

Bones

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## FALLOUT

Camille leaned over the windowsill at the far end of the bedroom, staring out over the acres of forest that rolled down the hills below her. She always did that after we'd make love. Roll over out of bed, throw on a pair of underwear and a t-shirt, and then head right over to that sill. I don't know what she was expecting to see out there. It's almost as if she were keeping watch, waiting for Gary to come trudging out from behind the shadows of the trees.

"Cammy," I called from my spot on the bed, sprawled out, lazy and satisfied. "Looking for something in particular out there?"

She didn't respond. She never responded when I called her Cammy. It was what her husband called her. Made her feel guilty, I guess. Reminded her of what she'd just done, again. I knew this. Knew she hated when I called her Cammy, but still I did. Usually after sex. I don't know why I did this. I just did. It's the way I am, I guess.

"Camille," I tried again. With the proper name this time.

"Hmm?" she responded absently, still pressed up against the window. Still keeping watch.

"Come back to bed."

"Kay." She didn't move.

"Right now, please?"

She turned around to face me. She was pretty, standing there with that loose, ratty pink t-shirt hanging down to the top of her thighs, just barely covering her panties. Her ash blond hair a mess, falling halfway over her left eye, in what turned out to be a rather damn sexy look. Oh yeah, she could be sexy when she wanted to be. Could easily pass for a woman in her early

thirties on a good night. Of course, this was usually when she was feeling dangerous. Slutty. When she'd pick up yours truly from the bar for a weekend of selfish, unapologetic sex.

And when her husband returned home from whatever pedestrian middle-management salesfuck business trip he had wasted another weekend on, she went right back to her role of mild-mannered, caring, *obedient* housewife. Hair pulled back behind her head, baggy sweatshirt, jeans. The drab uniform of the unsatisfied spouse. The look that said, "I love you, but don't get any ideas. Tonight, when we go to bed, I intend to read."

I've never understood why people choose to live this way. Eternally unfulfilled. That burst of love once felt at the beginning all but extinguished, just a brief fleeting spark that at times might lead to a 5 minute missionary position session. But never fucking. Fucking, for people like Gary and Camille was but a mere point in a line of long past events. Forever gone. Forever replaced by nights of network television, roasted chicken and potato dinners, and the occasional argument over weekend chores to make life a little less monotonous.

Yeah, I don't know why some couples would choose to live this way. Not me, man. People ask me why a forty year old like myself - relatively attractive guy, relatively in shape, full head of hair - doesn't "have himself a woman." What I'd like to say, but don't, is, "Why would I want a woman when I can have *your women*."

I've got my spot behind the bar, where I can wipe up the bar top and glance across all the sad faces, the sad hands pouring stiff drinks into sad mouths, and I can find the ones who are looking for something - anything - to reduce the tedium of their daily existence.

It may not be the most Christian behavior, I admit. But you know what? If it's so bad, where's Gary? Where's Gary while *I'm* in his bed?

Well apparently Gary wasn't in the woods, because Camille appeared satisfied with her search. She returned to bed. Sat down, then leaned over me to reach for a glass of water that sat on the night stand amid the contents of my pockets. Loose change, book of matches, pack of cigarettes, condoms, and my ever present buck knife. In this desolate shithole of a town, you'd be wise to always have a little protection on you - the blade, not the rubbers - when closing up

the bar. She sat back against the headboard, resting the glass on her lap.

"It just gives me the creeps is all," Camille replied, as if I'd asked a question.

"That glass?" I laughed. "Well nobody's forcing you to drink from it."

"No, Derrick. Asshole. The shelter."

"Oh, here we go again."

"I'm going to have to convince Gary to get rid of it. Board it up. Fill it with cement.

Anything. What possible reason could we have for keeping a fallout shelter around? Hidden back there in the woods, those two doors half buried in the ground, it's just creepy."

"It's just a hole, Camille."

"What's down there, do you think?"

"Same thing I thought the last time you asked. Dirt and rat shit."

"Gary says it's haunted."

"Haunted, yep. You told me this same thing last time we laid here. It's like you're just grasping for reasons to bring up Gary's name. Which, let me tell you, is just about the best way to kill a hard-on. Look, Camille, last time. It's not haunted, it's a hole. An irrelevant hole. And if it were haunted, Gary would be the last to know. Gary's a pussy. Gary couldn't step ten feet into those woods without running home terrified at the first squirrel fart."

Camille laughed. Shook her head. She liked it, and didn't like it, when I talked trash about her husband. I think it reminded her of her unhappiness, but also of her stubborn refusal to remain a constant slave to it. Helped relieve a bit of her guilt, I imagine.

"Bloody?" I asked.

"What?"

"Bloody Mary? Want one? I do. We lay here much longer we'll miss Bloody Mary hour."

I pushed myself up out of bed, grabbed my underwear off the floor - a stretched-out pair of white jockies - pulled them up over my legs, and slapped the elastic band around my waist.

Camille and Gary had a wonderful wet bar, and I was thinking that I'd fill a glass with a heavy pour of some of that expensive Vodka. A nice liquor buzz and some late morning sex would be

a great way to prepare for another long night behind the bar.

"What do you think?" I called out behind me as I walked to the bedroom door. "Bloody for the ma'dam?"

"Yes, please."

I turned back to her as I opened the door ahead of me.

"Salt?"

I noticed something in my peripheral.

I spun back around to face the open doorway, and my eyes barely had a chance to reposition themselves before Gary was on top of me.

We hit the hardwood floors with a tremendous bang. Me on my back, Gary on my chest. He'd hit me with such a force that I'd swear we must have flew back a good five feet. Shit. With that kind of momentum he must have been charging down the hallway towards the door before I'd even opened it. He hadn't made a sound.

And now he was strangling me. His surprise charge and tackle had completely caught me off guard, and in my stunned moment of immobility, he had taken the upper hand. And he was trying to kill me. Strangling the holy shit out of me. Still trying to gather my bearings, I looked up at the face that hovered a few inches above mine. It was not the face of a middle-management traveling dipshit. It was the face of rage. The face of a killer. His eyes were opened so wide they could have covered his entire face. And his pupils were practically nonexistent. They were the eyes of an opossum, its spine crushed and flattened into the asphalt, hissing defiantly at the tail lights of the car that had just run it down and initiated its early decent into Hell.

I was getting my senses back. Survival instinct was kicking in. I could feel his fingers digging into my esophagus, could smell his stale breath spurting out in pants like a dog, could hear Camille screaming somewhere in the distance.

"Gary! What are you doing? Gary!"

Bright lights flashed in the corners of my eyes. I could feel my tongue moving involuntarily

within my gaping mouth, as if it could lap in oxygen and feed it to my begging throat. It was about to be game over for yours truly in a moment here. I needed to man up.

With my last remaining bit of strength I managed to spin myself over onto my right side, momentarily loosening his grasp on my throat. Wheezing and choking like an asthmatic at an old folks' home, I was at least free for that instance, and I took advantage of the momentum. I rolled over onto my stomach. Gary, now on my back, had to rearrange his hands to regain his hold around the back of my neck. It was less effective. And so I rolled again. Hard this time. Out from under him. And for that brief second, we were side by side. Me on my back, Gary on his stomach. Poorly played, Gary. I rolled myself over, quickly, with the last of my energy, and found myself on top of *his* back.

Ha ha!

I dug my arms under and around him in a backwards bear hug. He struggled to break free with that same fury that I'd seen in his eyes. Thankfully I'd had plenty of practice restraining drunk violent rednecks at the bar and I knew to tightly wrap one hand around the other wrist, and squeeze with all my strength the torso of the maniac beneath me. I wouldn't be able to hold him much longer, though. I knew this. I rolled over onto my back, carrying him with me, over me, so that he was now laying atop my chest, his face and chest now pointing upwards. Towards Camille, who stared at us from the bed in shocked incomprehension.

Gary continued to struggle with an almost inhuman strength, digging his shoulder blade into my chest, kicking his boot heels into my shins. I couldn't let go of him. If I did, I'd be a goner for sure. But I was still gasping for breath and was quickly running out of my remaining reserves of energy.

"Camille!" I choked. "Help!"

I didn't know what I expected she could do. But then again, I did.

And she did it. She leaped out of the bed and pawed at the night stand, knocking coins and condoms to the floor. She grabbed my buck knife and yanked the blade out of the handle, locking it into position. She stepped towards us, holding that knife out in front of her.

And then she paused.

"YES!" I screamed. And with that one word, I became an accomplice. Because I wasn't thinking about survival at that moment. I can admit to this now. I was thinking about punishment.

It was the motivation she needed. She snapped out of her state of indecision, and she charged.

Camille lunged on top of Gary, straddling his waist with her naked thighs, and plunged the blade into his gut. Once. Twice. Again. Again. She was screaming. Hysterical. In a panic. Screaming. Driving that knife into her husband. I heard the sound of his ribs snapping. From my view over his shoulder I saw his blood paint her face.

She finally stopped. Rolled off Gary and onto the floor. Sat there in her panties and bloody t-shirt with her hands in her lap. The knife must have still been sticking out of her now dead husband. And with that thought, I realized that he was still on top of me. His head pressed down against my face. I felt his hair on my cheek. Could smell it. It stank of trees.

I pushed his body off of mine and scampered on my hands and knees across the floor boards to get as far away from it as I could. I pushed my back up against the side of the bed for support and tried to regain my breath. When I could finally breathe freely again, I looked over at Camille.

She was sitting in the same position, with her legs curled up beneath her and her hands in her lap. She was looking down at her t-shirt. At the blood of her husband that had soaked through it. She had killed him.

*She* had.

Whether or not Gary had been trying to kill me. Whether or not I had wanted her to kill him. This was all irrelevant, for it was her hands that had held that knife. Not mine. My conscience was clear. I didn't kill anybody.

She was crying. I felt a spot of shame. She had saved my life, for God's sake. And here I was, rationalizing my innocence.

"Camille."

"Camille."

She looked over at me.

"Come here."

I should have gone to her. Should have gone to her and taken her in my arms. But she was right next to that body. That body with the chest pretty much torn wide open. And I couldn't do it.

"Camille. Come here."

She crawled over. I wrapped my arms around her and pulled her to me. I could feel her heart beating. Fast. I could feel the warmth of her blood-drenched shirt against my naked chest.

I held her like that until she stopped crying. Until her heart beat slowed to a normal rhythm. As she shuddered in my arms, terrified and shell-shocked. For that moment, I loved her.

We just sat there on the floor against the side of the bed, wrapped tightly around each other. A killer and her lover, comforting each other.

...

We stood in the kitchen, leaning against the counter, silently sipping on Bloody Marys and counting the tiles that covered the floor. The corpse of Camille's husband remained upstairs, still bleeding, most likely, all over the bedroom hardwoods. Once I had regained my composure up there, had been able to inhale an entire lungful of air, once I felt the erratic beating of Camille's heart through the bloody shirt finally slow to relatively normal levels, I convinced her that we needed to get the hell out of that room. Go downstairs, fix a drink, and "talk this thing through."

I'm pretty sure both of us understood that there wasn't a whole lot that needed to be discussed. It was clear what needed to happen. We would eventually have to get rid of that body. Sure, we could claim that we - she - killed Gary in self-defense. In fact, I'm certain that's just what Camille was telling herself at that particular moment. But the scenario sure didn't appear to be so cut and dry. Two lovers in the act of adultery, and one dead husband. It didn't exactly look

like self-defense.

And if I were an honest man, I don't know if I could even claim that it really was.

It was this thought that clouded my brain as I stood there in that sterile kitchen, rattling the ice cubes in my glass. Yes, I do believe Gary would have killed me, had we not got him first. The way he charged - *was* charging - when I opened the bedroom door. Oh yeah, man, he was going for the kill. Mr. Middle Management Salesfuck clearly had a jealous lunatic buried under his tepid suburban facade. But I kept going back to that image of Camille standing above us with that knife in her hand, just waiting for someone to tell her what to do.

And what had I said?

*"Yes!"*

I had yelled that one simple word. "Yes."

And it may as well have been "kill," for I knew exactly what I meant. And so did she.

I've never had any misconceptions as to who I was. I've never been a moral man. But neither was I a killer.

Yet there was a man lying dead upstairs who may beg to differ, for I had most definitely played a part in making him that way.

It was her hand, though. Her hand that held that knife. It was her husband. And if she hadn't wanted him dead, she wouldn't have killed him, right? And maybe my "Yes!" had nothing at all to do with it. Maybe she killed him simply because she wanted her husband out of the way. Maybe she wanted to kill him, wanted *us* to kill him - together - as an opportunity to keep us that way. *Together.*

I squeezed my eyes tightly closed and tipped back the rest of my drink.

*Damnit, man, grab a hold of yourself.*

I was doing it again. Rationalizing. Finding a way to absolve myself of any guilt. It was a defense mechanism common to men like me. Men who sleep with married women and then laugh at their unsuspecting husbands' jokes the next night at the bar.

*Guilt-free sinning. And in my patented 10 Step Program, I can teach you how to do it...*

"Derrick?"

I looked up. Camille was staring at me. She looked very tired, very small, standing there against the counter in her panties and bloody t-shirt, holding her glass in both hands.

"Derrick, what are we going to do?"

What *were* we going to do?

"How do we get rid of it?"

It.

At least we were on the same page. We would not be requesting the assistance of Johnny Law. Good.

So how does one dispose of a body? It's not like we could just head down to the nearby Piggly Wiggly to pick up a couple pounds of lime and dissolve the thing in a tub. It's not like we could chop it up and bury the parts. Hell, I wasn't sure if I could even bear to look at it again. So what to do?

I peered out the window above the sink at those woods that stretched so far from the house. We would take it out there. But then what? Bury it? Only to have some goddamn animal dig it up for lunch? Isn't that how all the killers were caught? No, we needed to put that damn body somewhere that was no one was going to bother it for a while.

I turned to Camille.

"The shelter."

Her eyes grew wide, and that sad pensive look was replaced by one of terror.

"The... No. No, Derrick."

"Didn't Gary... didn't you hear that no one's opened that fallout shelter for years?"

"Derrick, I can't go in there."

"Look, no one's been down there for years, and no one has any reason to go down there. And by the time they do, that body will be nothing but dust and rat turds."

She started to cry.

Maybe I could have thought of a more sensitive way of putting it.

I put my glass down on the counter and stepped over to her, pulled her into my arms. She in her underwear and murder shirt, me in my whitey tighties, holding each other as if there wasn't a dead man directly above us. I whispered into her ear.

"The fallout shelter, Camille. We'll wait until nightfall, and we'll take it to the fallout shelter."  
She buried her face in my shoulder and continued to cry.

...

Night eventually arrived. After hours upon tortuous hours of waiting. Sitting together on the couch in the den, flipping through channels aimlessly on the tube, neither of us remotely aware of what we were watching. I was dying for a cigarette, but I couldn't bear to go upstairs and grab my pack. I couldn't see that body until I absolutely had to. Hell, I could barely find the strength to separate myself from the couch to take a piss.

But it was time to do the deed. To do what must be done. We both knew it. And so we stood up without saying a word, and we looked over at each other, and silently headed for the stairs.

...

It was pitch black out there in the woods. Both Camille and I were carrying flashlights, but unfortunately they weren't doing a lick of good crammed in our armpits, squeezed tightly against our sides, and most unfortunately, shining a yellow cone of light right onto the body dangling between us. It was the best we could come up with, considering that both my hands were already full, grasped around Gary's cold wrists, and Camille in a similar position down at Gary's ankles. It was in this position that we trekked down the slight incline of the woodsy hill outside the house, me walking backwards, pulling the body forward and Camille picking up the rear, straining her arms to keep the body in the air to prevent the awkward bumping of his ass against the ground. It was a slow and painful trek, but at least we were moving. And just getting this

far was a feat in itself.

An hour earlier we had stood at the top of the stairs, stalling, trying to gather our courage to step back into the room and revisit the crime scene. I made the first move. I had no choice.

The body looked even more horrible than I had remembered. Lying there on his back, a pool of black blood circling out from underneath him. And that goddamn buck knife sticking straight up out of him like a morning piss boner. It shone there, proudly, surrounded by what was once a chest, but was now so twisted and torn that it was impossible to differentiate the shredded fabric of his flannel shirt from the blood-soaked skin underneath it. Not like I was investigating the thing. I couldn't stand to look.

But I had to get that knife out of him. There's no way in hell I'd be willing to watch that thing wobble back and forth in the moonlight, possibly getting snagged in some hanging vine as we carried Gary to his tomb. I sucked in, pushed myself forward, squeezed my eyes as close to shut as I could while still providing myself the most minimal amount of sight, and I grabbed hold of the knife's handle. And yanked that thing out of the man's ribs.

The sound it made was a maddening pop. And I could have sworn that I heard a hissing sound. As if I'd just popped a New years bottle of champagne.

My stomach jumped up into my throat and I just about vomited all over Gary's corpse, until I spotted Camille walking over to the other end of him. Her lips pressed tightly together and a determined look in her eye that said, "Let's get it over with." My stomach slowly collected itself and crawled back down to its original spot.

Camille wrapped her hands around both of Gary's ankles and lifted.

"C'mon! Darrick, c'mon!"

I locked the bloody blade of the buck knife back into its handle and stuffed it into the elastic waistband of my jockies, the tight leg holes that hugged my thighs just below my nuts preventing it from sliding out and clattering across the floor. I then bent down to find myself unfortunately face-to-blood-spattered face with the corpse. I grabbed each of his wrists. I lifted.

And with that first pull, Gary's body rose from its death bed, the displaced blood pool making

a sickening sloppy smack. Without another word, we carried it to the bedroom door, then down the stairs, through the kitchen, out the back door, and into the woods.

We remembered to grab a couple flashlights from the kitchen drawer. We never thought to put on some real clothes.

I couldn't see a damn thing out in that freaky forest. Couldn't even see Camille a mere Gary's-length away from me. I could see Gary, however. The damn flashlight in my arm pit made sure of that.

We continued walking. My bare feet screamed in pain and anger with every twig, rock, thorn that I crushed it down upon. I knew Camille must be suffering in the same way. But the pain didn't matter. Nothing did, except getting to the damn fallout shelter. And after a good hour, we finally did.

My bare skin was wet with dew, itchy and bloody from the near constant attack of vine thorns. The knife remained securely tucked in my underwear, thanks to my shallow practice of always wearing a size too small in order to make my package look bigger. I didn't know what need I had for a buck knife out here in this desolate place, especially a bloody one that I had just pulled from a dead man's chest, but it brought me comfort. And boy, did I need some comfort right about now.

Having arrived at our destination, we released our grip from his limbs, and Gary's body fell to the ground with an almost comical thump. We shined the flashlights down at our feet.

Down at the two metal doors of the fallout shelter.

They were almost invisible. Years of wind and rain had metamorphosed its original silver sheen into a natural camouflage. It's no wonder no one had been down in there for so long. You could stand directly atop them and not even realize you were standing above a man-made shelter.

In fact, had I not been so consumed by the task at hand, it might have occurred to me that there was no way in hell that we, who had never been here before, could have found it, buried away in the pitch black, without even a single wrong turn. It might have occurred to me in any other situation. The impossibility! And if it had, I might have turned around and run screaming from

those two doors that seemed to call us, so subtly, right to them.

But it didn't. And I'm glad that it didn't.

The metal doors were as heavy as I'd assumed they'd be. But the long loud creaking sound that I expected when I grasped the thin silver handle of the left side and pulled... was eerily absent. Same with the right door. Heavy, but silent. It's as if someone had been here greasing up the bolts with WD40. You know, just in case a couple of adulterous murderers were going to stop by with a body to dispose of.

The doors now open, we shined our flashlights into the black hole which now looked up at us. The yellow beams of light bounced off the featureless walls and revealed a set of concrete steps that crawled down into the depths of the hatch. Shining the lights straight down, it was impossible to determine if there was a floor below, or if the stairs just continued all the way down to hell.

"Do we just throw it down there?"

Camille's voice. I realized that these were the first words that had been spoken since we left the house.

It was a good question. Toss it and run? Slam the doors before we could hear the body hit the floor? It just seemed wrong. Sure, we'd killed the guy in, arguably, cold blood, but did that really give us carte blanche to treat his body like a grocery bag of dog shit? I didn't know. But something about dropping the corpse down into that black hole, oblivious to what awaited it down there felt terribly wrong.

"No. We've got to take it down. We have to know where it's going to be. Know what's down there. We can't take chances."

I didn't know what I meant, but she didn't argue. She was feeling what I was. She grabbed Gary's ankles and lifted. I followed suit. Wrapped my hands around his wrists and pulled his body up off the dewy dark earth.

We descended down the stairs and into the darkness below, the victim of our illicit affair a stiff bridge that connected us. We reached the bottom step. The moon sent a square of dim light

down through the hole above us.

Standing at the base of the stairs, I realized that we weren't really that far down. Just a good twelve steps or so to take us eight feet below the surface of the world. It seemed a lot farther down when standing above in the night air. But, nonetheless, there was nothing reassuring about being down there. Just being underground with this body - in this grave - gave me a tremendous sense of foreboding. We needed to get the hell out of here. Fast.

We let go of Gary and once again his body crumbled to the floor beneath us. He lay there, a slab of flesh, with one hand draped into the square of moonlight. It lay there in that spot of murky yellow, as if trying for one last attempt at escape. As if to alert the world of his whereabouts. That he was down here. Down in this death hole, and to please, please not let these killers leave him this way.

I stared at that white hand that lay open palmed, stretching out into that square of light.

I stared at it.

Until that square suddenly disappeared and joined the rest of the concrete floor in its cold blackness.

The loud bang of the doors above us slamming shut woke me from my hypnotic state. The doors closed with a terrible crash, and the room went pitch black, save for the two beams pointing out from Camille and my flashlights. And then...

Silence.

Followed by a low murmur coming from the direction where Camille stood.

"Oh my God oh my God oh my God."

The sound of her voice was one of disbelief, one which I could tell was soon to be followed by absolute panic. I couldn't let that happen. I couldn't stand to hear her lose her shit down here in this dark crypt with this body at our feet. I had to keep things cool.

"Camille," I said in the most calm tone that I could muster. "Camille, it's nothing. Just the wind."

It wasn't the first time I'd lied, but it was clearly one of my worst. There was no way in hell

that the wind had blown those doors shut. I had left them lying flat against the earth. And more importantly, I had opened them. And they were some heavy fuckers. A hurricane couldn't have lifted those things off the ground.

I could feel that creeping sense of terror once again begin to fill my gut. That sense of dread. That sense that there was something terribly terribly wrong here. But thank God for my lack of imagination, for I couldn't really consider just what it could be. As so I reacted as I needed to. I reacted as a man.

"Camille, don't worry. It's nothing. I'll push them back open."

"Oh my God."

She needed to shut up. I was not going to be able to stand that sound. I shone my light up the stairs above me. It was no big deal, damnit. Just a closed couple of doors. Fucking doors. Big deal. I moved towards the stairs, keeping my light focused on the doors above. Up the stairs. To the doors. I stuffed the flashlight in between my legs for safe keeping, pressed both my palms up against the bottom of the doors above me... and I pushed.

They didn't give.

Oh God no.

I pushed again. And again. Again. Nothing. They were sealed shut.

And then Camille screamed. A terrible shriek. It caught me by surprise and sent a shake through my body that loosened the flashlight from my legs. I watched in horror as that beam of light fell to the stairs, and then bounced down each step until reaching the ground. And with each instance of contact with the surface, it sent a brief flicker of visibility over towards Camille. I saw her waving her arms frantically, pawing at her head, her shoulders, her back. Her flashlight lay at her feet.

I crawled down the steps, blindly grasping at the walls beside me for balance, moving in the direction of the flashlight beam that pointed away from me, forming a small circle of light, illuminating the nothing that was the wall in front of it.

Camille continued her lunatic screams, the howls echoing throughout the chamber, a ghastly

chorus. I could hear her hands slapping at her shoulders, her face, clawing at whatever it was that refused to get off of her. I reached the bottom of the steps and scrambled towards the flashlight on my hands and knees, terrified to move with any kind of speed inside that claustrophobic blackness.

I reached the flashlight, grabbed it, and spun the source of light over towards Camille. She was still screaming, her wails still echoing off the walls. I cautiously moved towards her. Whatever it was that was on her, I sure as hell didn't want it on me. I shined the light at her screaming face, then at her head, that at the thin strand of white that hung down from the ceiling into her hair. A spider web... No... a piece of string. I traced the string with the flashlight up to the ceiling to discover a single, naked light bulb.

"Camille!" I yelled. "Camille, it's just a piece of string! A piece of string!"

Her screams kept up for a moment longer, and then as my words began to register, they cooled to pants.

"A... what?" she whimpered, nervously moving her hands down to her chest.

I walked over, the glow from my flashlight reflecting off her terrified tear-stained eyes. I put my flashlight hand around her shoulder. Pulled her to my chest. And with my free hand I fumbled around in space until I grasped onto the string. I pulled down. I, of course, expected nothing. I was merely trying to pacify Camille by demonstrating the clicking sound that a dead light makes when you try to ignite it.

To my shock, the bulb went bright, and the room lit with a ferocity that was as terrifying as it was pacifying.

"The fuck..." I shouted. I had absolutely not expected that bulb to be live.

The newly lit room was revealed to us. Four bare concrete walls, a good fifteen feet apart from each other. With nothing in between them but the body that we'd brought with us. It was empty, and strangely, clean. As if those doors had kept the shelter in a fine sterile state. It made me aware of a feeling I'd experienced earlier. I had noticed the absence of something when we had first set foot down here. It was the absence of cobwebs.

I released Camille and hurried to collect the other flashlight and turn them both off. I didn't know how long we'd be down here, but thought it best to conserve our light sources. Just in case...

We slowly began to pace the small room as if we thought we might actually find something, but really just to keep ourselves preoccupied. So as to not look at that bloody body that lay there in the middle of the floor. There was nothing in here. Absolutely nothing. It was stripped clean. Weirdly clean. As if it had been... cleaned.

It began to dawn on me how bad our situation had become. We were locked down here. Best case scenario was that, on a fluke, and a nearly impossible one, some hapless stranger would cross over the doors of the shelter and hear our cries of help... in which case we'd be discovered with the body of Gary. The more likely scenario was that we'd remain down here, growing more and more hungry, until the sick reality revealed itself that we would need... to eat.

And, sick as it may sound, I would be forced to decide... after Gary... then what?

"Derrick."

Her voice was dry. Impersonal. I turned to look at her. She was on her hands and knees, peering at the ground.

"Derrick, what do you think this is?"

I crouched down next to her. She was staring at a small square in the floor. Four lines dug into the concrete that connected at angles to form a shape that was entirely too symmetrical to be natural. I bent down and knocked my fist against the square. It echoed. Slightly. I knocked my fist against the floor outside the square. Dull. The sound disappeared into the concrete. Back onto the square. It echoed.

There was something down there!

I pulled my knife out of my underwear and stuffed the blade into of the ridges. Using the knife as a lever, I pushed down on the handle, and created a very slight opening. Just enough to put the fingers of my free hand underneath. It was light. A thin piece of wood. A hatch.

A hatch? Down here? Why? I stuffed the knife back in my jockies and placed my other hand

under the board. I prepared to lift.

I paused.

Something told me that lifting that hatch was a bad idea. A very bad idea. I looked over at Camille, who was staring down at my hands with that same look of apprehension that I shared. I strongly considered yanking my fingers out from under it and letting that wretched board fall back into place. Whatever was down there, I didn't want to know. Not one goddamned bit.

But we were trapped underground with a dead body mere feet from where we kneeled, and there was a man-made hatch below us. We had to open it. We had no other option.

I lifted.

The hatch came free and I tossed it aside. And we looked down into the open square that had been covered for God knows how long.

We looked down into it. And saw blackness. Pure blackness.

"Fuck this!" I spat. A wave of terror tore through my body and I was unable to control the urge to get up and get the hell away from that hole. I felt a desperate desire to try those doors above us just one more time. To push them open and free us from this crypt. To please, just get us out of here.

I stepped backwards away from that hole. Towards the stairs, keeping my eyes on Camille the whole time. She was staring down in there, unconsciously moving her hand to the flashlight that lay on the ground next to her. Her fingers curled around the handle, slowly lifted it, clicked it on, and pointed it down into the hole. The thought of what might be revealed down there was too much for me to accept. I turned and charged up the steps and smashed my hands up against the doors above me. I pushed. Nothing. I pushed again. Nothing! I felt a scream forming in my throat. I was about to lose it, for sure.

"Derrick."

I froze.

*Don't talk, Camille. Don't tell me what you see. Don't tell me what's down there.*

I just didn't want to hear validation for the thought that was filling up my brain. That we were,

in fact, in hell.

"Darrick. It's empty."

I turned down to look at her. She peered up at me.

"It's empty. Just like this room. I can see the floor. There's nothing down there. Come here."

Ok. Calm down, man. It's empty. It's just a room. Keep your head on.

I climbed down the steps and leaned over her back that was bent over the hole. I put my hand on her shoulder. Peered over it, down through the hatch, following the thin beam of light as it bounced around, tracing the walls and floor of the room below. She was right. There was nothing down there. Just four more walls that appeared to reveal very slightly different shades of dark as the light shined upon each one of them.

Another empty room. Clean. Barely a single dust particle floated within the beam of light. Why? Why another empty room?

I stretched my head back for a quick glance at the body of Gary crumpled up on the floor.

Still there. Still dead. Good.

I turned back to investigate the hole with Camille, until I caught a quick flash of movement in the corner of my eye. I spun back around.

And saw Gary charging towards us.

I shrieked and lurched backwards against Camille, and I felt her weight give out beneath her as she fell into the hole. I was unable to regain my balance, and I followed her down.

In the brief moment we were falling, I had time to reflect on how my scared hallucination had just cost us dearly.

I landed hard on the concrete floor. Landed on my left shoulder. I think I heard it snap. I rolled onto my back and lay there, in the pitch black, as the pain bit deeply into my shoulder and seared through my entire torso. I couldn't move, it hurt so bad. My body rattled in a series of pained convulsions as I let out a loud moan of hurt and self-pity. And then I heard Camille's cries.

"Ohhhhhh my God. Ohhhhhh my God."

She lay right next to me, but I couldn't see her down here. Couldn't determine how badly she was hurt. But she had fallen as far as I had, landed as hard as I had, and so she couldn't be doing good.

"Camille," I gasped. "Camille."

"Ohhhhhh...."

"Camille, are you ok?"

I couldn't see her at all, damnit! Could see nothing but the slight blur of a shape laying beside me. I tried to lift my head a little higher and the pain shot from my shoulder to my neck like a bullet. I screamed in pain. I forced myself to sit, pushing myself up with my right arm, the one that didn't feel like it was attached to a pouch full of shattered glass. I spotted Camille's flashlight laying a few feet from us, it's lonely beam of light shining uselessly towards the wall.

Camille began to sob.

"Camille," I gasped. "I'm going to get the flashlight."

Pushing my legs against the ground, I slid on my back towards the beam, the pain in my shoulder screaming with every movement. I slowly reached over, grabbed the flashlight, and pointed it over in Camille's direction.

She was lying face down, her head in her hands. Her back rising and falling with her sobs. I shined the beam up and down her body, taking inventory. She didn't appear to be too banged up.

"Camille."

"I landed on my knee," she cried. "I think it's broke."

"Ditto my shoulder," I said with a sick chuckle.

I pushed myself over to her, until my head was touching her right arm that remained tucked under her face. I needed to rest. I closed my eyes. I could feel her slowly turn over onto her back. Her right hand reached down to rest down upon my chest, to give her some semblance of safety down here, a reminder that we were still alive, something to take her - our - minds away from the pain. And the horrible place in which we had found ourselves.

My eyes refused to open, knowing that there would be nothing to see when they did. Camille

continue to cry, but her sobs were slowing down to an almost rhythmic pace. I was growing tired as my body kicked into survival mode and was grasping for the only solution it could come up with to get rid of the pain. Sleep. I began to drift away...

"Derrick!"

It was a whisper, but there was no mistaking the panic beneath it.

"Derrick! Look!"

I opened my eyes. Above me was the hatch, a good eight to ten feet up there. An orange square, illuminated by the light bulb glowing two ceilings above us.

"What?" I groaned.

"Look!"

I looked. Nothing. Just a square-shaped hole with a light shining down through it.

And then, the light dimmed momentarily, and then back to normal. Then dimmed again. Then back to normal. But it wasn't the light bulb that was dimming. It was as if something had walked underneath it, momentarily blocking its light.

As if there was something moving up there.

Pacing.

The hole grew dark for a moment, then brightened again. Then dark, and then bright again. Something *was* moving up there. Something was moving... stepping... under the light bulb. But there was nothing up there! No way there was any living creature that could be moving up there. That room was empty. Except for Gary.

Oh my God.

"Camille..."

"Shhh!"

The light from the hole grew dark again. And this time, it didn't go back to bright. Whatever it was, it was standing still now. Standing underneath the light bulb. Standing above the hole.

As if it was looking down at us.

I stared up at the hole, and with a sudden horror, I discovered that I could make out a shape up

there. A shadow. A human shadow, bouncing off the walls that were visible behind that hole.

Oh yes, there was a shadow alright. No denying it. From my viewpoint I could peer up through the hatch at an angle and I could see a shadow of a man projected against the wall. And it wasn't moving.

It was looking down the hatch.

Gary.

No way.

No fucking way.

Crippled by the pain in my shoulder, I couldn't move. I could only stare up at the shadow that remained motionless. Staring back down at us.

No way. I was hallucinating. The pain was making me see shit that wasn't there. Just like I had hallucinated Gary running towards me.

And then the shadow moved. It *walked*. Stepped away from the hole, out of my frame of vision. And then it stepped back in. It was pacing again. That shadow. A shadow of a man.

"Camille," I whispered. "Camille, don't scream."

The order was directed more towards myself.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"I have no idea." I was tired of lying.

But apparently seeing the shadow of a man you've recently killed pace back and forth - or whatever it was - had a bit of a therapeutic effect, for I momentarily forgot about my crushed shoulder.

"Camille, can you stand?"

"I... I don't think so."

"Camille, you need to try. We can't lay here any longer."

With great effort, I was able to push myself up onto my feet. Passing the flashlight off to my left hand, which was pretty much attached to a dead limb by now, I held my right hand down to Camille. She grasped onto it, and I pulled her up to standing position. She balanced awkwardly

on her one good leg, biting her lip to keep from crying out in agony. She was a trooper.

I shined the light at the wall behind her. It was a dark brown hue. As was the one adjacent to it. I flashed the light at the one behind me. Pale. As was the one adjacent to it. Two dark, two white. Shining the light on the darker wall, I stepped towards it. I leaned in closer to it, my nose almost touching it. It stunk. Smelled of metal and rot. I investigated it more closely. The darkness was a layer, a paint, with small specs of dark, thin... chunks... in it. The paint was uneven, getting lighter towards the far side of the wall. I followed it with the flashlight, until I spotted where the dark paint blended into the lighter shade. The streaks of brown were more pronounced here, making it clear that the "painting" was a work still in progress. Upon closer inspection, I could discern what appeared to be hand prints, as if whoever was painting the room did not use a brush, but caked it on the wall with his bare hands. But what was it?

It reminded me of...

"Darrick..."

Camille. A scared whimper from Camille.

I turned the flashlight in her direction. She was staring up at the hole.

"Darri..."

"Shhh!"

Something shined behind her. Just a brief glimmer. A reflection from the cone of light projecting past her. I walked to it. Stepped past Camille to the other side of the room. The glimmer. I shined the light up the wall towards the ceiling.

Two circles shining in the light.

What is that?

Two circles. Hoops. That appeared to be metal. Spaced a good four feet apart. I stepped closer to them. They were now directly above me. Stretching out my arm, I could touch them with the flashlight. They were hanging by something. Each of them. Hanging by a thin chain bolted into the wall. What were they? My mind raced. Trying to process, trying to think rational thoughts down here in this dark cell, with this immense pain throbbing relentlessly from

my shoulder. Camille's panicked breathing somewhere behind me. I realized what I was looking at.

Handcuffs.

Handcuffs, my God. Oh my God. Handcuffs hanging a good seven or eight feet from the floor. High enough that, if your wrists were wrapped in those things, you'd hang there, stretched out, your toes just barely touching the floor. Your arms pulled up above you, your chest pulled tight. Wide open and vulnerable. Exposed. Naked. Breathing in. Out. In. As the tip of the blade touched it prodded it entered it. Deep. And with one quick graceful sweep, it would open you. Releasing a wide river of red that would flow beautifully to the floor... no... to the *bucket* on the floor.

"Darrick."

I saw Camille. Strapped to the walls. Bleeding from the red mouth that smiled wide, from one side of her abdomen to the other. Bleeding. Screaming. I saw her eyes staring down at me in a gorgeous terror. I saw my thumbs dig down into the elastic waistband of my underwear, pulling them down to my ankles. I saw my feet step out of them. I watched my hand grab the underwear and slip it into the bucket of paint below Camille. Watched the paint soak it. Turn it a deep dark red. I saw my hand pull the dripping rag from the bucket and carry it over to the far side of the room. To the unfinished side. I saw my hand press the rag to the wall.

I could complete the job.

"Darrick."

I saw trees. Moonlight shining through the foliage. I saw my hands wrapped around a pair of ankles. Unfamiliar ankles. A girl. A stranger. Who was she? I watched her body drag behind me, a wake of leaves and dirt growing behind her. I felt the dirt beneath my feet grow flat and hard. And cold. I felt the hatch under my feet.

I felt a thrill grow inside me that was unlike anything I'd felt before. A rage. A wonderful, orgasmic rage. Lust. I saw hands sticking out from the handcuffs, straining, shaking. I saw eyes. Unfamiliar eyes. Eyes of strangers. Terrified strangers. Pleading. Begging. Bleeding.

Lust. Hundreds of them. Trophies. Sacrifices. Lust.

I saw the walls.

"Darrick!"

Louder. Almost a scream.

I snapped back. Realized that I was still down here, down in this room. A brief memory flashed through my mind. Gary. Charging at me through the bedroom. Silent. Vicious. A killer.

*Ha ha ha! Gary, you son of a bitch! This is your room! Your Murder Room! You beautiful son of a bitch!*

I looked down and observed my erection sticking out through my jockies.

"Darrick!"

I turned to Camille. She was staring up at the hole. Her eyes wide, her mouth wide open. She whispered, "There's more."

I looked up at the hole. And I saw shadows. Many of them. Moving frantically under the light. The light strobed bright, then dark, then bright, then dark, as the shadows crossed under the bulb above. I stared. Tried to focus my eyes on that movement. To understand it. I began to make out shapes. Human shapes. Limbs. Arms. Flailing. Madly. Legs. Kicking. Heads. Shaking. Bobbing. Laughing. Silently.

"What are they doing?" Camille cried.

"They... They're dancing."

They were dancing. A chaotic mad tribal dance. Back and forth they spun, throwing their arms above their heads, stretching out their necks to howl in silence to the ceiling above them. Jumping and spinning and kicking. They were celebrating. They had heard me.

Had heard my thoughts. My blood lust. And they were celebrating my arrival.

I had brought Gary down here to them, as he had brought so many young girls before. Or.... Or had Gary brought me here? To replace him. To continue his work, finish his job. Finish the walls.

"I'll do it." I murmured .

"I'll do it." I said.

"I'll do it!" I screamed.

*I'll do it I'll do it I'll do it I'll do it I'll do it!!!!*

Camille was no longer looking up at the hole. She was staring at me. Staring at the screaming man with the erection, down here in this pit, this palace, this place that was to lead her to her death. And me to my life.

They wanted her. I would give her to them. I would. I had to. I *wanted* to.

I reached down to my underwear to grab the knife from the waistband.

Gone.

"Cammy," I said. "Give it to me."

She lifted the blade up in front of her. When had she taken it from me? *Why* had she taken it from me? What did she know? She stepped back. Pointed the knife in my direction.

"Cammy. Give it to me."

The dancing grew faster. Flickering light. Flailing limbs. Faster. Laughter. Faster. Screams. Faster. Rage. Faster. Lust. Faster.

"I'll do it," I heard her say.

I charged.

-Bones

May 22, 2009

