

Try Them On

Part One

Sick people are disappearing. And not just any sick people, but sick patients. Wraithmoor's hospital has lost 5 of those sick patients now in 16 days. The doctors, nurses, even the damn janitor refused to speak about it. But, why? If the hospital is innocent, why isn't anyone willing to talk about it? Oh, and the security cameras? Nothing. When I asked if I could take a look at the footage, they practically laughed in my face.

Soon after I admitted defeat. No footage, no answers, no story. That was until I was grabbed walking down the infirmary wing, headed for the exit. The elderly man who now clung to my arm clearly had no intention of letting go. Fear taking over his expression. "Don't let them take me! Don't let them take me!" he pleaded, shuffling his feet across the tile. I stumbled back in shock, my head colliding with the brick wall, sending my seat to the floor.

Holding one hand on the back of my throbbing head, I look up in horror. The man who was just begging me for help is now being wrestled by three nurses into a wheelchair. What the fuck? Is the only thought I can muster. I continue to watch from my position on the floor while they wheel him into a side room. Still screaming "Don't let them! Please, don't let them!" This is the infirmary wing right? Not psych? I spotted the answer to my inquisition painted in bold red letters over the entrance to the hallway, "INFIRMARY" ... Well that's strange. Like hell am I leaving now.

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I had no prior knowledge of Wraithmoor. Not until Katie, my roommate, came barreling through our front door after her shift two weeks ago. She stumbled over to the kitchen table where I was eating my breakfast, panting. "Sick. People. Are missing." She managed in between

breaths. Katie is a first year Resident Nurse at Brooklyn Hospital, and yet I think her favorite part of the job is coming home and telling me all of her crazy stories from the day. This one though, takes the cake.

After working a 12 hour night shift, I wasn't sure if my clearly exhausted roommate was delirious, or if this rumor had any validity to it. All she gave me was the name of the hospital, how many people were supposedly missing, and who she thinks the rumor came from. Regardless, with what little information Katie provided, it was enough for me to pack my bags and get on the next bus headed to P.A. After All, I've been needing new material for my column in the Brooklyn Eagle.

Wraithmoor is near the north east border of Pennsylvania and about a four and a half hour drive from Manhattan. Population is roughly 5,000 people spread out over 9 square miles, and beyond that, forests for days. Desolate might be an understatement, at least for someone like me. The village is one street, quiet and cute with no big chains taking over. Though, some of the buildings have clearly fallen victim to neglect. The brick walls look as though they could collapse just from staring at them for too long.

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Still dizzy from the interaction my head had with the wall moments ago, I find myself standing over the front desk again. I can't decide if I should ask to be seen as a patient now, or continue on as a journalist who *needs* answers. Before I can manage a word, a large shadow takes over mine. Security... "Doesn't anyone care about these missing people!?" I yell past the brick wall wearing a black button down. Clearly unamused by my exclamation.

I huff in frustration outside the hospital doors, but am caught off guard when I hear the sound of pavement crunching next to me. I look over, "So, you're the writer pissing people off?" The

man asks while putting a cigarette out under his boot. I don't answer while I scan him looking for any clues as to who he might be. Surely I would remember someone dressed for a biker gang meet-up. "You don't recognize me?" he pauses, preparing to light another cigarette. Gross. "Probably because I'm not changing someone's IV bag, isn't it?" he gestures, nodding his head towards the door I was just escorted out of. If he works here, why isn't he dressed like it? "I just finished my shift." Well, that answers that. "What do you know...?" I ask slowly, glowering at him.

"Well nice to meet you too. The name's Shep." He says pushing himself off the wall with his shoulder, heading in my direction. He offers his hand in introduction, a now glowing cigarette perched between his lips. I accept, hesitantly glancing between his hand and the slight smirk he wears. Young, he seems much younger up close, perhaps only a year or two older than me? "Alana," I say in return. Apparently, though, Shep already knows who I am as he mimics me asking people the same questions over-and-over again. Damn, am I really that annoying? He seems to have read the thought on my face as he reassures that I'm just doing my job. Quickly, he pivots on his heel and begins walking.

"So?" I shoot at him, falling into step behind. "So, what?" He retorts. What the heck? He knows what I mean. He was the one waiting outside for me like some stalker. "You know what." He moves quickly mounting his all black motorcycle. I stand over the handlebars, eye-to-eye and wait for a response. Shep looks at me with... concern? He offers me his helmet in silence, and I waiver. Considering all the ways this could go wrong. Horribly wrong. Perhaps not my proudest moment, but I accept. I pull the helmet over my head and watch his eyes track my every move as I approach the bike with no further questions and swing my leg over.

“You’re going to want to see this,” Shep says, pushing a USB drive into his computer. We made it to his apartment in one piece, and he has yet to act like some crazy serial killer. So, that’s good. He hits play on his computer while I take up the seat next to him. Moments later I watch in disbelief as patients are brought into an operating room, never to be brought out again. Hours and hours of footage we go through. The only thing to leave the operating room are the nurses and the doctor. Oh, and dozens of ice boxes with hazard labels pasted on the outside.

“So is he collecting vital organs and what not for people who need them or whatever?” Because that’s a thing right? Organ donors, it’s what people check off on their drivers license so their organs can help someone in need. “I looked into some of these patients,” Shep starts, “they’re older people sure, but some of them were hardly sick. Like this guy, he came in for back pain.” He points to the man on the paused screen, “Turns out it was a pulled muscle. He should have been released after getting some pain meds.” Okay, so how did he end up in an operating room? And why did he then leave dismembered?

“The only correlation I found between all 5 patients is that they reported no kin.” Shep turns to face me. “Holy shit” I say, searching the screen for some other possibility. They’re killing the people no one will come looking for. “I already went to the police, and they didn’t want to hear it” defeat clear in his tone. “So I called up a buddy who works at a hospital in the city.” Shep’s friend was no help, in fact he was more hysteric than either of us. But at least I know where the rumor started.

What now?

“You were right Katie,” I say to my roommate over the phone. Pacing in Shep’s kitchen seems to be the only logical thing to do right now. I go into detail explaining everything Shep and I have found thus far. As a reasonably concerned friend, Katie urges me to come home. I

decline, of course. “I can’t. I would be restless if I came home now.” Calling Katie was more than just updating my friend. It was my reassurance that should something happen, at least someone knows where I might be.

Part Two

Soft whimpers carry through the hospital’s hallway. But where is everyone? It’s 3 am, most of the lights are off, and there’s no hospital workers to be found anywhere. It seems to be just me and Shep here, and whoever those cries are coming from. We follow the sound, still navigating through the halls with stealth. Almost immediately, I recognize where we are. Though, this hallway, and those bricks I crashed my head on, look a bit different at night.

My breath catches as I enter the room of the man who rattled me earlier. Shep stiffens, glancing between me and the man crying on the bed. Tears trickle past his lips as he turns his head slowly to face us. His eyes lock with mine, widening as I’m sure he is just as shocked to see me again as I am him. The man lies still, too still. “They’ll be here soon,” he says with a weak voice, “I can’t move, but you must get out of here.” Why can’t he move? Did they paralyze him? He was walking fine just hours ago.

A hand flies over my mouth, and another around my waist pulling me backwards. Shep pins me to his body and tucks us between the corner of the room and a large linen cabinet. Barely hidden from the nurse and doctor who stride towards the bed. The elderly man closes his eyes and begins a quiet repetition of prayers. “I think he’ll like this one” the doctor states. “He’s in good shape compared to the other ones.” My stomach twists.

It feels as though time slows as I watch them wheel the still praying man out of the room. I shut my eyes in relief once they’re gone. A single tear escaping. “We have to get out of here.”

Shep whispers in a hushed yet sharp tone. He steps out from behind me slowly releasing his grip on my waist and mouth. I nod in agreement. Katie was right, I should have let this be and just went home.

Without any further exchange, we're headed for the exit. The halls seem darker now, and not because there's less light, but because there's less life. These hallways have seen cruel happenings, and now so have I. Shep and I are shoulder to shoulder, each step quickening the closer we get to the exit.

A sharp pain at the back of my neck stops me in my tracks. I turn to Shep, my vision becoming hazy and my body weakening. The doctor. He stands behind Shep, a surgical mask covering his face, but his eyes shift to mine. He holds a syringe now submerged in the skin just below Shep's ear. *No, no, no*, is all I can think before everything goes dark.

Part Three

Through the darkness, I can hear mumbling. I can't make out any words but someone is speaking. My head is spinning yet again, but this time the ache is unbearable. I flutter my eyes open, trying to push through the fog that overwhelms my vision and find myself upright in a chair. When I try to move though, my body ceases. Shit, why can't I feel anything? I look down to my fingers, trying to move one at a time. Nothing. Panic beginning to course through me.

I shoot my head up and find Shep in a chair next to me. His eyes are open but unreadable, almost as if he's in some sort of trance. I follow the direction of his gaze to the doctor standing over the operating table, his back turned to us. Who is he talking to? I don't see the nurse anymore. Then, he steps away from the table. I let out scream in utter horror, but I can't look away. The poor man who once begged me for help is no longer that - a man, but body parts. Each

dissection at every joint, and now separated by a few inches. There's no blood though, just clean precise cuts exposing flesh and bone.

“Ah! Our audience is awake!” the doctor says turning to face us. Neither of us manage a word, but watch as he takes a step in our direction. “I'd like to introduce you to someone...” He pivots and stretches his arm out to the opposite corner of the room. As if beckoning his accomplice into the spotlight. A shadow moves in the darkness of the corner, but I can't make out a figure. That is until a gray wool cloak emerges, a hood covering its head that is mere inches from the 12 foot ceiling.

Its breathing is loud and harsh, as if gasping for every breath. Then, its arm raises exposing the long, boney-white-tendrils it has for fingers, reaching for its hood. My mind is absent of any thoughts, all I can do is watch in disbelief. But before this being exposes itself, I close my eyes. Avoiding the potential spiral I would be sent into if I saw this... *thing*. I close them tighter when Shep cries out, “Oh my god! What is that thing?!” His yelling becomes louder and more frantic as footsteps approach. Bare feet slapping the tile.

The sound of ripping clothes and cracking bones fill my ears, and my face is sprayed with a warm thick liquid. His cries stop. *No, no! Please Shep say something!* But there's nothing. Just the same heavy breath from before now inches from my face. Engulfing me in a hot, damp gust wreaking of roadkill. *I know you're here for me*, a deep scruffy voice enters my thoughts. I can feel it back away when it hisses, *It's time to see what you came for girl*.

When I open my eyes, I immediately look towards Shep. Now lifeless and bloodied. The being is uncloaked. A tall, disfigured and frail creature stands in front of me. Its head resembles that of a mummified human, with empty eye sockets, exposed teeth and no nose. *I am a collector of sorts*, the voice in my head making me jump. He takes the arm belonging to the elderly man

and brings it to his own. The arm then merges with his, like he's putting on a piece of clothing. Continuing this process, piece by piece, limb by limb. Now, taking a new form as the man I was unable to save.

I am not from here girl, but in order for me to walk amongst you I must look like you. "But why keep killing?" I ask out loud, my voice shaky. Because I can use different parts from different humans to make my own. His voice slows while he quirks a smile. And I shall add you to my collection next...