

THE QUARRY

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Phantom

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CARNEGIE POLICE DEPARTMENT

PART 2 OF AUDIO RECORDED INTERVIEW

ADAMS: Am I a suspect?

POLICE: The body was found in your apartment, Mr. Adams. We need to know why.

ADAMS: So I am a suspect. [laughs] People keep telling me that the police are getting duller, but shit man, I didn't believe them 'til now. Your parents must be so proud.

POLICE: Mr. Adams, I'm going to ask you to remain civil and answer the question.

ADAMS: Right. No, of course! Please continue, I'd hate to stand in the way of justice.

POLICE: Can you explain why Eric Compton was at your residence on the night of the fifth?

ADAMS: Never heard of him.

POLICE: Can you explain why your phone records show that you called him twenty-six times on the day he was strangled? Choked to death in your very room?

ADAMS: What can I say? I'm clingy.

POLICE: So you do know Eric Compton?

ADAMS: Eric Compton the drug dealer? I've never heard of him. I'm a model citizen.

POLICE: Mr. Adams, the more you cooperate, the faster you can leave.

ADAMS: I can leave when I want. No handcuffs, see?

POLICE: Alright. Let's go back to the beginning, Mr. Adams. Can you tell us how you lost your arms?

They say war changes you, and I have to agree. There's just something about getting your arms blown to hell and having surgery in a bloody *tent* that makes you see things differently. Really changes your perspective - although that might just be because I'm practically blind in my left eye and can't see for shit. And then there's the damn morphine. Now that changes you. They like playing God with it, giving it and taking it away. They wean you off it like as if you won't remember how good it feels to not be in constant agony. You get prescribed other shit, but God, nothing does it. So you bet your ass I was buying it wherever I could find it. I wasn't an addict or anything, I could live without the

drugs. I just didn't see why I should. But it was getting harder to get the good stuff, even after I pawned off my medal for cash. The monthly allowances barely staved off my hunger, and the pain wasn't getting any better. They call it phantom pain. You think your wrist itches and you go to scratch it, but then you realise that you don't have a wrist anymore or anything to scratch it with. But God, the itch doesn't give a shit about whether it's supposed to exist or not. It just keeps on existing, starting off small - you could almost ignore it. Then it just grows and grows until it's a clenched uncontrollable mass of scorching muscle that twists in on itself. It drives you crazy. Panadol just doesn't kick it.

I'm going to be honest, I was in the army, I was a bit of a thief. Shocker right? Me - the morally upstanding citizen with the medal of 'bravery' in one non-existent hand and a hypodermic needle in the other. It was mostly petty though, nothing too serious, but you start to miss that extra cash. I was good with my hands, could get a wallet from a man while he was still walking. It was easy living. You can't really do that with a prosthetic. Can't really do shit with a prosthetic except drop things. I could have gone my whole life living on that money alone, maybe get a crap job somewhere if I had to. I don't know why I joined the army. I guess I thought I needed direction in my life. Instead I got a bloody IED. I still have the scars from the shrapnel. It's been six years and they don't look like they'll fade any time soon. Arms don't show any sign of re-growing either, but you can always hope.

Listen, before I get to the bit about my arms, my *real* arms, you should know that I didn't kill anyone. Not even in the army. Call me a thieving druggie, sure, but I'm no murderer. I'm practically a pacifist. Sure, Eric was my dealer and he was a piece of shit, but he's the one who got the drugs in me. I wouldn't kill him. I wouldn't kill anyone, I swear.

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'Just one prosthetic arm? You couldn't afford two?'

'The army didn't think I needed another.'

'I see. Mr. Adams, you were taken in for petty theft before you joined. Have you attempted any other such crimes since then? Theft? Drugs? Murder?'

'Of course not. I'm armless.'

'Where did you get the money to purchase drugs from? Did you have someone steal it for you? Or did you owe Eric Compton a lot of money? Is that why you killed him?'

'I didn't kill Eric.'

'Then who was it?'

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I think it was quite early on. I remember Eric had come in to shoot me up and he had brought a friend with him, a guy called Boxer who looked 85% steroids, 14% beard and 1% brain - and that was being generous. Arms like he had stuck balloons under his skin. I think he had come along to have a laugh at the poor tin soldier, but I was too far gone to give a crap about them. Anyway, that was the first time I noticed it. I was in this beautifully tempered bliss, no pain, no nothing. I'd started thinking I'd got my arms back and I was lifting them up and marvelling at the creases and joints. They looked so real I was convinced they'd grown right back. Drugs will do that to you. Stay in school kids.

Boxer and Eric were leaving, either trying to get out before the cleaner came or because they were bored of watching me look like I was about to drop off. Even disability loses its charm sometimes. Boxer had been amusing himself by throwing shit at me all day and yelling 'think fast' or 'catch', and then just as he was leaving, he tossed the keys right at me - straight for my face. Out of pure instinct I put my hands up, and of course that shouldn't have made a damn difference, but it did. I swear the keys hit my hands instead of my face and I felt them hit my hands as well. It wasn't a phantom feeling, God no. It was real.

For a moment, I thought my arms had actually grown back and I was whole again. That was probably the happiest moment in my entire life. It didn't last. I tried touching my face, but it didn't work. Later on, I told myself it was the drugs and the keys had really hit my face. I started to believe that was true, but then it happened again and I hadn't even taken a chewy vitamin. I was at the checkout and the lady was giving me my change when a coin dropped, and instead of going for it with my prosthetic, I went for it with a hand that didn't even exist. Except I actually caught the damn coin, and it bloody well hovered in mid-air for a couple of seconds. Doesn't sound like much, but it felt like forever. I checked the cashier's face to see if she was as shocked as me, but people don't like to look at you when you don't have arms, like amputation can be ocularly transmitted or something. But I really had caught the coin and I had actually used my arms - the ones that *didn't even exist*. Holy *shit*, right?

Well, I was psyched. I was convinced that my arms were slowly going to become more and more physical until everyone would be amazed at how I actually regrew my arms. It was the power of love, I'd tell them. I even tried telling my therapist, but she went on about PTSD and hallucinations. Couldn't prove I was right could I? I had no control over when my arms would work and when they wouldn't, but they *would* work sometimes, usually when I wasn't thinking about it - instinct you know? Impulses and stuff. That's when I could catch things from the air. I used to pretend that I could see my arms back when they first got blown off and my imagination was never really up to scratch, but now I could actually see them, every single wrinkle and hair. It was mostly through my half blind eye, so they looked kind of fuzzy and vague, but sometimes they'd clear up - those were usually the times when I could use them as well. Sometimes I'd forget I didn't have my prosthetic on and I'd be using my real arms to do things instead. Of course, the moment I'd realise, it would all fall apart. But it was happening more often and I was getting better at it, not very quickly, but I really was. Soon I could use it consciously. I practised as much as I could, only when there wasn't anyone around, but the whole thing was exhausting. Lifting a paper was like lifting at the gym when a pretty girl was watching how many weights you put on. Hell, I was getting pretty ripped. It was a damn shame that no one could check out my mad biceps.

Here's the thing though, my arms were great when I was controlling them, but when I wasn't, the pain was ten times worse. I'd be staring at my arms and they'd be blurring in and out of focus, mottled red things with the veins squirming like worms and the fingers blackened with oozing gashes, bits of metal shrapnel sticking out everywhere. I'd be screaming like a mad man and I was convinced that somehow my left eye was showing me what my arms looked like before they were cut off by the doctors. My arms started working normally more often, which was great, but I couldn't stand the God damn pain anymore. Eric and Boxer were over a lot more often. Sometimes Boxer came alone and then afterwards Eric would show up bruised like a bad apple. I didn't ask questions.

I only had so much money though, and Eric and Boxer were burning through all my emergency savings. I was barely eating once a day and I still couldn't really afford groceries after I got my shots and the more shots I got, the less they worked. I needed money badly and I had no way of getting more. And then I had a stroke of sheer brilliance. You remember how I said I was a great pickpocket? Never got caught in my life and I had bet that I'd have an even better record with my hidden arms. What kind of cop was going to arrest a man for stealing when he doesn't have any hands to steal with? I figured it out on the train one day. This lady's phone started ringing from inside her bag. So she opens the giant thing, fishes the damn phone out then starts yammering away at it without closing her purse, so it's just wide open and I can see her wallet right at the top. And I thought, if I can pick up all those other things with my hands, what's stopping me from picking people's pockets? It was genius, and even though I wasn't nearly as good as I was with my old arms, this job had its own perks. Sometimes, you'd get people who noticed what was going on you know, felt something moving in their pockets, and they'd turn around to glare - but I was a freaking disabled man, and they weren't about to stare at me for more than a second. They'd actually feel bad for suspecting me! It was better than being invisible. It was like I was the Pope. No one thought I was capable of crime. Sometimes I'd take to wearing my camo and I bought a little veteran's badge type of thing. God, the way they'd blush when they saw me like that. I was a freaking

saint, and they were criminals for suspecting me. I started to regret selling off my medal. People would have shit their pants.

The money was rolling in, and you can bet that I got the morphine as quick as Eric could give it. On the days that he couldn't commit, the pain was incredible. It was almost like it increased according to how much I used my arms. My fingers would be twitching like an electrocuted chicken, and I'd be feeling my heart throb in my arms instead of my chest. Boxer was showing up more often and sometimes he'd watch me screaming for five minutes before he did anything. He liked watching people suffer.

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'So you're saying Boxer killed Eric.'

'I'm saying I didn't kill Eric.'

The officer scribbled something down, and I took a deep breath. It had been three days since my last dose and I could feel myself losing control, and this idiot with his questions wasn't helping.

'So what happened the night of the murder?'

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I had started promising Eric ridiculous amounts of money for the morphine, but something was up with his suppliers. I had been in control for the last three days, the longest I'd ever gone, and I knew I couldn't keep it up much longer. When the pain came, it was all-consuming.

I was on the floor when he got to me, damn insane with how bad it was. My arms were on fire, they just wouldn't stop clenching and unclenching, making jazz hands at the ceiling then ready for a fist fight. Anyone could see that I needed some damn help, but Eric, bless his soul, just stood there and laughed

for a moment. Not an all-out laugh, more like an audible acknowledgement of something funny. And me on the ground, with my hands playing an invisible game of peek-a-boo, faster now that he had laughed, like my arms were glad there was an audience.

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‘Was Boxer there that night?’

He was looking up at me expectantly now, but I couldn’t afford to lose focus by talking. I couldn’t let my arms take over again. I was breathing faster now, practically hyperventilating. What if I couldn’t stop it?

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Eric was smiling down at me. If I could have moved my hands I would have punched him. But then again, he also took the time to inject things into my ass, so he couldn’t be that bad. A part of me wondered if Boxer was with him, ready to make me wait five minutes. Eric knelt down and leaned over me, and suddenly my arms stilled, falling to my sides.

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The officer was leaning over me now, concerned, and my arms were becoming mutilated before my eyes, twitching and clenching. They were turning red now, red and blue and black and now here was the metal, growing out of the dappled skin like pea plants. I couldn’t control them anymore. God, they were shaking. I couldn’t stop it. The pain was snaking up, and my hands were curling in for a clench - shit! Was that blood in my nails? I knocked over a glass of water, and the officer’s eyes widened.

'Did you do that?'

'No! No, it wasn't me!'

They were going spastic now, and the pain, oh God, the pain. And then, with one last clench, they stilled and settled on the table. Oh God, not again. Not again, please no. The officer was too close and he reached for his radio but my arm got to him first, grabbing on to his, I couldn't control it, I swear, and then, while he was looking at me with those God damn wide eyes, just like Eric's, my other arm reached inside his chest. It wasn't me. I couldn't control it. But God, I could feel my hand squeezing. One hand clutching his heart and the other twisting my face to look at his, look at those eyes that went wide then blank like Eric's.

When the others rushed in, it was too late. The cop was on the floor, leaking blood like a faulty tap. They were looking at me, but I was looking at my hands. Still red and black, still uncontrollable but no longer clenching. Instead they were drumming on the table. Impatient almost.