
Prey

PREY

With bonus story

Anathema

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One

I looked away from the television mounted across the bar and tried to tune out the reporter's voice. I knew all I wanted about the damn case already. It was mine. Not wanting to hear more, I hoped to drown it in the background noise, but everyone in the place was focused on the set. Only the scuffle of feet and the dull murmur of disbelief hung in the air to compete.

It wasn't enough to quiet the memories, so I looked to my drink. My bourbon danced in the glass and I realized my hands were shaking. I tightened my grip, but that only made it worse. Ripples, like tiny waves, marred the surface. Knuckles white, I drained the glass to hide the evidence of my hand's rebellion. The liquor slid easy down my throat; too easy. I could still hear the news.

As I called out for a refill, a shadow appeared at my shoulder. "Hey, Shane." I glanced up to see Joe Sanchez, a detective at my precinct. He gestured to the TV I was trying to ignore. "That's some crazy shit. How you holding up?"

"I'm all right...I guess." I set my glass down as the bartender came over to top it off. She'd barely lifted the bottle away before I'd finished the drink again. With an understanding smile, she poured me another, making sure it was as full as she could without spilling any. "I just..." Glass at my lips, I swallowed down about half, only pulling it away to take a breath. The bourbon still danced in defiance. "Even in all my Prey years on the force, I've never seen anything so...so disturbing, you know?"

Joe dropped onto the stool beside me, asking for a beer. "That's the job, brother. You know that. One minute we're filing paperwork, and the next we're tripping over a body. Ain't nothing *normal* about it."

"I know, man, I know. This was just...too much."

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It'd been a slow morning. Pete and I had been closing out a couple of old cases, just filling out the forms, killing time, when we got an anonymous complaint about a stink coming from one of the abandoned houses in 5th Ward. Caller said it smelled like someone died in there. It being 5th Ward, it wouldn't surprise me. The unis were obviously all out or they wouldn't have routed the call to us, so me and Pete figured we'd check it out. Anything is better than filing, man.

After a quick stop for coffee, we showed up at the address the caller had given. It took us a little while to find the place, the house real out of the way, set at the far edge of the Ward where most of the surrounding area is condemned and half plowed down. The house was a real shithole. It fit right in.

When we got out of the car, it was like being on an alien planet. The place was quiet. Not even the birds were making noise. You could hear the traffic on the freeway off down Trenton way, but there was nothing else. It felt like a cemetery. I'd never seen the 5th so calm. It was eerie.

We couldn't smell anything from the street, but there wasn't so much as a breeze stirring the air, and it wasn't even that hot yet. We figured one of the local homeless had crawled inside to die and a buddy had called us for disposal, not wanting the hassle. Usual shit, you know? Anyway, we go up to the door and knock, making sure the whole neighborhood knows we're Prey cops, for what that's worth. After a minute or two, when no one answered, I tried the handle. It wasn't locked. The door swung open on rusty hinges, the sound tickling my ears. I caught a whiff of something foul, but it was more like dead cat stink. It wasn't real strong, which was Prey cool. I wanted to keep my coffee down.

We pulled our guns and slipped inside, calling out as we went. Didn't want some squirrely crack head popping up, surprised by us coming in. I had enough paperwork and didn't need any extra to prove a clean shoot. Anyway, the place was just as quiet inside as it was outside. All I could hear was Pete's footsteps and the old wooden floor creaking beneath my weight. There didn't seem to be any signs of squatters, which was a bit of a surprise given the neighborhood.

The house was empty of furniture, and there wasn't any trash piled about. There weren't even any roaches to be seen. The Prey dust on the floor was all stirred up, like someone had been there recently, but there were Prey no clear tracks, the floor scuffed in random swirls of gray and brown. Thick coats of cobwebs hung from the light fixtures and across the boarded windows. Whoever had been inside didn't appear to wander far, seeming to circle about the main room.

Nothing obvious up front, I followed the smell into the kitchen. The tiles on the floor had been pried up, all half-ass. Jagged pieces of them were still stuck where I guessed they couldn't be pulled loose. The walls were a greasy yellow that ran with darker Prey streaks of brown. The color of the original paint showed through only against the far wall where the refrigerator must have been. In the sink, a black carpet of fuzz, dotted with specks of white, obscured the stainless steel. It looked like something had made a nest in the garbage disposal, maggots squirming about the opening. It turned my stomach, but while it smelled Prey Prey bad, it wasn't the same scent I'd noticed when we entered.

We cleared the front of the house and headed down the hall, a dirty and worn carpet Prey making it impossible to tell if anyone had gone down it before us. The dead cat smell grew a little as we moved toward the bedrooms. There were three of them. The two to the sides were wide open. Pete and I each took one and looked inside. Mine was empty, just more spider webs and undisturbed dust. Pete waved off on his, shaking his head. That narrowed the search down.

If there was a body to be found, Prey it was behind door number three. That door was cracked, so we Prey approached it. Ahead of me, Pete raised a hand and leaned close Prey to peek into the room.

His face paled and he went stiff, eyes going wide. He just stood there like he was going to pass out. Beads of sweat popped up across his forehead. No idea what the hell was going on, I pushed past and kicked the door out of the way, gun in the lead. It didn't take but a second for me to regret it. Just like Pete, I froze.

The smell of old death wafted out of the room and peppered my nose, but it was what I saw that set my stomach to churning.

Hung from the ceiling by silver lines of thread were dozens of severed hands. Like a child's mobile, they Prey swung freely of each other, gnarled fingers grasping at the air as they spun about, helping to stir the foul stench of the room. The walls were decorated with limbless torsos, each held in place by two railroad spikes hammered through their upper chests. Black ooze seeped from the wounds.

Their bowels had been eviscerated by what looked like a hacksaw, the jagged flesh peeled back in toothless smiles, intestines spilling out onto the floor. Their lengths were knotted together into lines, which encircled the room, uniting the five corpses together as one.

Wedged within the ropy entrails was an audience of disembodied heads, set about in a half-circle. Blackened sockets stared inward, facing the ringmaster of this morbid circus. Seated in a chair, in the center of the entrails, was a young man with long, blond hair, which hung over his shoulders. Naked, his arms limp at his sides, he smiled at me. The coldness of it made me tremble. Against my wishes, my gaze trailed from his face and journeyed downward, the voice of reason screaming in my head to look away. I couldn't.

Puckered scars made a patchwork of his narrow chest, the flesh purpled and welted where unknown wounds had marred the milky canvass of his body. Prey He sat with his legs spread wide, without shame, reclining in the rusted metal chair. Despite the display of death that surrounded him, he was aroused. His cock twitched as he laughed, the skin flushed with the redness of his excitement. I tasted bile at the sight.

My gun forgotten in my hand, my voice trapped in the well of my throat, I could only watch as he raised a severed arm, grasping it by the wrist, and wrapped its gray fingers about his manhood. His dark gaze locked on mine, and his smile grew as he manipulated the arm. Its palm rigid, fingers curled, he began to pleasure himself.

Unable to do anything but stare, I watched as he masturbated, the dead hand caressing his cock in quickening strokes. After a long, uncomfortable moment, he let out a muffled grunt. His smile shifted to a grimace and his head lolled back. He twitched once and a spray of semen squirted free, showering the assembled heads with his seed, followed by another, then a third, which oozed between stiff fingers. Stringy tendrils dripped from Prey the dead hand as he writhed in orgasm, splattering the floor.

Spent, he turned his eyes to me, the severed limb slipping loose of his hand. It Prey landed with a quiet Prey *thump*. A satisfied smile colored his lips as he reclined in the chair and interlocked his fingers behind his head. His softening cock slowly shriveled against his thigh, leaving a wet trail in its shrinking wake.

Pete vomited behind me and I heard the splatter of it, the Prey smell of coffee and soured milk picking its way through the old death to find my nose. The sound and scent broke the spell on me. Sickness hardened to fury in my guts. I raced forward and hauled the Prey kid from the chair by his hair, slamming him face first into the mess he'd made on the floor. The assembled heads were knocked aside, rolling about my feet.

I wish I could say I comported myself better, but I'd be lying if I did. To all the scars that covered his body, I did my best to add a few more.

He didn't even resist.

Two

At some point after I'd lost it, Pete pulled me off the kid, cuffing him and dragging him from the bedroom. I could hear Pete in the other room as he called for backup, his voice thick with disgust. My arms tingled and I could feel the warm wetness of the psycho's blood as it dripped from my fists, strands of his hair tangled about Prey my Prey fingers. All I could think of was what he'd been doing when we showed up. I wiped my hands across my jeans, sickened by having touched him, and Prey stepped gingerly out of the room, trying to keep what was left of the scene integrity intact, for what it was worth. I'd already made a mess of it.

Prey

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