

Chained

Short Horror Tale No.3

By
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Chained

"This is 15-Adam-20, calling in from Bachman Heights..."

"Got you, 15-Adam-20. What the hell are you doing out there?"

"We got word from a bunch of street-people about screams in this vicinity..."

"You been listening to winos again? Man, you're really wet-behind-the-ears, aren't you? Your partner should know better."

"Can the attitude for once, will you? We've been patrolling the area for five minutes – and now we've stopped because we've heard screams. My ears might be wet, but they work just damn fine."

"Okay, 15-Adam-20, do you need backup?"

"Backup? Send everyone you can. I've just looked over the back wall of 512 Bachman and there are skeletons littering the rear garden. Must be at least a dozen amongst the rubble and rubbish."

"Good God. Backup will be on its way ASAP. Stay put."

"That's a negative. You get the backup here, but we're going in to stop those screams. Can't take the chance that whoever that is will be dead before help arrives..."

"Proceed with caution, 15-Adam-20..."

* * *

Sergeant Conway met me at the entrance to 512 Bachman Heights. He was a tall, wiry-muscled black man, who was as reliable as sunrise. After college, he toured with a theatre group, performing across the state – then, for some reason, Conway became a cop. Over thirty years he grew into a seasoned Sergeant with a wicked sense of humour, who still loved to act.

"Well, let me introduce this property," he began. This was his real estate agent routine. "A real fixer-upper in an... *interesting*... area of the city. Began as a two-storey, three bedroom option, but was re-graded to a tall bungalow after the upstairs fell in. Air conditioning is the natural kind, on account of all the holes in the walls..."

I didn't laugh as I crossed the threshold into the hallway of a reeking ruin that was once a family home. Conway didn't expect it – I'd always reckoned his banter was a way of calming his nerves, and it calmed mine too. The hall was a dozen feet wide and extended back to what I guessed was a kitchen doorway; left and right there were other open doorways; the stairs rose up eight feet to end in a crumbling ruin. Whatever carpets the former owners might have left behind were buried under layers of fallen masonry, deposited junk and rat shit. The stench would have made the average citizen gag – sadly, it's something you got used to during fifteen years as a uniformed cop and then seven as a detective. I peered up and shined my torch towards the rafters of the roof. A few bats flitted around.

What the hell did you little critters witness? I wondered.

Looking back down, I saw another skeleton, six paces from the doorway. Surrounding it was a circle of plastic pyramids with numbers on them – placed by the crime scene tech's while they took photos. I knelt down beside the remains.

The bones weren't arranged in the normal manner. When a person dies and their flesh decomposes, the skeleton tends to be found lying fairly intact. In this case, the skull lay on the hip bone; bones from the arms and legs were mixed together; smaller bones from the hands and feet looked to have been scattered like confetti; sections of spinal column were everywhere. This was just like the fourteen skeletons outside.

And there was another matching characteristic to what we had found outside. The bones were pure white and clean except for a little dust. They looked... *polished*.

"What's the count, now?" I asked Conway as I rose.

"Forty-two. Most of them are in there..." He gestured to the open door on the right, beyond which I saw a group of waiting policemen. "...With *him*."

Someone strode into the hall from the left. It was the short, white-haired form of the deputy coroner, Tim Jacobs. From the way he limped, I knew his arthritis had him in a vicious grasp that day. When Jacobs saw me, he moved across to join us. No one shook hands – we were all wearing plastic crime-scene gloves. Jacobs took a notebook from his tweed jacket and flipped it open.

"I thought you were watching your grandson play baseball this afternoon, Tim," I offered.

"Would have been, but some dumb cop called home to tell his wife about this... And his son overheard the details and typed it up on Twitter as fast as his fingers could go. So, the press are

crawling up the Mayor's ass. The Mayor's up the Commissioner's ass. The Commissioner's up the Captain's ass. The Captain's up my boss's ass... It's like a bloody proctologists' convention."

I shrugged. "And your afternoon off got cancelled."

"Yep."

"And in your expert opinion..?"

He pointed at the skeleton on the floor. "Oh, these folks are all dead."

Sometimes I wanted to strangle the old man. I gave him my patented talk-or-die glare.

"I honestly don't know how they died. There are a few broken bones – but no signs of gunshots, knife-wounds or blunt-trauma. They may not even have been murdered. They might have died of natural causes, then been brought here and stripped clean of flesh."

"Stripped clean?" Conway repeated. "I assumed rats had—"

"No. Nothing gnawed on these bones. Something drew all the flesh off in such a way that the bones were left spotless. In fact, the bones don't even have the usual marks upon them that show where muscles were attached. And it wasn't done with acid, either. They look..."

"Polished?" I said.

"Hell, it's as good a term as any. Dunno how it was done, though."

"How about ID?"

"No wallets, watches, jewellery, clothes... All I'll have to work with are dental records. I'm just glad that fillings and bridgework did survive."

Muttering to himself, he left via the front door. Conway and I went to the right – and entered the room where *he* was.

* * *

Four more cops waited inside and I knew them all. Daniels and Perkins had worked with me often; they looked like a pair of linebackers squeezed into police uniforms. Daniels was in his early twenties and still a rookie, looking like a white college kid who has only just begun shaving. Perkins was twice his age, a big black man with greying hair and the face and attitude of a drill sergeant. The other two, who I'd worked alongside recently for the first time, were middle-aged, slightly paunchy, beat-weary cops. Offer either one an early pension and they'd snap it up; they were sick of the job, but had nowhere else to go. Gyeong was Korean-American, easily remembered by his shaven head and irritable nature. Lee was the only woman here, but could probably have out-drunk, out-punched and out-driven most male cops; I couldn't stand the permanent *oh-do-I-really-have-to* expression on her face.

The four nodded to me in deference to my rank of detective.

My attention shifted from them to the former living room we were in. It was roughly twenty feet wide by thirty long. To my right, two large windows would have let in light from outside, before the glass was shattered and someone boarded them up. Light was now provided by two Police lamps on tripods, set either side of the doorway, and these illuminated everything in stark detail. The left-hand wall contained a collapsed hearth and a doorway not far from where I had entered. The door was missing from the latter and a pile of rubble prevented access into the room beyond. The walls around us had suffered from an onslaught of damp, so that the plaster had rotted away and the bricks were visible. A white carpet of human bones stretched from halfway into the room to the far wall. They were pure white and had that horrible polished appearance.

When my gaze reached the far wall, it rose up the figure chained to the mould-covered bricks.

He was utterly emaciated. The jeans, T-shirt and jacket hung off him as if he was a living skeleton. His bare feet resembled bird's claws, for the bones were so pronounced. The head was a narrow skull with skin painted on it and dark eyes deep in their sockets. His hair and beard were wild.

I noted additional details. The man was six-foot-two and might have weighed around a hundred pounds. Four metal spikes had been driven into the wall and short chains ran from these to shackles on his wrists and ankles; this held him in an 'X', upright and helpless. By sheer effort, the man was standing rather than hanging off the wall. His eyes shifted left and right to study the cops.

Conway said in a hiss: "How long has the poor bastard been stuck up there?"

I turned my attention to the crowd of policemen.

"Why the hell isn't he in an ambulance and on the way to hospital?"

Perkins' heavy baritone voice answered: "Sir, he doesn't want to be freed. He's been begging us to leave him here."

End Of Sample

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