guy! Still is? I don't actually know if he's still alive. But, uh... the teeth.

He got up, dusted himself off- he was a little unsteady on his feet, but caught himself quickly. He said that it had really gone a lot better than he'd thought it would. I asked him how he was feeling. He said he was starving. (*Laughs nervously*)

And then he said he'd be back later, and limped out the door, and closed it behind him.

What else was there for me to do? I cleaned up the broken glass, cut myself terribly, and then had to clean *that* up. I didn't see him for more than a day after.

I, uh, started looking up train tickets again. And plane tickets. And bus tickets. Not that I was wanting to hang my buddy out to dry, you understand! But- well. It was starting to feel like we'd reached the 'consequences' stage of the whole affair, and I didn't *really* want to be caught standing there when the music stopped.

He finally came back the next night; I woke up to the sound of him closing the front door. When I got up and went to the kitchen, there was a new bowl of the dark stuff on the counter, and he was busy cleaning out the fridge.

He said he was feeling fine. Better than ever! I asked, since he'd skipped a few steps on our whole business plan, what he wanted to do next, and he said he just wanted to keep going. Nothing had to stop.

And- there were those tickets I'd been looking at, but- we *were* making some pretty respectable profits. I figured I'd stick around a little longer.

One thing that was funny was the first time he went back into the living room- you know, where I'd cut myself cleaning up the glass- he stopped dead, in his tracks, and sort of... sniffed the air? And licked his lips. He asked me if I'd spilled something. I said no.

The next couple days after that- it was *almost* like nothing had happened, except for how Cub had started sticking his fingers in the bowl and licking them off whenever he walked past. They started looking a little purple. Bruise-colored. His lips, too, like he wasn't getting enough oxygen.

And then I started noticing him chewing on his fingers. Just when we were out doing things. He would do it until they bled without even noticing. And listen, I'm not one to begrudge people their little habits, but he hadn't been doing that before! Not that I ever saw!

Look, if I knocked thirty years off my age, I'm sure I would get a little weird too. And I'm hardly someone who can judge a friend for having a few, uh, abnormalities. Happens to the best of us!

But... in hindsight, you know what they say, it's twenty-twenty, in *hindsight* I can admit I should have just left when it got weird. Because the other thing I started noticing was that we were running out of the weird blue stuff a lot *faster* than we had before.

Technically I never *caught* him drinking it, but- it was obvious.

And our customers were also getting a little, uh... okay, *addicted* is such an ugly word. But they were definitely getting a little cranky! They started wanting refills more and more often, and the phone calls were...

They weren't very nice! I stopped answering the calls. Unprofessional of me, I know. But I'll admit it got to me. I didn't know. I mean, really, I knew the supplements were *weird*, but they hadn't seemed to be *hurting* anybody, not at first.

Oh, well. What's past is past. Right, Jellie? (*A meow.*) Right.

And then everything sort of hit a breaking point when we just... ran out. One morning, the bowl was empty. Completely. I don't know if Cub licked it clean and forgot or *what*, but it was definitely empty.

Cub was very upset. He asked if I'd taken any, but I'd never touched it, not once, the whole time I was living there. Gave me the willies. He started pacing in circles around and around his little apartment, chewing on his fingers, muttering to himself. I don't know if he even remembered I could hear him or not. But, uh...

I definitely heard when he bit through bone, though, and that was about when I figured it was past time to take my leave.

The music had stopped, and like I said, I didn't want to be caught without a seat. Jellie and I were on a bus to Atlanta that night. Soonest one I could book.

I've...

I've tried to be a little more responsible since then. You know, I was young! People do dumb stuff when they're young. And the trouble from that followed me for a pretty long time, 'cause Cub put *my* name on the business registration as a partner. So it made a whole mess for me when our customers started, uh...

Well. The smoke all cleared eventually. If it was anybody's fault, it was his- he was the one who'd got caught without a chair, in the end. I made it out right in the nick of time. And when they went looking for him, he was nowhere to be found. I still don't know where he went. Like I said, he could still be out there. I haven't tried to find him.

We had fun, though! What an interesting guy. (*Laughs*) You remind me of him, sometimes.

(*Pause*)

Jeez, I hope nobody else ever listens to this one. They'll be *so* confused, Jellie, can you *imagine*-

[Click]

## End Notes

first of all- someone made a fanlore page for this series?? what the hell?? that's so cool. huge shoutout to whoever did it, because it made my day when i saw it, and if anybody is interested in editing or adding to it, [you can find it here!](#)

additionally, and with very funny timing, [someone posted an fta!scar rendition of the jurgen lietner rant](#) as i was working on this which i think is so funny

aaand happy summer!! four more statements to go! ya girl IS gonna be traveling for the next couple months so the rate of output might be a little slow, but im definitely hoping to finish the series by fall semester if i can!

always comment if you enjoyed, and remember to check out the [podfic!](#)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!